



## **AD CLERUM Update II**

7<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Let me begin by recording my profound thanks for the wonderful and innovative ways in which you are responding to the challenge of this pandemic. Ministering to the anxious and housebound, and sustaining the life of a community is a costly business, and I honour your faithfulness. For many of us, not to enter our church buildings over these past weeks has been an added burden, a real deprivation. Words from Philip Larkin's poem, 'Church Going' come to mind:

A serious house on serious earth it is  
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet  
Are recognised and robed as destinies.

Many will echo Larkin's affection for his parish church and be relieved at the decision of the House of Bishops to permit a phased re-opening of our church buildings. It has been agreed that, in line and in parallel with the Government's approach, individual diocesan bishops will issue guidance about the **first stage** of a gradual easing of restrictions on our buildings and activities, although **our church buildings will continue to remain closed for the time being**. You can read the full text of the House of Bishops' statement here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/house-bishops-backs-phased-approach-revising-access-church-buildings>

I am therefore able to issue new permissive guidance:

- Clergy (or a Licensed Lay Minister as agreed with their Incumbent) may now enter the church building in their own local parish for private prayer or for streaming of services, so long as the necessary hygiene and social distancing precautions are taken.
- Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers, especially those with underlying health problems, or who are shielding people in their household with such problems, should not feel under any obligation to do this themselves, nor should anyone do so who is in one of the Government's risk categories.
- It is essential that Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers follow the new national advice about hygiene and re-entering closed churches on the Church of England Website so that they can undertake these activities safely:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

As a result of this easing of restrictions, what has recently been taking place in the home, in kitchens, dining rooms or the vicarage study, may now take place once more in church buildings. There is **no compulsion** to make this move back into church and clergy who wish to continue with their current 'home based' format are **under no obligation** to do so. If you have any questions then please contact your archdeacon.

I trust incumbents, readers and churchwardens, and all appointed people, to follow the spirit of this guidance as you plan ahead. Our priority must be to continue to act responsibly to safeguard ourselves and other people from infection.

In the coming weeks, if new cases and deaths continue to decline, I hope to offer further guidance about funerals in church and, subject to a change in Government restrictions, about the re-opening of our churches for parishioners and visitors for private prayer. But we have not reached that moment yet.

This pandemic is a challenging experience and at times a frightening one, but there have also been wonderful surprises. Amazing numbers of people, right across the country, have been dipping into our online worship, looking, listening, praying. People have felt included in our life and worship, and we must continue to reach out to them. In these strange times, we are continuing to learn what it means to live out our faith and to proclaim afresh the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I conclude with a poem by Alan Amos, entitled appropriately enough, 'A locked church':

Ah my dear Lord, the church is locked  
but let my heart be open to your presence;  
there let us make, you and I,  
your Easter garden;  
plant it with flowers,  
and let the heavy stone be rolled away.

May God bless you with his peace and give you grace to persevere with joy.

+ Robert Exon