



AD CLERUM Update 12

21st May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Ascension Day is a wonderful day to send you my greetings and give you further information about the re-opening of our church buildings.

As you know, the House of Bishops has agreed to a phased re-opening of our church buildings in line and in parallel with the Government's easing of the lockdown. The timetable remains uncertain because the Government is keen to avoid a spike in the infection rate. Nevertheless, things are now moving. It is likely that the Government will allow church buildings to re-open for individual private prayer, though not as yet for public worship, and for 'small' weddings and funerals, probably from 1st June onwards. We are waiting to discover what the Government means by 'small'!

In the light of this fast-evolving situation, we have put together a Diocesan Guide, *Preparing to re-open our church buildings*, to help you think through the decisions and actions that need to take place before re-opening a building. As the Guide makes clear, although it will soon be legally possible for church buildings to re-open, it does *not* mean that all our buildings have to re-open immediately, let alone on day one! Indeed, I would encourage you not to rush, but to take your time and prepare properly. Take small steps and work together across your Mission Community to co-ordinate when and whether to open each church or not. The Diocesan Guide is attached with this letter and is available on the diocesan website here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Preparing-to-Re-open-our-Church-Buildings-FINAL-v4.pdf>. We anticipate that national guidance on the cleaning of church buildings and general access will be published on the Church of England website over the weekend.

For many people re-entry into their church building will feel like a long-awaited return from exile. For some, relief will be tinged with anxiety as they undertake risk assessments and embrace the challenges of maintaining the safety and cleanliness of their building. For others, feelings of grief and loss will be dominant. Few congregations have been unaffected by illness and death, and it is important to reflect this in the way we celebrate the re-opening of our buildings. Liturgical resources will be available to help you mark these moments, perhaps involving the wider community to which your building is connected as you think appropriate and as Government guidance on social distancing permits.

Sadly, it may not be possible as and when public worship is permitted for it to include congregational singing for some months. National guidance about music in worship is in the process of being drafted and will be circulated shortly.

New opportunities and challenges continue to emerge as each week passes, including new ways of being church and of worshipping online. We are connecting with 'the fringe' in ways the Church of England has longed to for years. Meanwhile parishioners who for reasons of infirmity or disability have been unable to attend their parish church have suddenly felt re-included in the life of their worshipping community. These good things need to be built on, not squandered in a casual return to former patterns of church life.

In spite of on-going restrictions, I hope that our prayer, both private and public, will echo the joy of pilgrims returning to Zion: 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Isaiah 35.10).

Thy Kingdom Come

As we honour the kingship of our risen and ascended Lord and begin ten days of prayer in the run-up to Pentecost, I take to heart the words of the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy kingdom come'. At the centre of this year's call to prayer is encouragement for each of us to pray for five friends to discover the hope and the love we find in Jesus Christ for themselves. You will find lots of resources and ideas on the diocesan website here. <https://exeter.anglican.org/christian-faith/tkc/>

As a Diocese, we are seeking to generate a wave of unceasing prayer for the whole of this ten-day period. Over 180 hours are already covered. If you are interested in sharing in this, please do [sign up for a slot in our Zoom Prayer Room](#). You will find further information about it [here](#).

Our prayer will come to focus on the Day of Pentecost itself. In the evening a special 'beacon service' is being put together with contributions from all ages from across the county. We will be praying for frontline workers and I will be preaching. The service goes online at 6pm.

As we move from Ascension Day to Trinity Sunday, we begin a journey that echoes the doxology of the Lord's Prayer: 'for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory'. Today we celebrate the triumph and kingship of Christ; at Pentecost we open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit; and on Trinity Sunday we contemplate the glory of God. And so we pray:

*Holy God,
open the gates of righteousness,
that your pilgrim people may enter
and be built into a living temple
on the cornerstone of our salvation,
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

May Christ our risen and ascended Lord bless you and lead you to glory.

+ Robert Exon