



## **AD CLERUM Update 15**

**10<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

Dear Colleagues,

On Sunday the Government announced that church buildings can reopen for individual private prayer and for funerals as from next Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June. This is very welcome news, a milestone on the journey out of lockdown. Of course, now that the Government has given the green light, it brings with it various considerations and concerns about the practicalities of opening our buildings safely, including the importance of following the latest public health guidance.

The guidance issued by the House of Bishops on various subjects, which I circulated last Friday and which was re-affirmed yesterday, is permissive and not prescriptive. To repeat what I have said in a previous *Ad clerum*, it is up to the incumbent and the PCC jointly to decide whether or not to open a given church building. If the building cannot open for private prayer or for a funeral because those who care for it are shielding or because it cannot easily be cleaned, we will support your decision. In such a situation, funerals can continue to be held either at a local crematorium or at the graveside as at present.

If you are responsible for more than one church building, you may decide to open one or more for private prayer and/or funerals, but not the others – at least not for the time being. We recommend that mission communities with more than one church building make these decisions on a mission community basis so there is a real coherence about your policy. As always, it will be important that you communicate your decisions clearly and sensitively to your local community so that parishioners understand the constraints under which you are operating. You can read the national guidance here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/bishops-revise-and-produce-further-guidance> .

The Guidance is updated on a regular basis and posted on the Church of England website. I encourage you to check it out by following this link:

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

The archdeacons have already issued a comprehensive guide to assist you in planning for the re-opening of our church buildings, and are holding a briefing for all clergy to answer any outstanding queries tomorrow on **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June at 4pm** via Zoom.

Thank you for all you are doing in these extraordinary times as together we plot our course across a fast changing landscape. Like many people, I have been moved by the recent broadcasts of the Queen to the nation. In her last broadcast, she referred to her father, the late King George VI and the evocative lines of Minnie Harkins' poem that he immortalised:

I said to the man  
who stood at the gate of the year,  
'Give me a light that I may tread safely  
into the unknown.'  
And he replied ,  
'Go out into the darkness  
and put your hand into the hand of God.  
That shall be to you  
better than light  
and safer than a known way !'  
So I went forth  
and finding the Hand of God,  
trod gladly into the night .  
And he led me towards the hills  
and the breaking of day in the lone East.

As the nation begins to recover from this pandemic and we discover the shape of a new 'normality', there will still be many who are self-isolating. As our cathedral and church buildings re-open, we should not forget them. For all of us there is anxiety as we journey into the unknown. We find it difficult to entrust ourselves to it, let alone to believe that God is there, awaiting us with outstretched hands that are themselves wounded.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon