



## **AD CLERUM**

**5 November 2020**

Dear Colleagues,

The year 2020 will be one we shall be glad to leave behind. The coronavirus pandemic is casting a long shadow over the nation with no end in sight. With the nights drawing in, going into a second lockdown feels heavy, but we hope that it will help arrest the spread of the virus, and most importantly bring down the rising tide of infections and hospital admissions. It is vital that the NHS in the South-West is not overwhelmed this winter.

Earlier in the year, we talked confidently about ‘life *after* Covid-19’. Now we talk about ‘life *with* the virus’. We find ourselves in a period of co-existence. How long all this will go on for is anyone’s bet, but by drawing on the wellsprings of our faith and reaching out to those in need we mitigate isolation and smooth the abrasive edges of lockdown. In the face of uncertainty and anxiety, we must not pull back in exhaustion or fear. As Paul writes, ‘We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair’ (2 Cor. 4.8). This is a moment to draw together in mutual support and to renew our trust in God.

The new Government restrictions shaping this second lockdown are not identical to those in force back in March. Although church buildings are once again closed for public acts of worship, they may remain open for individuals to pray privately. Clergy and readers can enter their buildings and record or livestream worship from them. With appropriate social distancing, funerals may be held with up to thirty people present. Weddings, however, are not permitted except ‘where one of those getting married is seriously ill and not expected to recover’. Such weddings are limited to six people. Full details of the new Government regulations are posted on the Church of England website and they will be updated as necessary:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november#weddings-civil-partnerships-religious-services-and-funerals>

### **Remembrance**

November is the month of remembering, beginning with the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed on All Souls Day last Monday. This weekend, in spite of the fact that many war memorials are inside our churches, all acts of remembrance, whether on Remembrance Sunday or Remembrance Day itself, must take place outdoors in the open air. The Government has issued a comprehensive set of guidelines:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-preparations-for-remembrance-sunday/local-authority-preparations-for-remembrance-sunday>. These are supplemented by a series of FAQ on the Church of England website. A special County Remembrance Service is being broadcast from the Cathedral this Sunday at which Bishop Jackie will be the preacher. A link to this service and to the Civic Remembrance Service in Plymouth, which would normally be held on the Hoe but this year has been pre-recorded from the Minster Church of St Andrew's, can be found via the diocesan webpage <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance/remembrance-2020/>. Prebendary Jackie Taylor has filmed a short sermon for Remembrance Sunday in her capacity as a Royal British Legion chaplain. It will be available to download from tomorrow and you are welcome to incorporate it into your online worship <https://vimeo.com/cofedevon>.

### **A Call to Prayer for the Nation**

As this second lockdown comes into force, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York are inviting Christians and all people of good will to share in 28 days of prayer for the nation. Can I encourage you to circulate information about this to your parishioners and contacts as soon as possible? The Archbishops invite all of us, wherever we are, to pray daily for a specific area of national concern. This will culminate in a collective moment of prayer at 6pm each evening, with cathedrals and churches across the country invited to ring a bell as a call to prayer.

A simple seven-day cycle of prayer has been designed, with a specific focus of prayer for each day. This includes the NHS and frontline workers, the bereaved, and those struggling with physical and mental ill-health, for children and young people, and for local businesses coping with economic impact of lockdown. The link to the resources is <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches/call-prayer-nation>.

Please also find a link to a simple prayer booklet which you can print out: [Prayer Booklet](#). All this material is offered simply to stimulate prayer. The hope is that churches and individuals will make these times of prayer their own and shape them as they think best. Further resources will be shared on social media with the hashtag: #PrayerForTheNation.

The Archbishops have written to the nation to accompany this initiative and the text of their letter may be found here:

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/letter-nation-archbishops-canterbury-and-york>.

### **Sunday Sermons to download**

I am conscious of how tired many of you are and how hard you are working. In the midst of all this pressure, thank you for your perseverance and your abundant good will. As a way of trying to support you, we are providing a ten minute video sermon, delivered by a senior member of the Diocesan clergy, each week based on the Sunday lectionary readings. You are welcome to use them in your online services,

zoom groups or for individual reflection. The videos will be made available every Thursday and can be downloaded here: <https://vimeo.com/cofedevon>.

## **Mental Health Awareness**

The increase in Covid-19 cases and this second lockdown bring renewed concerns for our mental wellbeing. Many feel understandably anxious and it is vital that we look after ourselves as well as take care of others. It goes without saying that, as well as attending to our spiritual life, exercise, diet and sleep are also important. Equally important are making opportunities to talk with trusted friends and colleagues to mitigate any sense of isolation.

In times of difficulty, help is available and much of this we can access ourselves. You will find a range of online resources, both secular and church-based, assembled on the Diocesan website. Please see the [Wellbeing and Getting Help](#) page. It provides links to emergency and proactive resources. The [Coronavirus Wellbeing](#) page has pandemic-specific information on trauma, dementia and marriage support. The Clergy Wellbeing page includes details of the Diocesan confidential counselling service, Sheldon Hub and the Spiritual Direction Service. These are all freely available. I also commend the [Tragedy and Congregations](#) website.

Mental Health First Aid Awareness training (three hours, online) is also on offer. Designed to help us to help others, it introduces awareness of signs and symptoms, listening skills, and a wealth of signposting resources. This nationally accredited, secular best-practice course is delivered by a local Anglican (and clergy spouse), with some specifically Christian context added. It is free to all clergy and readers (and highly subsidised for others). Please click [here](#) for more information and to book; and do promote it to your congregations.

The Diocese is investing in a more detailed two-day Mental Health First Aid course, with a goal to have a Mental Wellbeing Adviser in each deanery: a go-to resource for local clergy and readers if they need advice about signposting and non-therapeutic interventions. We are piloting this in Barnstaple Archdeaconry. Clergy and readers in the archdeaconry received an email from Bishop Jackie last week with details of the initiative. May I remind North Devon colleagues to speak with any church member who you think may fit the bill for this voluntary role, and to return the referral form to [chris.keppie@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:chris.keppie@exeter.anglican.org) by 16<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Financial worries**

In spite of the valiant attempts of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the prospect of a significant increase in unemployment and homelessness this winter seems inevitable. Many people are worried about their livelihoods and finances. The Covid Cash Recovery Course run by Transforming Plymouth Together is available across the Diocese. It seeks to train church and community leaders to provide key information and resources for those struggling financially. There are online training sessions available this month: [click here for more information](#).

## Daily Hope

Those of us who live in Devon know that when it comes to the internet, rural connectivity is not all that the Government cracks it up to be. There are many people in our communities either who cannot get online or who cannot afford a computer. In addition to the fantastic telephone services that some parishes in the Diocese are offering, there is also the Freephone Daily Hope: 0800 804 8044. I hope it and other diocesan resources will amplify what you are able to do locally in sustaining people's hope in the weeks ahead.

Bishop Nick and Bishop Jackie join me in assuring you of our prayers at this time. As we enter this period of lockdown, may Paul's words shape our hearts and minds: 'Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer' (Romans 12.9).

Loving God,  
at this time of crisis  
when so many are suffering,  
we pray for our nation and our world.  
Give our leaders wisdom,  
our Health Service strength,  
our people hope.  
Lead us through these parched and difficult days  
to the fresh springs of joy and comfort  
that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon