

Our Ref: +PBW/+RT/AG/SH/AY/pg

24th March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Thank you to you all for all the wonderful ways in which you have responded to the Archbishops' call for us to be Church in new ways and find spiritual communion even when we are physically apart. We continue to be amazed by the creative gifts we have amongst us. Please do share your ideas across deaneries and with your deanery accompanier so that Ministry for Mission and Comms can disseminate more widely too.

Last night we heard from the Prime Minister who clearly stated that new restrictions are now in force for at least 3 weeks. Churches must now be shut to everyone and all weddings and other religious activities are postponed. You can find an example of a notice to post on your church doors, on the website. Only funerals can now take place and only under strict guidelines. Attached is the letter which the Archbishops have now published containing more details.

For Bath and Wells can we underline the following from the national Church's guidance

- That churches are not to be opened for private prayer. All prayer even for priests who live adjacent to churches needs to take place at home
- That live streaming of worship can only be undertaken by individuals alone and at home, not within churches
- That all funerals take place either at the graveside or in crematoria chapels with minimum mourners and under the national guidance from Govt and Funeral Directors, not within churches. Possibilities of sharing in grief might be undertaken remotely through streaming or provision of home liturgies

Let us remember too that all of us are now being told that we can only leave our homes in order to:

- Shop for basic necessities and only when absolutely necessary
- Engage in one form of exercise once a day
- Address a medical need or care for a vulnerable person
- Travel to and from work when this is absolutely necessary

These are huge and momentous decisions. All of you will feel the personal distress and pain of having to shut the church buildings which means so much to us whilst we fully recognise that this is part of a national effort to save lives.

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We want to encourage you to **take good care of yourselves**. This is a marathon not a sprint! Many of us might have previously put aside personal anxieties or troubles due to the business or distraction of our usual lives. The trauma of the current time will no doubt bring fears to the surface on different levels. Living in human uncertainty and trying to hear God's still small voice is a challenge for all of us. In seeking to support others we must not neglect ourselves. We are all needing to create or secure a God focused rhythm in these days. If you feel in particular need of confidential personal support then we as Bishops and Archdeacons are available.

Secondly, we want to ask you to **make contingency plans**. Some of you have already done so and there is a template on the website to help you to do this for your church. As the virus takes hold in our area you or family members may become ill or need to self-isolate and thus be unable to take on funerals or other pastoral duties. We need to make plans now. It is expected that the number of funerals will rise dramatically in the next days and weeks and we need to stand ready and prepare ourselves. Work is being done to provide appropriate short liturgies when that is needed. Sharing the load across our deaneries will be important.

Please be alert to the website and for further communications as necessary.

On Sunday evening we lit candles of hope to shine from our windows, others placed rainbows, all indicating that we have a hope in a God whose grace is sufficient for all our needs. If you are able then perhaps you would like to join us in continuing this practice each evening at 7pm while physically separated.

With our prayers, thanks and gratitude to you and wishing God's blessing upon you.

+ Peter Bath and Wells

Rt Revd Bishop Peter Hancock
Bishop of Bath and Wells

+ Ruth Taunton

Rt Revd Bishop Ruth Worsley
Bishop of Taunton

A-Gyr

Archdeacon Bath

Simon Hill

Archdeacon of Taunton

Anee

Archdeacon of Wells