



*Letter from Archbishops and Diocesan Bishops of the Church of England  
to all clergy in the Church of England*

27 March 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

**Stay home, protect the NHS and save lives**

We are writing further to you given the rapidly changing nature of the situation in our country at present. We want to thank you for the ministry you are exercising and for the creative and imaginative ways in which you are responding to the crisis and showing the love and care of Christ to the communities we serve, particularly to the most vulnerable in our society.

As we move towards Passiontide, focussing on what Jesus did for us on the cross, more than ever this is brought into stark focus.

We want to reiterate the advice we have already sent. The government is asking us to **stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. We call upon all our churches and church leaders, clergy and lay, to follow this advice.**

We are in a time of great fearfulness. The numbers of those becoming seriously ill and dying is increasing. It therefore remains very important that our churches remain closed for public worship and private prayer. The Church of England is called to model the very best practice. We must lead by example. Staying at home and demonstrating solidarity with the rest of the country at this testing time, is, we believe, the right way of helping and ministering to our nation. Therefore, for a season, the centre for the liturgical life of the church must be the home, not the church building.

We recognise that this has its challenges. But many clergy and lay people have already started streaming and live streaming daily worship from their homes. Often they create prayer spaces or a small oratory in a room or the corner of a room. It is hugely encouraging to hear stories of how our prayers and loving actions are blessing our communities and reaching out beyond our usual congregations. Similarly it is wonderful to hear stories of innovative pastoral practice and spiritual care being undertaken in new ways. Thank you for this.

Not being able to use our church buildings is, of course, a huge loss to us all. We are aware that for many clergy it is hard not to be able to pray and worship in their church building; and for many lay people, not even being able to see worship going on in their church building is difficult. Streaming worship from home shows that we are alongside those who are having to self-isolate and those who are forgoing so many other things in their lives that they used to rely

on. It also shows that we are facing up to the same restrictions as them and doing all that we can to take a lead in encouraging people to **stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives**. Moreover, to pray from and in the home may help us to show that the church is, as we all know, us, the people of God, not our buildings.

Nationally, the Church is making a growing range of digital resources available including weekly video broadcasts each Sunday; daily audio for prayer for the day and night prayer; webinars for churches; daily #LiveLent content; new mental health reflections; and apps and smart speaker skills. Lots of this content is also available in downloadable and printable formats. **Explore everything available [here](#)**. More will be added in the weeks and months ahead.

The BBC is also offering services on television and radio and online which people can access and we are working closely with them. This will be especially helpful for clergy who do not feel confident in streaming services themselves. No one should be under pressure to stream worship or feel guilty if they can't.

Some of our communities do not have access to the internet. Please, therefore, do all that you can to ensure other resources are available and pastoral care is offered to all. For example, we know many places have set up telephone networks and these are crucial for keeping in touch with the vulnerable, isolated and elderly. We are endeavouring to make other resources for prayer and worship at home available, particularly for Holy Week.

The decision to close the church buildings and to prevent them being used for streaming has been a very difficult one. Some government advice suggests that we should be able to allow streaming from church buildings. Our advice, however, is that we should go the extra mile in following the clear public health advice and guidance which is to stay at home and to stay safe.

The government guidelines also continue to assert that funerals can take place in church buildings. The medical, epidemiological and public health advice we have received clearly indicates that this represents an additional layer of risk that we don't need to take. Cleaning a church building after a funeral is much harder to do than a crematorium chapel. Furthermore, the ability of a parish priest to control the number of mourners will always be compromised by the proper instincts to care for the bereaved at the moment of a funeral. Of course, this is costly, but we believe the cost is less likely to be in human lives. Consequently, we are continuing to ask clergy to conduct funerals at the graveside or in a crematorium chapel.

We are very aware of how quickly events are changing and we will keep under review all our advice and guidance.

If Government guidance changes we will consider our own guidance. **Our priority is to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. Our prayers are with you all; let us all support one another.**

With every blessing,



+Justin Cantuar



+Sentamu Eboracensis