



January 5, 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We want to start by thanking you for your ministry. Over the last 11 months, through times of lockdown and eased restrictions, the church in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has continued to worship, pray and serve - often in creative ways and at significant cost - and we are profoundly grateful for everything you have done to make that possible.

During that time we have learnt about worshipping online and by phone, about how to stay safe when we are together in church, about running food banks and debt centres, about sharing our faith and being of practical service to our neighbours. In all of this, profoundly demanding as it has been, we have encountered God in new ways and learnt more about his love for his fragile and suffering world.

Now we face a new lockdown, and we do not underestimate the demands it places on you and on the communities you serve, especially schools and colleges, where head teachers, staff and students are facing another year of profound disruption. Our prayers are with you all.

The announcement by the Prime Minister last night allows for public worship to continue and for churches to remain open for private prayer. As we have said many times before however, 'can' does not mean 'must' and while communal worship is permissible under the government's restrictions, in some places it will not be advisable. It is for each church community to decide what to do, with support and guidance from the diocese and national church.

Whilst we assume many churches will decide not to open, there will be different approaches across the diocese. Please be kind and understanding of those who come to different conclusions from those you make, and continue to be mutually supportive in this complex and difficult situation.

With this in mind, we encourage you to make a careful and prayerful decision about whether to gather for worship or not, and whether to keep your church

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buildings open for private prayer or not. As you do so, please consider these points:

1. **Gathering for worship is one part of church life, but not everything, and gathering together in a church building is one way to worship, but not the only way.** Being a church community includes the life of prayer, study of scripture, service and witness and whatever you decide about Sunday mornings, we encourage you to remember the fullness of what it means to be church.
2. **If you decide to suspend public worship you will have our clear and unequivocal support.** Formal guidance at the moment allows for the incumbent and PCC to take a local decision to suspend without episcopal permission if the suspension will last 'for a few weeks'. This may change in the light of the latest lockdown, and we will be back in touch with further information as it emerges. The relevant advice is available on this [link](#) (Please see the update of 9.7.20). For now, if you decide to suspend public worship you will need a PCC resolution, which can be dealt with by email or on Zoom and which must be sent to the Archdeacon and Rural Dean.
3. If you decide to suspend public worship, and if you are not already providing alternative options for the church community, we encourage you to share and make use of the resources available on our website [here](#). These include links to online worship from across the diocese, including the Sunday livestream from the cathedral, which will remain open during lockdown.
4. **If you decide to continue with gathered worship, you will also have our support,** provided that you have reviewed your risk assessments, checking that they remain robust and your churches remain Covid secure in the light of the much greater transmission risk associated with the new variant. This includes the times immediately before and after services take place when people naturally gather to chat.

Archdeacons Audrey and Paul are available by email or phone to help you work through your decision if that would help. They will also be available on a Zoom call on Thursday, January 7 at 2pm and Friday, January 8 at 11am for questions, idea

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sharing and support. Please email alex.O'Byrne@truro.anglican.org for the Zoom login details. Updates on guidance will also continue to be available on the diocesan website [here](#).

Much is changing as a result of Covid and we have learnt much and lost much. We are being called into an unknown future we had not planned for and while the vaccine offers a way out of the restrictions, life will not return to the normal we once knew. The world is changing, and the church is changing too.

But we are people of hope, not simply in the future offered by a vaccine, but in the greater future promised by God. Our prayer therefore is that we will all keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, in whom the fullness of hope dwells, and who is the presence of God's good future with us now. It is in this future, which is nothing less than the Kingdom of God, that our true hope lies.

This comes with our love, our gratitude for your ministry and with the assurance of our prayers.

+Philip



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Bishop of Truro

+ Hugh



The Rt Revd Hugh Nelson
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