



The Bishop of Chichester
The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner

**To all Licenced Clergy and Clergy with PTO
Churchwardens**

1 July 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

The restoration of public worship

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. (Psalm 96.9)

A few general points and then the more practical stuff about public worship.

First, and most important, thank you for your forbearance, faithfulness and generosity. Stories come in through Lisa Williamson and the Comms team, and are readily available on social media, of the remarkable ministry that continues in the communities that we serve through our parishes and other Church organisations. I also wish to thank Lisa, Amber and their supporters for keeping us informed and keeping us encouraged.

Second, I wish to emphasise the complexity and seriousness of the challenges we face in sustaining the Church's mission right now. Information is rarely available as swiftly as we would like, we do not always get the simple and definitive answers we hoped for, and advice can change. I fear that this is an aspect of the "new normal".

Third, it is evident in the language of Government Guidance and the Church of England's advice that is derived from it, that the application of guidance and advice has to depend on an informed and responsible understanding of the local context.

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However, key things that must be still be observed are:

- Regular hand washing and/or use of hand sanitiser
- Social distancing (2 metres is still the norm; 1 metre would require face masks)
- Reporting symptoms and self-isolating in response
- No use of communal items – books, towels, plates, cups, etc
- No communal singing
- Cleaning of buildings after use

Fourth, and very importantly, I urge you to trust your judgement in consulting with your wardens and PCC and in the decisions you make. In seeking to support you as best we can, the archdeacons and I will provide what information we have and will gladly respond to your questions.

Fifth, there is no “one size fits all” application of the advice. You should be confident about doing what you can and doing it well. If others do things differently, that is not an implied criticism of you. We cannot all stream or record our services. High achieving YouTube figures might be encouraging; they can also be beguiling.

Sixth, when the lockdown began, we might have thought that it would offer lots of time for reading and prayer. If that has been so, you have been blessed. But if you’ve found yourself just as distracted as normal, or even more so, you are not alone. That has quite often been my experience in recent months. Nonetheless, I wish to encourage two things. One is that you remain as diligent as you can in your life of prayer and the other is that you attend with equal care to regular days off and to holiday time.

Resumption of Public Worship.¹

The link to Government guidance is given below; Church of England advice has now also been published². You ought to read the documents from the Government and the Church of England referenced in the footnotes below.

1. You are not *required* to open your church building for public worship where it is not reasonably possible to comply with Government Guidance. The legal advice is that the requirement of the Canons can be dispensed with for a limited period of “no more than a few weeks” (I would expect that to go no further than the start of the new school

¹ Government guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

² Church of England guidance is available here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/COVID%2019%20advice%20on%20conducting%20public%20worship%20v1.1.pdf>

year) by agreement of the local minister (priest in charge or incumbent) and the PCC. You do not have to ask the permission of the Bishop. If that situation is likely to continue far beyond a few weeks (and not even one church in the benefice can open for public worship) you should get in touch with me to ask for a dispensation for an extended period. (I would expect that dispensation for an extended period could last for up to 6 months.) This legal advice is in the Church of England document, referenced below.

2. If you are shielding and unable to minister in public, please inform the archdeacon. Provision for you to be safe is a priority and we will work with you to ensure it is in place.
3. Although public worship might now be possible, some people will not be able to attend. If you have been recording or streaming services, it is important that this ministry should continue, if possible. The missional benefits of online prayer and worship indicate that the future will expand to offer a mixed economy of participation.
4. Government guidance addresses all faith groups as a single constituency. It is therefore sometimes not clear how it applies to the specific context of the Christian Church in general and a CofE parish in particular. The use of church halls seems to fit in this category. If any activity is to take place in a church hall it must fulfil all the standard safety and hygiene regulations stated above, in addition to the health and safety and safeguarding regulations that were required prior to the lockdown.
5. Work with children and young people is not defined in the latest guidance. However, the criteria for any gathering, as in schools, will apply to that work, irrespective of whether it is in a church or a church hall. See additional advice here:
<https://youthworksupport.co.uk/>

The Celebration of the Eucharist

1. This is the defining activity of the Christian Church and it should be a cause of rejoicing that we can, again, gather to offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, for ourselves, those among whom we live, and for the whole creation.

2. The Church of England is working to update advice on the celebration of the Eucharist. It will then be issued in each diocese by the Bishop.
3. Some have pressed for that advice already. The following advice builds on what has already been circulated, these are the major considerations.
 - a) All the advice already issued for opening church buildings for individual prayer must remain in place.
 - b) The attached advice from the Church of England, gives information about
 - attendance
 - recording who attends,
 - people over 70, children
 - cleaning
 - orders of service, etc
 - music and singing
 - taking a collection, handling cash
 - cleansing communion vessels
 - reservation of the Sacrament
 - processing
 - c) A priest with PTO may celebrate the Eucharist if in good health and with no underlying condition that would constitute a clear risk.
 - d) Government guidance indicates that congregational participation should be in a quiet voice, in order to minimise risk of infection. This might need some explanation, and even rehearsal! But it could also contribute very significantly to creating a more prayerful way of worshipping together.
 - e) The celebrant, similarly, is advised to avoid voice projection: the use of a sound reinforcement system is therefore important. A lapel microphone is safe to use; others are not because they risk spreading infection.
 - f) There is no requirement to wear a mask. It has also been observed that people with hearing difficulties often need to read the lips of a speaker.
 - g) The peace is not exchanged.
 - h) Communion can only be given in one kind, under the form of bread, though the celebrant does consecrate

both bread and wine (a very small quantity) and must receive from the chalice on behalf of the whole congregation. The celebrant must prepare the chalice and the large wafer bread with sanitised hands before the Eucharist begins.

- i) There should be no offertory procession; all vessels needed for the Eucharist must be placed on the altar before the liturgy begins.
- j) The wafer breads to be consecrated and administered to the congregation must be carefully prepared, hands sanitised before doing so. They must be placed in a covered ciborium or with a pall covering an open dish. The ciborium or dish must remain covered during the Eucharistic Prayer, and not uncovered until the administration of holy communion.
- k) If the celebrant is elderly or clinically vulnerable and is not confident about administering holy communion, this should be done by an authorised Eucharistic minister.
- l) Before the administration of holy communion, whoever is administering must use a hand gel to sanitise hands.
- m) Communicants must receive standing, one at a time in a single file, and respect social distancing as they come forward.
- n) The host must be placed in the hand, avoiding physical contact and no words (e.g. “The body of Christ”) are to be spoken.

NB It has been suggested that when the celebrant receives communion, he or she might say aloud, “The body of Christ” (or whatever authorised form is used) and the congregation reply, “Amen”, and then “The blood of Christ” (or whichever form), and again the congregation reply, “Amen”. This provides an opportunity for the whole congregation to make a statement of identification with the communion they are about to make but will do so in silence.

- o) The dismissal after the blessing does need to be just that; people should be encouraged not to congregate as they might have done previously.
- p) The Eucharist can be celebrated outdoors in a garden, provided all the above advice is followed, including the prohibition on singing.

I hope and pray that the demands made of us now in the conduct of public worship will intensify the care with which we prepare to celebrate the Eucharist and to worship God.

May we grow in delight, in awe and reverence as God's pilgrim people who, in this vale of tears, are fed at the sacred feast in which we partake of Christ: his sufferings are remembered, our minds are filled with grace and we receive a pledge of the glory that is to be ours. Alleluia. Amen.

+Martin