

22 June 2020

Clergy, Lay Ministers and Volunteers over 70: Revised Guidance

We wrote round on 1 April to advise that for the sake of minimizing risk – not least to themselves – ministers over 70 should not be engaging in ministry which involves direct public contact, such as conducting funerals. This was in line with what other dioceses around the country were also saying.

In the light of new recently-issued guidance from the national church, we are now able to change that advice. The new national guidance can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Personal%20Risk%20Factors%20for%20Clergy%2C%20Church%20Workers%20and%20Volunteers%20v1.pdf>

Please read this new guidance note carefully.

The Government and the NHS distinguish between two different vulnerable groups with respect to Coronavirus: the clinically extremely vulnerable, and the clinically vulnerable.

The Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Group

As the national guidance note explains, those who are in the **Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Group** should continue to follow the shielding advice from the Government. We continue to advise that ministers in this category should not therefore engage in employment or volunteering outside their own homes.

The Clinically Vulnerable Group

The national guidance note also explains that those in the **Clinically Vulnerable Group** (which includes many people over 70 without specified underlying health conditions) may now undertake church work or voluntary activity which involves direct contact, provided they observe Government and church guidance on social distancing, etc. Our advice is that ministers in this second category may now undertake work such as conducting funerals. Ministers who are clinically vulnerable must make their own decisions about whether to take services in a church building, churchyard or

crematorium, weighing the personal risks and following both current government social distancing advice and guidance on the Church of England website.

If clinically vulnerable ministers who are beneficed or licensed to a particular responsibility decide that for their own protection they cannot take services, they will need to work with the rural dean and other colleagues to ensure that services are covered.

If a minister or anyone in their household shows coronavirus symptoms, they should follow the government guidance on self-isolation.

Clergy with Permission to Officiate

Clergy with PTO are under no obligation to officiate at any service and must not be put under any pressure to do so. We strongly urge those over 70 to take extra care, but it is now up to each individual to decide whether to take services or not, always at the invitation of the incumbent.

Volunteers

The above guidance is also relevant to the position of volunteers in a parish setting. Those in the clinically extremely vulnerable group should not be volunteering outside their own homes. Those in the clinically vulnerable group may do so, in consultation with their incumbent / priest-in-charge, provided they follow all relevant Government and church guidance.

We are very aware that for some, the prospect of returning to ministerial roles they have had to restrict will be a joy, while for others there might be a sense of anxiety which will understandably lead them to be more cautious. There are others, in the clinically extremely vulnerable group, for whom significant restrictions will remain for the time being. At this complex and difficult time, we wish to underline again our deep appreciation to all, lay and ordained, who minister across our diocese in so many different capacities. We give thanks for your partnership in the gospel.

+Keith

Archdeacon Ian

Archdeacon Mike