

## Opening up our churches for private prayer

How strange to go into my church this morning after such a long period of closure. And how lovely. I wonder how many of us actually take time to sit quietly for a long period in our own church? Some of us may be very familiar, through the cleaning rota, or Churchwarden responsibilities with every nook and cranny and every memorial. We may spend time decorating our church for Christmas or harvest. But under normal circumstances do we limit our time in church to attending worship and drinking coffee with our friends? Nothing wrong with that and plenty to value. But the peace of the church when we share silent prayer space with others is wonderful - uninterrupted time with God.

Of course God is with us everywhere and in all situations and we can pray at any time and any place, but the peace found in the church, filled with our predecessors prayers down the centuries may aid us as we come to terms with the unprecedented times we are living through.

I know many of us can't wait for the next steps in opening up our churches when we can worship together. But let us value this opportunity to hold a conversation with God undisturbed by domestic or other distractions. I know many of you regret that your church wasn't open as a place of solace during the full lockdown. But sadly, as you know, the transmission of this potentially deadly covid-19 disease is greatest in closed spaces and where people gather and so the Church of England, following Government requirements acted to protect us and closed our churches, even to the clergy.

So what do we mean by **private** prayer? Well prayer takes so many different forms it can mean any form of communication with God that is just between me and God. I may want to express my adoration, or give thanks. I may want to shout at God if I am angry or upset. The Psalmists knew how to do this very well. I may want to pray for someone who desperately needs God's love and healing. But it is important to listen to God as well as talk to him. When I have time, such as now, I like to have a long conversation with God over something that is troubling me - it's surprising how often that reveals the answer. Much of my prayer takes place when I am out in the countryside and I often hear God's replies when I am on my bike. But I do love sitting quietly in a beautiful church, relaxing into the prayerful presence. I hope you do too.

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