

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave

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THE BISHOP OF LICHFIELD

10 June 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I send you my warm greetings as we continue to journey through these extraordinary times together. Along with Bishop Clive and Bishop Sarah, and Bishops Jan, Jonathan and Rod, I want to repeat how grateful I am to you for all that you are doing. I am always encouraged to hear the wonderful and innovative stories of how you are sustaining the life of our churches and reaching out in loving service to our communities.

Individual prayer

I welcome the [Government's announcement](#) that **church buildings are now permitted to open for individual private prayer** from next Monday, 15th June. This is another step on the journey towards the full re-opening of church buildings as lockdown begins to ease. Further Government advice, including whether church buildings need to be 'supervised' by someone from the church if open for individual prayer, is expected in the next few days.

I want to reassure you that, while I hope that you will make the most of the available opportunities to share the love of Christ with your community, I do not expect all church buildings to re-open from next Monday. You will need to take into account what is appropriate for you, your church and your local community as you consider the best way to respond. Above all, you will want to ensure that churches which re-open can do so safely, for yourselves, for members of your church, and for the public. I encourage you to take soundings within the church, including consulting with those in leadership, to work out together what is safe, practicable and appropriate. It may also be sensible for churches to share plans across benefices or other local areas in deciding which buildings should open, and when and for how long in a week.

Church buildings that do re-open should not be open to the public for individual prayer when other activities – such as the celebration of the offices or Eucharist or live-streaming – are taking place. Opening times for prayer should be clearly displayed on the church building's door. Please refer to [this advice document](#) on re-opening buildings – which also links to [advice on cleaning buildings](#). If clergy or lay ministers are likely to use the building as part of a rota, please make sure those bits of the church that are touched often (doorknobs, light switches etc) have been thoroughly cleaned between use. An updated parish risk assessment to carry out before re-opening buildings for individual prayer is also available [here](#). Meanwhile, new guidance about permissions for temporary works in church buildings – including to put social distancing or hygiene measures in place – is available [here](#). A range of hygiene and cleaning supplies, as well as personal protective equipment (PPE), is available to purchase through the [Parish Buying](#) website.



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LICHFIELD



DISCOVERING
THE HEART OF GOD



GROWING
DISCIPLES



REACHING
NEW GENERATIONS



TRANSFORMING
COMMUNITIES



PRACTISING
GENEROSITY

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Funerals

Yesterday, the Church of England's House of Bishops also advised **that funerals may now be carried out in church buildings** again from Monday, 15th June, in line with Government regulations. Again, this guidance is permissive and not prescriptive, and funerals may continue to take place at a local crematorium or cemetery if the decision is taken not to open a church building. [Advice to help churches prepare for funerals](#) was circulated at the end of last week. Our Diocesan Board of Finance previously decided to waive all funeral fees that would otherwise be payable to them under the Parochial Fees Order. This arrangement will continue for funerals of those who die this month, but **fees should be applied again for all funerals of those who die on or after 1st July.**

Weddings

The restrictions on weddings have not changed and are still in place in accordance with Government regulations.

Looking ahead

Further guidance will be available in the coming days and weeks so please keep referring back to the [Church of England website](#) for the latest updates on guidance already issued and further guidance for other areas. This guidance – listed with links at the end of this letter (see over) - currently includes planning resources for weddings, baptisms, ordinations and Holy Communion for when restrictions are eased in those areas. Please do speak to your archdeacon if you need any advice or support.

Working together will be increasingly important as we explore the shape of church moving forward. The work of our churches has continued outside of our buildings in new and innovative ways during lockdown, including online; I know that this will continue, and I hope that it will be made easier and more sustainable by churches supporting each other. As we are all thinking about the meaning of what it means to be together, may I encourage you to look at the [Space For Learning resources](#) on our diocesan website. From different angles and using a variety of media, these can help us all reflect further on some of the key questions of what it means for Christians to be in community in these changing times.

As you will be aware, the full re-opening of church buildings for public worship may still be some time away. As we look forward to that time when we can meet again, I am very grateful for your patience and faithfulness in these unusual times. Please pray for me, as I pray for you.

With my warm good wishes,

Michael Ipgrave



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Currently applicable documents:

[Advice on individual prayer by members of the public in church buildings](#)

[Advice on conducting funerals](#)

[Advice on cleaning church buildings](#)

[Can clergy, staff & volunteers enter church buildings to prepare for re-opening? \(see FAQ under Fabric and Building Maintenance\)](#)

[Risk assessment for opening church buildings to the public for individual prayer](#)

[Guidance on permissions for temporary works to churches](#)

Planning documents for the future:

[Advice for conducting weddings](#)

[Advice for conducting baptisms](#)

[Advice on ordinations](#)

[Advice on Holy Communion](#) (this also includes current guidance for communion online)

