

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Igrave

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THE BISHOP OF LICHFIELD

10th March 2021

To: Clergy, licensed lay ministers and churchwardens in the Diocese of Lichfield

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am writing in the middle of this great season of Lent to give some guidance as we look ahead to the Easter celebration. I know that these are unsettling times, and that as clergy, lay ministers and those who care for our churches you may well be feeling tired, anxious or confused. For some of you also, shielding will continue to be the right thing to do, in order to protect a member of your household or yourself. Whatever our circumstances, our help comes not from ourselves but from the Lord, and in just over three weeks in our Easter proclamation we will welcome him as the one who has conquered death and despair, whose resurrection makes all things new. I know that you will be thinking ahead how best to share that joyful message with your people and your communities, and I hope that the following will be helpful for you in your planning.

Risk assessments

As you are considering possible ways of celebrating Easter, whether in an opened church in or in other ways, I am asking you to conduct a fresh risk assessment of the celebration of public worship in your churches. As you conduct these exercises, please take care to pay attention to the latest guidance from the Church of England and from your local public health authority; our [diocesan website](#) will also continue to be regularly updated. Please use the [risk assessment template](#) on the Church of England website (where there is also a [risk assessment template for outdoor worship](#)).

Opening churches

As infection, hospitalisation and death rates drop in most places, vaccinations continue to be administered, and we begin to move our way through the [government's roadmap](#) out of lockdown, I know that many of you will be considering having churches open for in-person public worship, and to be able to do that safely by Easter would be a powerful statement of the hope that is at the heart of our faith. If you are planning that your church will be open at or before Easter, I would ask you please to share your up-to-date risk assessment with your rural dean.

Dispensations

I wrote last month to advise that I was extending to 31st March the period during which I would grant a general dispensation from the canonical requirement for worship to be offered in every benefice. I write now to extend that period by a further two days, April 1st (Maundy Thursday) and April 2nd (Good Friday). From April 3rd onwards, a dispensation should be sought in each case where a benefice does not feel able or ready safely to offer in-person worship on Sundays. In such cases, please share your risk assessments with your rural dean and archdeacon before making an application for dispensation to your Area Bishop or Episcopal Vicar; churches receiving extended



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pastoral and sacramental care should also keep the Bishop of Ebbsfleet or the Bishop of Maidstone informed. More details of the dispensation process can be found on the attached sheet.

Worship in Holy Week and Easter

I anticipate that many churches, having conducted risk assessments, will be open for in-person worship on Easter Day, and a significant number before that, including during Holy Week. Services will of course remain subject to restrictions on social distancing, the wearing of face coverings and other COVID security measures; at the Eucharist the common cup remains withdrawn, and public singing will not be possible at any services. The Church of England's guidance on COVID safety in worship remains unchanged at present, and now would be a good time to reacquaint yourself with its provisions as set out on the [Church of England website](#), which also offers [specific guidance](#) relating to Holy Week and Easter ceremonies. There will also be many places where worship is offered online, either exclusively or in combination with in-person gatherings. In addition, the Church of England has provided online [resources for prayer at home](#) during Holy Week and at Easter.

Chrism Service

I will be leading the Chrism Service this year from our Cathedral at 11am on Maundy Thursday, 1st April, with participants warmly invited to join in online from across the diocese; a Zoom link will be sent nearer the time. The liturgy will as usual include the renewal of ordination vows and commitment to lay ministries, and the blessing and consecration of the oils; there will not this year be a celebration of the Eucharist. As is our practice, the oils will be blessed by +Clive, +Sarah (from their respective homes) and myself; the preacher (from his home) will be +Matthew. We hope that the oils will be available for use in churches by the week beginning 18th April; more information about ordering and obtaining them will follow in due course.

Holy Saturday

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, Holy Saturday (3rd April) will provide a particularly fitting and poignant opportunity this year to remember and grieve for those who have died, particularly those lost to the pandemic over the past year. Suggested resources for remembrance and lament are available from the [Church of England website](#). In this diocese, there will be a livestreamed service 'In Memoriam' from our Cathedral at 5.30pm in the context of Evening Prayer on Holy Saturday, 3rd April, to provide a particular focus to gather together memories of those we have loved and lost and to hold them before our Lord in anticipation of the resurrection joy. I will be writing to you at the beginning of Holy Week with more details about this.

Easter morning

At daybreak on Easter Day, Sunday 4th April, I warmly invite you any of you who are awake and not otherwise engaged in worship to join me online for a short vigil of prayer from my garden to welcome and celebrate the light of the risen Christ. I anticipate that we will begin at 5.45am that



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day. It would be good if you could have with you a candle – preferably one which would not shatter if dropped – and a means of lighting it. Details will be available on the [diocesan website](#).

Easter season

As we continue to reassemble in our churches throughout the Easter season, I will be inviting you to an online programme of teaching from all the bishops of the diocese on the meaning and practice of 'Holy Communion also known as the Eucharist'. Over nine weeks, Bishops Clive, Sarah, Matthew, Jonathan, Rod, Jan, Alistair and I will provide video lectures discussing different aspects of the sacrament, and there will also be open seminars on 6th May and 3rd June. More details will be available soon after Easter; please do bear in mind this opportunity to reflect further on this great means of grace which will be increasingly available for us all more and more in the coming weeks and months.

My brother and sister bishops join me in sincere thanks to each one of you for your faithfulness and dedication in ministry and service, and in prayer for you and for all who are dear to you. Please pray for us, that together we all may come to the joy of Easter with this joyful prayer on our lips and in our hearts:

*Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to him and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age and for ever.
Amen*

In his name,

Michael Ipgrave



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