

The Venerable David Sharples

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To: Licensed and PTO Clergy
Readers
Deanery Lay Chairs
PCC Secretaries
Churchwardens

Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Diocesan Coronavirus Response Group.

You will all be aware the national situation is fast moving and developing day to day. As a result, the advice and guidance that is being issued by the Government and by the Church of England is constantly being reviewed and updated.

The latest and most current information is available by following this link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

and I would continue to strongly urge parishes to access this information on a very regular basis in order to be fully up to date.

The guidance was updated yesterday and some important updates have been made.

- Ensure **everyone maintains good hygiene** (we should be doing this already as part of normal good practice) at all gatherings, whether services or other occasions. This includes those handing out books etc or having other direct physical contact with numbers of people, as well as those administering the Eucharist (see below for more guidance):
 - Provide hand gel at entrances and ensure there is a good supply of soap or hand gel in cloakrooms and kitchens and any other appropriate areas.

- The best way of protecting us from the spread is for everyone to use **universal good hygiene**, - this means everyone, all the time, which will effectively disrupt the spread of the virus. Display the public information poster attached, which states:
 - **Catch it** – sneeze into a tissue.
 - **Bin it** – bin the tissue.
 - **Kill it** – wash your hands.
 - **Do not touch your face** unless you've washed your hands.

- The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have written to clergy to **advise that the Common Chalice/Cup now be suspended until further notice**. We advise that all priests should:
 - Offer Communion in one kind only to all communicants i.e. the consecrated bread/wafer/host, with the priest alone taking the wine;
 - suspend handshaking or other direct physical contact during the sharing of the Peace;
 - suspend direct physical contact as part of a blessing or "laying on of hands" (see **FAQs** below for more information on this)

- Churches are encouraged to complete a **Coronavirus Parish Continuity Plan** to ensure, as far as possible, their continued mission and ministry.

- **Intinction is not recommended** as an alternative to the Common Chalice/Cup. It is a route for transmission from the

individual through handling the wafer/bread/host, and tiny fragments could affect people with allergies to gluten etc.

- Please note that the **distribution of individual cups** for use by communicants is **not a lawful practice** in the Church of England.
- Ask **those attending services to wash their hands** as they come into church.
- Ensure **ministers of the Eucharist wash their hands** before and after distributing communion.
- **Suspend catering** (teas, coffees etc.) where multiple people touch mugs, utensils and foodstuffs.
- **No pastoral visits should be undertaken to people who are self-isolating** until isolation ends. However, do offer phone support.
- When **visiting parishioners at home**, wash hands before and after giving the sacraments.
- **Refrain from passing collection plates** around.
- **Suspend the use of holy water stoups.**
- **Wash vestments** (surplices, cassocks) on the hottest cycle you can without damaging them. Chasubles etc. which could become contaminated, may not be able to be washed. Instead, they should be securely stored away from people, ideally in a well ventilated and brightly sunlit area, for at least 48 hours before re-use.
- **Visits to people in care homes or Hospitals** should follow advice from the staff on infection control.
- Ensure **good regular cleaning of surfaces people touch regularly**, including such things as door handles, light switches etc.

Your attention is particularly drawn to:

- **Refrain from passing collection plates** around.
- **Suspend catering** (teas, coffees etc.) where multiple people touch mugs, utensils and foodstuffs.

At this stage, there is no advice to cancel any services.

Urgent attention is drawn to the precautions advised in relation to **Baptism**, in the event that Baptisms are due to take place in the next few days:

- The Priest must wash their hands before and after making the sign of the cross on the candidate's forehead.
- Where possible, if the candidate is a baby or small child, they should be held by the parents/godparents rather than the priest taking them in their own arms.
- It is preferable for water to be poured on the candidate's head using a baptismal shell.
- If chrism/oil is to be used the priest should use a spoon or similar implement.
- In any event the priest should wash their hands before and after the baptismal act.
- Baptism by Immersion should not take place as this represents a transmission risk.

The latest advice from the Church of England also states that churches are encouraged to complete a Coronavirus Parish Continuity Plan to ensure, as far as possible, their continued mission and ministry. Bishop's Council met on 12 March 2020 and fully agrees that this should happen.

A copy of the Coronavirus Parish Continuity Plan template is provided alongside this letter for you.

We recognise schools are still open and will continue to be provided advice by the relevant local authorities and the Department for Education.

The link to the Department of Education website is:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

The Diocesan Coronavirus Response Group are scheduled to meet again on 19 March 2020. We will convene sooner to respond to the situation as required, and we will get information and advice out across the diocese as quickly as we possibly can.

As ever we continue to hold in prayer our churches, the communities we serve, remembering especially the most vulnerable members of our society and those who are anxious and afraid at this time, giving thanks for our health service and all medical staff and support services.

Every Blessing

David

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Chair, Diocesan Coronavirus Response Group