



27 March 2020

Dear sisters and brothers,

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Thank you so much for all you are doing in praying and ministering so differently at present and please know that you are prayed for in doing so.

There is currently some confusion and indeed disagreement over the use of our church buildings in the current coronavirus restrictions. It seems this arises out of a difference between the current government advice and our own diocesan guidance based on the Church of England guidance.

The Church of England guidance does go further than the government guidance and comes from our own medical advice. In the light of that advice we believe we need to take the lead in demonstrating how important it is to stay at home and that we can still be the church without our buildings, although this is so difficult at the present time.

We are asking in the strongest possible terms that churches and clergy follow our instruction and guidance in these matters for the immediate future. For the purposes of clarity the guidance is set out below:

1. Our church buildings remain totally closed for public worship or private prayer. This includes the clergy, and means that no act of worship is led or streamed from inside the building.

A notice should be placed on the church door (using the template that has been provided)

2. Funerals are not possible in church, which we know is distressing for grieving families, but is safest in preventing the spread of the virus. Funerals may now only happen at the Crematorium or at the graveside. Only immediate family members can attend (if the crematorium allows) – that is, spouse or partner, parents and children, keeping their distance in the prescribed way.
3. For the support of the most vulnerable, food banks and other essential social services, where they operate out of the church building, should continue where possible under strict guidelines and may have to move to be delivery points not places where people gather.

We have no comfort in urging everyone to follow the instructions given, but we do believe it is our Gospel imperative and shared pastoral responsibility to be seen to be setting a lead to the whole of society. Being entirely blunt about it - this is what may save lives at present.

We hope for the day when we can offer less restrictive guidance and pray that day may arrive sooner than currently anticipated. Please know that you are prayed for, especially where you need to explain and defend these guidelines to grieving families and others.

Let us continue to pray, to love, to care for the vulnerable, and build our communities, even while separated.

+David Manchester

+Mark Bolton

+Mark Middleton