



7 May 2020

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

Thank you for your faithful work and ministry at this time. As I am sure you are aware, the House of Bishops has been considering how to move forward in respect of Covid-19. As your Diocesan Bishop, I am now issuing this guidance which is in accord with the House's deliberation and the current legal position.

It is clear that for the time being all our church buildings must remain closed to the public. Baptisms, weddings and funerals may not take place in church. (If you are asked to perform an emergency baptism or deathbed marriage, please contact your Bishop or Archdeacon.)

It is now possible to move to the first phase of very limited access to our church buildings, as I explain further below. You will be contacted again when further phases become possible: as I am sure you will appreciate, it is impossible to know how far ahead that will be.

Please remember that everything we do must be with careful consideration of what is safe — which therefore may not be the same in every church building. I strongly ask you to weigh up the risks before you plan to do anything in church.

I hope too that everyone concerned will understand that there is no expectation, pressure or requirement for every church building to be entered during this first phase.

The first time a church is re-entered, doors and windows should be opened for an hour to disperse dust and mould spores, and someone will need to wait outside to prevent anyone entering during that time.

The advice now is that, having taken those preliminary assessments and precautions, you may consider the following:

- Incumbents, or Area Deans where there is no incumbent, can in consultation with the relevant churchwardens appoint one person for each church building in their benefice to enter that church building (consistently the same person for any day, i.e. not one person for three days and another for the weekend).
- The appointed person should be the incumbent or another clergyperson, a Reader, churchwarden or PCC member.
- The church should be near to where the appointed person lives and a visit should generally be part of their daily exercise.
- The appointed person should be going into church for any or all of the following on behalf of the community they serve:
 - pray the Daily Office and/or celebrate the Eucharist;
 - live stream or pre-record worship;
 - check the fabric of the building.
- The appointed person may enter the church building together with members of their household with whom they are living, and the door should be locked.
- The appointed person may ring one bell, or raise a flag, if it is appropriate to do so and only if it can be done from ground level and without ascending a tower. Safety is paramount. Any rope should be cleaned; avoid physical risk from heights. It is highly dangerous for someone who is not a skilled ringer to touch the rope of a bell that may have been left 'up' for change ringing.
- Clergy and lay leaders who have received a shielding letter from the government should not be leaving home to enter any church building.
- Those with underlying health problems, or who are shielding people in their household with such problems, should not feel under any obligation to be the appointed person and might consider whether there is anyone else less at risk who could be approached. Please do not ask anyone who is in one of the government's risk categories, which include people over 70 and those with an underlying health condition such as breathing or heart problems or diabetes.

- Please consider carefully what cleaning will be needed to make our churches safe (e.g. to avoid risk from urine or droppings from bats or rodents, mould spores, dust, or legionella in water systems; as well as disinfecting gates and door handles etc.).
- I am grateful to those churches that are hosting foodbanks and similar community activities which of course continue.
- Churchyards remain open for people to visit: persons who are not from the same household must keep physical distance from one another.
- If you believe it is necessary for contractors to go into the church building to do any urgent work that cannot wait, please consult your Archdeacon before arranging this. Contractors may only go on site subject to HSE (Health & Safety Executive) and government regulations, as well as their own risk assessment. The church must remain locked while they are inside, and care should be taken over the hygiene of surfaces, door handles etc.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your Archdeacon.

Thank you for everything that you have been doing over these past weeks to maintain the mission that God has entrusted to us. There have been many impressive initiatives by way of online worship, offering people a pattern of prayer that is new to them, but nobody should feel obliged to produce internet-based material — please remember that contact with individuals by telephone or prayer leaflets is immensely valuable.

This comes with my prayers for you all as we continue to respond to God's call to serve his people at this time.

Thank you for our Partnership in the Gospel,

+Sentamu Eboracensis