

From the Bishop of Salisbury



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Re-opening churches phase 1: clergy only, for now

Clergy are going back into their churches, but the buildings remain closed for public worship.

Our clergy are being allowed back into their churches under new guidance issued by the House of Bishops. However, this will only be for very limited purposes such as prayer and the streaming of services. To ensure the public remains safe, our buildings still need to remain closed for public worship.

Bishop Nicholas has written to all our clergy, LLMs and churchwardens in the light of new guidance issued by the House of Bishops yesterday, concerning a phased re-opening of our churches as national lockdown measures are slowly relaxed by the Government as infection levels improve.

In his letter, the Bishop enclosed the statement letter from the Church of England Bishops which advocates the lifting the closure of church buildings "in time and in parallel" with the Government's approach.

Thanking our clergy, LLMs and churchwardens for "the ways in which church continues even though our buildings are closed", he said:

"Coming out of 'Lockdown' is more complex than going into it. The House of Bishops has agreed to a staged process which is likely to follow a similar path to the country as a whole following what the Prime Minister outlines on Sunday evening.

"As a Diocese we will continue to use the Guidance of the Church of England which is regularly reviewed and updated.

"The decision of the House of Bishops means that there is no longer any inhibition on clergy praying in their own churches, either privately or to stream a service. This is a very limited provision."

He added that clergy, LLMs and churchwardens would want to pay attention to other elements of the guidance about safety, cleaning, and social distancing.

Also that those who are vulnerable because of health issues or age may understandably decide to continue to stay at home.

He said the decision was with immediate effect, but in reality many ministry teams and churchwardens were likely to have already made plans and even pre-recorded for Sunday and the special services to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day, and so the Bishop suggested:

"It might be best to plan for clergy to be able to pray in church again starting next week."

Read the Bishop's letter in full [here](#).

The statement from the House of Bishops says that, while at the moment churches remain closed for worship, the bishops have agreed to 3 stages of re-opening church buildings once infection levels improve.

Phase 1 would allow "very limited" access for clergy and other ministers on their own or with one family member for activities such as streaming services or private prayer by clergy, so long as social distancing and hygiene precautions are taken.

Phase 2 would allow for subsequent access for some rites and ceremonies when allowed by law, observing appropriate physical distancing and hygiene precautions.

Phase 3 would allow worship services with limited congregations meeting, when Government restrictions are eased to allow this.

Bishop Nicholas stressed the guidance made it clear we were not "yet open to a wider range of people entering our church buildings."

Bishop Nicholas reflected:

"We have all felt the impact of Coronavirus on our families and in our communities. Some have been particularly badly hit but as a region the South West has been less badly affected than other parts of the country.

"Please continue to take great care. With the prospect of some relaxation of travel in the next few months and as a holiday destination we do not want to find ourselves more badly affected by a second wave of infection."

The Guidance makes it clear that no one, apart from a member of the clergy (and the person filming them, if any) or those carrying out emergency work, are allowed to enter the building during this phase.

Read the House of Bishops' Statement [here](#).

Extra Guidance will be issued by the Church of England over the coming days. Keep up to date with this [here](#).