

Lead story

Risk Assessment is key for opening up

Following a recent announcement that places of worship could reopen for individual private prayer from June 15, the Government has now revised the date in guidance just published to June 13 ([link here](#)), but it will be up to individual churches to open only if they feel it is safe to do so.

Please do a Risk Assessment using [this template](#), as it will help you in making your decisions.

The House of Bishops has also said that funerals may take place inside our buildings from June 15th ([click here](#) for the story).

In letters to all clergy and licenced lay ministers and churchwardens, advising them of the change, (click [here](#) and [here](#) to go to the latest Ad Clerums), Bishop Nicholas made it clear that it would be up to individual churches to make a decision about whether or not they would be able to open within the published guidelines.

He said:

"Please take the time that is needed for local decision in keeping with the latest guidance. Church buildings may open for private prayer but it is not a requirement that they do so."

Writing on the day the Church remembers St Barnabas the Apostle, the Bishop added:

"I hope that you and the people in your care will experience this first relaxation from the 'lockdown' as an encouragement on St Barnabas' day but not a demand for you and your church to do what may in some places be impossible."

The Bishop noted that throughout our Diocese, churches were taking a variety of approaches:

"Some are planning to open for a few hours each day, others once or twice a week to reduce the need for cleaning on the basis that the virus does not survive for more than 72 hours without a body to host it."

The Church of England has also revised its guidance about funerals in line with advice from Public Health England ([link here](#)) and the Bishop advised that:

"Each church is different but you will need to be able to demonstrate that you are acting within the guidance and the risk assessment will help you to do this."

The Bishop's letter echoed the guidance from the Church of England website, which comments:

"If churches are ready to open earlier than planned, they may of course do so, however many may wish to wait until June 15 or later to do so in line with their existing plans.

"Although the guidance allows for places of worship to reopen, as always the decision of how and when to begin the process of doing so for individual private prayer will be taken locally."

You will note that the guidance confirms the date of June 13 indicated by the Prime Minister this week. However, as we have emphasised, there is no compulsion on churches to open tomorrow, and many will be planning to reopen for individual private prayer at a later date, if at all.

As before this guidance is permissive in tone and is not itself legislation, but we expect that formal regulations will be published shortly.

There has been some concern about the use of the word 'supervised' in previous Government announcements relating to individual prayer. The term is not repeated in this document in that context. However it does refer to situations which might, in practice, require some physical staffing in some places, for example managing queues in larger places of worship.

The guidance also permits organ practice, providing the same social distancing precautions are observed as for individual prayer. This will be of encouragement to organists, and will help to ensure organs do not fall into disrepair.

This remains a time of uncertainty for church musicians and the Church of England is working with the Government as it prepares scientific and medical advice around how singing and instrumental music can be resumed safely in due course.