

Latest News

Safety first

"It's good that places of worship may remain open in this lockdown, but that does not mean they have to be open if it is not safe to do so."

That was the message from Bishop Nicholas as we enter a new lockdown with the latest guidance for places of worship remaining very much the same, with a few exceptions around singing and weddings.

And with infection rates and deaths rising in our area, many churches are feeling it is not safe to do so.

Bishop Nicholas has written to all clergy, licensed lay ministers and churchwardens in the light of the new Tier 5 regulations and the [updated Church of England guidance](#) on worship during the pandemic.

In his letter, the Bishop says that it's good the Government has allowed places of worship to remain open, saying:

"We have built up experience of how to do this safely. There have been very few occasions when the transmission of the virus has been traced back to a place of worship. The work you have been doing has really paid off in providing safely for the needs of those in your care. Thank you."

But he added:

"That churches may be open does not mean they have to be open.

"The only sensible place for the decision to be made about that is locally. You know what is and isn't possible within the Covid regulations and guidelines. Those who are shielding because of age or other vulnerabilities cannot be used to minister in these circumstances."

The Bishop asked clergy to involve churchwardens and, where possible, the PCC in the decision making process and also "have in mind the importance of church buildings as signs of hope and places for prayer within the local community."

Churches also need to complete a written [risk assessment](#) before they can open.

The Bishop also reminded his readers that:

"During this lockdown funerals may continue and be attended by a maximum of 30 (in addition to those who are 'working', such as the minister). Weddings may take place in exceptional circumstances with attendance limited to 6 people (again in addition to those who are 'working'). Use the guidance to which we have been signposting throughout this pandemic on the Church of England's website."

The Bishop's letter was sent as new statistics show that over half the churches in England have moved to online worship only during this latest phase of the pandemic, but that number is growing as the crisis deepens.

You can read the full letter [here](#).