

To licensed clergy, those holding PtO and LLMs in the Diocese of Salisbury

25 June 2020

Dear sisters and brothers

The prospect of churches being able to re-open for worship is a relief and will be a great joy for many. There is also likely to be some anxiety about whether reopening is possible in local circumstances and some may be wondering whether the easing of lockdown is wise. As I write, I have not seen the statutory instrument that relaxes the current prohibition nor the government's detailed guidance on how the relaxation is to be effected. Equally, the national Church's guidance is provisional until those documents are available. I understand that the government guidance may not be available until the end of the week and so the national Church's guidance will follow on from that. As always, [the diocese's Coronavirus webpage](#) is linked to [the national Church's guidance](#). Please keep referring there for the latest guidance which is posted as it is issued.

### **Permissive not prescriptive**

The relaxation is with effect from Saturday the 4 July. This does not mean that every church must be open on the 5 July for worship as it was before the lockdown was applied. It will be possible but it is not mandatory. In the same way that opening for private prayer was not practicable for some churches with their limited resources, so it may not be practicable in every situation to make all the arrangements that are necessary to conduct public worship safely – or as safely as is reasonably possible in the current circumstances. If you do reopen, please do follow the government's and the national Church's guidance which includes the need to update your risk assessment if you are already open for private prayer and to undertake one if you are not. There is a template on the national Church's website which may well be updated when they issue guidance on reopening for public worship. If you don't feel able to reopen reasonably safely, then please do not reopen.

I was grateful when we were able to go into churches again for private prayer but it was achingly apparent that these buildings are primarily for worship and communities. For those who can do so, it will be good to begin the provision of services. The Liturgical Commission has produced some resources which may be found on [the national Church's webpage](#) – about half way down under Documents/Resources. Southwark Diocese prepared [some liturgical resources](#) that struck me as good for use on re-entering the building. Feel free to adapt them to your use as you see fit.

It is difficult to know how many will return to public worship immediately. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of our people (especially, but not necessarily, the more vulnerable) remain

nervous about being in a confined space with others, albeit socially distanced at one or two metres. Ticketing services seems to go against the law that, broadly, none may be refused entry – though safety is a good reason – and our wish to make all welcome. It may, however, be a helpful tool initially to monitor the level of attendance to expect and to help plan accordingly.

## **Canon law**

There are, however, other legal considerations. Canon law does require public worship to take place somewhere in a benefice every Sunday and so, with the relaxation of the law prohibiting public worship, that requirement of Canon law comes back into effect. The requirement may be dispensed with 'on an occasional basis, as authorized by the minister who has the cure of souls and the parochial church council of each parish in the benefice acting jointly'. So incumbents should liaise with their PCCs to make such authorisation as may be necessary. I am prepared to interpret 'on an occasional basis' as being for a matter of a few weeks but, if the dispensation is to apply for longer, then a different provision applies. If public worship is to be dispensed with on a regular basis, then such dispensation must be 'authorized by the bishop on the request of the minister who has the cure of souls and the parochial church council of each parish in the benefice acting jointly'. In either case – whether on a temporary or regular basis – '[i]n giving an authorization ... the person or persons doing so must be satisfied that there is good reason for doing so and shall ensure that no church ceases altogether to be used for public worship.' Do be in touch with your archdeacon if you wish to apply to me for a regular dispensation since I will rely heavily on their advice as to whether the application is made for 'good reason'.

## **Weddings**

I do not think, however, that we have any option but to be open for weddings, if not for regular public worship. You will have seen that the number of those attending a wedding (but not other public worship) is to be limited to 30. The government's update to their Q&A yesterday included the following:

### *1.17 Can weddings go ahead?*

*Yes, from 4 July, weddings and civil partnerships will be allowed to take place. You should only invite close friends and family, up to a maximum of 30 people. The wedding exception is for wedding ceremonies only. Large wedding receptions or parties should of course not be taking place. Wedding celebrations can only happen when people follow the guidance of six people outdoors, support bubbles, or two households indoors or outdoors. It is critical for these guidelines to be observed to keep you and your family and friends as safe as possible.*

If being open for weddings gives rise to a seemingly insuperable problem, again, please be in touch with your archdeacon.

A wedding may be solemnised following banns only if it takes place within three months of the third calling of the banns. Since it has not been possible to call banns during the lockdown, any banns which have been called to date will be of no effect. A request for the calling of banns must be made to the minister of each parish where banns are to be called seven days in advance of the Sunday when it is anticipated that the reading of the banns will be commenced, so the earliest that a wedding may take place following banns will now be a month away. Any weddings that are to take place before then should, therefore, probably be by common licence. The lawyers are still out on whether banns partially called before lockdown may be completed and a common licence remains the safest course of action if there is not time to start calling the banns again. Please be in touch with the Registry and/or local surrogate for advice on how to obtain a licence.

### **Singing**

It looks as if singing at public worship (which includes weddings) will not be permitted for the time being.

### **Recording attendance**

It has been indicated that, to help contact tracing should someone attending worship contract Covid-19, we should keep a record of who attends public worship, perhaps for the three weeks or so that it is being suggested that restaurants and bars should keep a record of their patrons. There is a potential data protection issue here which we will need to keep an eye on when the guidance is issued. It is likely that the 'lawful purpose' exemption will apply but, if we do have to record, it will probably be safest to issue some sort of privacy notice making it known why the information is being collected and for how long it will be held etc. I hope that the national Church will help with guidance in this area.

### **Live streaming and filming**

On the subject of data protection, some of you may wish to live stream or to record your public worship so as to continue to engage with those who continue to be shielded or who may have started to attend your online worship during the lockdown. Such filming presents a data protection issue which also becomes a safeguarding issue where certain groups like domestic abuse survivors, children or adults at risk are present. If you are proposing to film or live stream your

worship then, at the very least, you must display a sign that is clearly visible on entry to the church advising those attending that filming will be taking place and that they should seek advice as to where to sit so as not to be filmed. Parents' consent is required to film any unaccompanied children.

It may be that not every benefice will want to live stream every week or at all but, as we gradually go back to a pattern of regular worship, perhaps we might be able to work together across a deanery or other suitable grouping to live stream some services to which people could be signposted to provide accessibility across a wider area and to share the workload.

### **New curates**

This Sunday afternoon at 3.00pm I will be licensing as lay workers those who were due to be ordained deacon. This will be a first for me in terms of licensing them on Zoom. Please remember them in your prayers. They are:

Ali Alexander  
(Salisbury St Thomas and St Edmund)

Sharon Boyle  
(Wimborne Minster and the Northern Villages)

Adrian Burholt  
(Wellsprings)

Helen Croud  
(Bridport)

Karen Franklin  
(Canford Magna – The Lantern)

Katie Jackson  
(Broughton Gifford, Great Chalfield and Holt St Katharine)

Gerry Lynch  
(Devizes St John and St Mary)

Leila Mather

(Charminster, Stinsford and the Chalke Stream Villages)

Matt Smith

(Corfe Mullen)

Caroline Spindlow

(Warminster Christ Church)

Nick Webb

(St Aldhelm)

Nick Wells

(Wimborne Minster and the Northern Villages)

Helen Williams

(Wareham)

I continue to be so grateful to you and your colleagues for the way in which you have continued to be Church in your communities in so many varied ways. The Lord is indeed doing a new thing. Thank you for joining in his work so willingly and with such good humour despite the pressures that we have all been under. I do not pretend that we are through it all yet and appreciate that there are now new and different stresses to which we will be subject.

But we won't be able to continue the Lord's work if we don't take days of rest. Do try to take time to care for yourselves and to enjoy the blessing of this glorious weather. Please do get back into the rhythm of a regular day off each week and a 48 hour break every month. Please do take your holiday. We can get so tired that we just keep on going because we can't see the wood for the trees and feel we must. We mustn't – but we only realise that when we do actually take time off and our perspective is changed.

With God's blessing

*+Nicholas Sarum*