

To all licensed clergy and LLMs  
cc all churchwardens

The Eve of the Epiphany 2021

Dear all,

The celebration of Christmas has been smaller, simpler and in some ways clearer. It seemed to generate amazing creativity across the Diocese as Churches invented ways to celebrate Christmas. I've no doubt it was hard work and I also hope you experienced comfort and joy and had some fun and that you got a short break. On this Twelfth Day I am writing to wish you a happy new year.

No end of Christmas cards included a hope for a better 2021 but the year has begun with a good deal of anxiety, particularly because of the increased transmissibility of the mutated virus. The implications of this lockdown are going to take a bit of working out for Churches. I am grateful that so many of you are already engaged with this.

It's good that this time the Government has allowed places of worship to remain open. 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.

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. In making your decisions, I ask you to involve your churchwardens and, where possible, the PCC, but also to have in mind the importance of church buildings as signs of hope and places for prayer within the local community.

If you decide to suspend public worship in a church building, please think about

whether it might be possible within a multi-parish benefice or with neighbours in the deanery for a church locally to be open for public worship on Sundays. Make sure plans for online worship are communicated clearly, again perhaps as a deanery as well as in the benefice, so that people know the provision and their options. In every case where public worship is suspended, the bishops would be grateful that you inform us so that we are able to build an overview of what is happening across the Diocese. Informing your area bishop may be treated as you also receiving any authority should that be needed under Canon B14 since it will probably not be practicable to issue all such individual authorities as may be required.

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 six 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](#).

It helps a lot to keep a rhythm to the day and to the week so that you continue to say your prayers and take time off for recreation and rest. Bishops Karen, Andrew and I are very aware that many clergy are tired and that lockdown is draining. If you would like one of us to join in your online worship, we may be available to do so. We are also willing to record sermons or addresses if that would be of use to you. Please feel free to ask us and we will try to respond positively.

On, on to Epiphany and all that lies ahead. Like the Magi we will return to our own country by another road.

Yours faithfully

*+Nicholas Sarum*