

Ad Clerum from the Bishop of Chichester – Covid-19 update issued on 17 March 2020.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Following yesterday evening's message from the Prime Minister and discussions in Parliament, the Archbishops have announced that Church is Changing. The communication can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/archbishops-call-church-england-become-radically-different-public-worship>.

The two key points are that public worship should be suspended (this will include Holy Week services) but that churches should where possible remain open for prayer. This suspension will remain in place until further notice.

The strap line is that church is changing. The Church, the life of the people of God, the presence of the body of Christ on earth, continues to exist. However, the manifestation of our presence is changing.

What does this mean in practical terms?

- The suspension of public worship does not apply to weddings, funerals, baptisms, and licensing. However, these should go ahead with as few people in attendance as possible. Clergy should use their discretion on what limits to apply. For example, it would be reasonable to limit attendance to the immediate family, excluding anyone who is at risk from infection. If you need further guidance and support, please contact your archdeacon.
- Please keep checking the updates at <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>, where you will find answers to frequently asked questions, with more are being added.
- PCC and other meetings should only go ahead if the chair considers that there is important or essential business. Those who can use email, telephone or video conferencing, should feel free to do so.
- If there are particular matters you wish to see addressed in my letter on Thursday, please let Anna Quick know by emailing adminhelpdesk@chichester.anglican.org. I will not be able to address all, but will address as many as possible.
- Please ensure that if your church is open, there is a hand washing facility available and all other health and safeguarding regulations are in place,
- Please remove all prayer books, hymn books, prayer cards, etc that might be used by more than one person.
- Many people value being able to light a candle as a sign of prayer; it is good to make this possible.
- You might want to have a poster with contact details available (email and phone number) for the clergy or any other people who have a public and authorised ministry.

This is a massive shift in ministerial life, and it will require us to dig deep into our spiritual reserves and discipline. Inevitably, other issues will also need to be addressed. I will be in touch with you again on Thursday to give you an update on advice as it is received from the Church's advisors nationally. We will also give details of the Day of Prayer and Action this Sunday, when we will be asking people to light a candle at 7.00 pm and put it in the window.

We are also working on producing resources from within the diocese for the strengthening and continuation of our spiritual and pastoral life - our apostolic witness.

Finally, please be assured of my continued prayers and my confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God made known in Christ Jesus.

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