

***To all clergy (licensed or with PTO), readers (licensed or with PTO), churchwardens, PCC secretaries, treasurers and administrators, parish safeguarding officers and child protection officers, and deanery lay chairs, secretaries and treasurers***

In addition to the impact that Covid-19 has had on our worship and our pastoral care for both our congregations and our communities, it will have a significant impact on financial and governance matters. The following matters are addressed below:

- Finance
- Staff
- Marriages, banns and common licences
- Funerals
- Safeguarding issues
- Parsonage properties
- Annual Parochial Church Meetings
- PCC meetings
- Other meetings
- Archdeacons' visitations

### **Finance**

With the suspension of public worship, those who give by cash or envelopes at the collection will no longer be giving; revenue from shops, cafes, hall bookings, guided tours and so on is likely to be significantly reduced even if the decision has not been taken to close or suspend them; and investment income is likely to reduce.

Many businesses will be facing similar challenges, and redundancies seem highly likely. This too will affect giving, among those who give through the Parish Giving Scheme or standing order.

Churches throughout the diocese and across the country are playing a leading role in helping to support all those most affected by not only Covid-19 itself but also by the measures that are being implemented to address it. Much has been written about support in the form of prayer, combatting loneliness, supplying food and so on. But you may also like to encourage your congregations to offer financial support. For example, if a theatre or conference ticket has been booked, could they donate the cost of the ticket, rather than seeking a refund? If a cleaner is unable to attend through self-isolation, could they be paid anyway?

Similar considerations apply to churches. Recognising that some will be unable to continue to give to their church, can those who are better placed to withstand the economic impact increase their giving to help churches continue to meet their outgoings despite the financial pressures? Some advice on sustaining financial support to your church in these difficult times can be found [here](#).

Similar considerations again apply to the Diocesan Board of Finance. A number of parishes have already expressed concern about their ability to continue to meet their parish share pledges in full. We recognise that some parishes will be more affected than others. But in the same way as PCCs need to continue to meet their outgoings, the DBF must continue to pay stipends, salaries and other outgoings. We would therefore urge all parishes who can maintain their parish share payments to do so for as long as they can, so that we can all continue to support each other within our household of faith. As with individuals giving to churches, could those parishes who are better placed to withstand the economic impact, whether by reason of continuing income or unrestricted reserves, increase their pledges?

**If you have concerns about your ability to pay your parish share this month and pay by direct debit, please contact [accounts@chichester.anglican.org](mailto:accounts@chichester.anglican.org) (or if you do not have email access 01273 425046) by noon on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March.**

#### **Staff**

Many parishes will have staff and be concerned about the implications for them. We are not qualified to offer employment law advice, and parishes will need to seek advice from Sussex HR ([lgoncalves@sussexhr.co.uk](mailto:lgoncalves@sussexhr.co.uk), 0800 074 1066 or 01323 890010) or elsewhere on particular issues. Sussex HR have kindly offered to give general advice related to Coronavirus free of charge to support parishes as part of the community. If more significant work is needed, they are happy to discuss deferred payment to ease cash flow.

Meanwhile, we can offer the following suggestions of things to think about.

- If an employee is ill and unfit to work, whether because of coronavirus or another reason, your usual sick pay policy and procedures will apply. It is thought that Statutory Sick Pay is payable in all cases from the first day of absence (usually it is the fourth) but clarification is awaited.
- If an employee self-isolates without being ill following written notification to do so from the 111 service or their GP, they will be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay. This entitlement will start from the first day of their absence. It seems that the same applies if an employee voluntarily self-isolates in accordance with government advice but again clarification is awaited. If you usually pay enhanced sick pay, you will need to decide whether to pay in these circumstances too. It would be good practice to decide this and tell any employees as early as possible, and ideally before the situation arises.
- If anyone voluntarily self-isolates, but can and does work from home, you should of course pay full pay for the hours they work. Otherwise you will need to decide whether to choose to pay full pay or not. The employee could of course choose to take annual leave.
- You will also need to choose whether to pay staff who are unable to work because they need to look after children or other dependents. The statutory position is that this is limited to 1 or 2 days and unpaid.
- Ensure that any temporary measures are confirmed in writing to all employees because currently we do not know how long we may have to implement changes to working environment or hours, but at some point all employees will need to return to their normal working environment and contracted hours.
- It is important to maintain usual sickness absence procedures so that absence is recorded by the employing parish for HR records and payroll purposes. Staff should report in when they are unwell. Make sure you record whether the absence is coronavirus, other sickness, self-isolation following government guidelines, or dependants leave to look after children or other dependants.
- Also ensure that the communication is two-way and that you are checking in on staff who are working from home, self-isolating or (if appropriate) unwell, to see how they are doing.
- Parishes may find that they face financial difficulties in continuing to pay their staff. It may be worth checking the employment contract to see if there is a provision which allows you to implement short-term working conditions or introduce a lay off period. If it does, and you wish

to implement that, you should seek professional HR advice. You should also seek professional HR advice if you need to consider staff redundancies. If you would like to do some background reading to gain an understanding of what questions to ask, there is a helpful toolkit on the Diocese of Guildford website: <https://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/docs/default-source/about/Administration/hr/hr-toolkit.pdf?sfvrsn=2> Note though that as it says on the front page, it is no substitute for specific legal or HR advice and neither the Guildford nor the Chichester DBF can be held responsible for any errors or omissions, and that the present situation is fast-moving and updates to reflect changes will not have been included.

### **Church halls**

Owners of halls should advise that the [Government's advice](#) is followed, where possible. That means that social distancing measures should be in place, particularly for those who are themselves in a category of vulnerable person or might come into contact with such a person.

- The advice is that social interaction between people should be reduced by avoiding large gatherings and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars and clubs.
- Gatherings with friends and family should also be avoided.
- Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as pragmatic.
- It also advises everyone to look after their mental wellbeing and consider options for exercise at home.

Although a hall might not be a public space in the same way that a pub or cinema is, it would certainly create the same environment. We would suggest that ordinary users of such halls would be acting contrary to Government advice if they continued to meet in the halls.

If the hall is not subject to a more formal lease arrangement then it is for the owners of the halls to take steps to ensure that, so far as possible, the opportunity to ignore Government advice is reduced. Our advice is therefore that PCCs should not permit continued use in these circumstances, unless the use provides a service for those in need and thus directly reduces pressure on other public services. It should be possible to continue, or start, to offer those services within the confines of the Government's advice.

Where halls are let on hiring agreements then the terms of those should be the first port of call. PCCs should contact the Diocesan Registry or another solicitor for specific advice if needed (but please be aware the Registry is fielding an extremely high volume of queries at present).

Where there is a lease or licence in place granting exclusive possession, or limited exclusive use then it is for the tenants/licensees to take appropriate decisions rather than the hall owners.

There will, however, be the issue of whether halls need to be appropriately cleaned (likely at some cost) after each period of use, and we would expect each user/tenant/licensee to be responsible for those costs.

### **Marriages, banns and common licences**

Questions have been asked about some of the financial and legal implications with regards to marriage and funerals.

With the current Government guidance that churches should suspend public worship it is not possible for Banns of Marriage to be called. The remaining option is an application for a Common

Licence. Our Deputy Registrar addresses this, and qualifying connections, in a note you can find [here](#). If a couple apply for a Common Licence then they will have to pay the associated fee. As you will see from the Deputy Registrar's note, all those seeking a common licence should contact the Registry directly at [ChichesterRegistry@wslaw.co.uk](mailto:ChichesterRegistry@wslaw.co.uk). They will then facilitate appointments to appropriate surrogates, if surrogates are themselves in a position to meet with people. The Chancellor of the Diocese has agreed to reduce the Registry Fee to £100 and it will be up to individual surrogates to decide whether, in the circumstances, they waive their £52 fee. If weddings are cancelled and Banns of Marriage have to be read for a second time in the future, the national Church of England Guidance is that fees for Banns already read (but where the marriage has been unable to take place) should be refunded. The same would apply for banns which cannot be read in whole or in part. Of course, the couple may choose to make their fee a donation to the church.

Some couples are asking if they might re-arrange or book their weddings for July or August. In supporting couples wanting to explore this we should be clear that it is not possible to make any commitments about that at this stage. The Registry is attempting to facilitate common licence applications only a week in advance as we are all in a rapidly evolving situation.

### **Funeral fees**

The sensitive question of waiving fees for funerals at this time needs to be carefully managed. If it is thought appropriate to review the fee for a funeral held because the individual has died as a result of the coronavirus, and the likelihood that there will be fewer permitted mourners at the burial, then it may be that the officiating minister proposes a service of thanksgiving/memorial at a later date and that no fees are charged for this.

### **Safeguarding issues**

The National Safeguarding Team have confirmed that the cancellation of Leadership training (C2), which is only available face to face, constitutes a cogent reason for departing from the House of Bishops' guidance in respect of the need for safeguarding training to be completed for certain roles. In other words, it is acceptable for clergy to continue to minister and church officers to undertake their roles, if they have either not done the training or not completed further training within the required time period, due to the impact of the virus. Please liaise with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team if this affects you, so that records can be kept and the training undertaken once the current restrictions are relaxed.

People in roles which require Basic (C0) or Foundation (C1) training will still be required to complete that training as usual using the online modules, which can be accessed through the safeguarding part of the diocesan website.

Safer recruitment guidance has not been relaxed, and DBS checks will continue to be required, and updated as they fall due.

However, given the practical difficulties with face to face meetings to check ID documents, the government has temporarily permitted ID to be checked remotely. Detailed guidance will be given to affected clergy as their checks fall due for renewal.

Referrals about safeguarding will continue to be followed up as business as usual, albeit wherever possible this will be conducted through conference calls etc rather than face to face meetings.

### **Parsonage properties**

In view of the advice that has been issued by the government, asking all of us to stop all non-essential contact, we have taken the decision to suspend the quinquennial repairs and improvement programme for 2020. While the quinquennial programme is an important part of our work to keep

diocesan houses in good repair, it is felt that the risks of having people in their homes at this stage is too great, and will do nothing to help slow down the spread of this virus.

If we were due to undertake quinquennial or improvement works this year, they now will not take place, and we will defer the works until 2021.

If you do have an issue at your house then you are advised to report it to the property department, in the usual way, by either e-mail ([property@chichester.anglican.org](mailto:property@chichester.anglican.org)) or telephone (01273 425 683), and we can then discuss with you the options and decide the best course of action together.

We will continue to undertake works to get properties ready for priests who are joining or moving within the diocese, as these works take place in empty properties, so the risk of transmission of the virus is low.

We will obviously be keeping an eye on what advice or rules the government issues over time, and will review the above as necessary.

We appreciate that some of you may have questions about this approach or the future plans for your house. We are likely to be under increased pressure over the coming weeks, as we adapt and change the way we work, so please be aware that response times may not be as quick as you might like. We also want to ensure that we are dealing with people who are asking for us to deal with repairs or issues at their properties, rather than answering general questions about the above approach.

### **Annual Parochial Church Meetings**

As part of church legislation, it is important that all dioceses take a common approach to how we address APCMs. Following much discussion between diocesan secretaries, diocesan registrars and the Church of England Legal Office, it has been agreed that the deadline for holding APCMs and Annual Meetings of Parishioners will be extended to 31 October for 2020. A copy of the legal document which has been signed by the Bishop to bring this into effect can be found [here](#).

This will allow time to assess the best time and manner of holding the meetings. It would be inadvisable for PCCs who are registered with the Charity Commission to fix the meeting for a date too close to 31 October as 31 October is also the date by which accounts must be filed with the Charity Commission.

#### *If the APCM has not yet been held*

The consequences of the extension are that

- the churchwardens who were elected in 2019 will continue to hold office until 31 January 2021 (unless their successor is admitted to office earlier than that);
- deanery synod representatives who were elected in 2017 (or those appointed since then to fill casual vacancies) will continue to hold office until 30 November 2020; and
- representatives of the laity elected to the PCC who are due to retire at the 2020 APCM will continue to hold office until that APCM actually takes place, even if that is between 31 May 2020 and 31 October 2020.

#### *If the APCM has already been held*

If the APCM had already been held before 19 March 2020, when the Bishop signed the instrument, then:

- The newly elected members of the laity will be PCC members and those who were due to retire at the APCM will duly have retired.
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- However, the deanery synod representatives who were elected in 2017 (or those appointed since then to fill casual vacancies) will still continue to hold office until 30 November 2020 and those who were elected at the 2020 APCM will not take up office until 1 December 2020, rather than the usual 1 July.
- Similarly, the churchwardens chosen in 2019 remain in office and the churchwardens chosen in 2020 will not take up office until they are admitted (which could be as late as 31 January 2021).
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#### *General Synod elections*

As matters stand, elections to the General Synod will still take place this year. That means that secretaries of deanery synods will still need to provide details of the names and addresses of members of the houses of clergy and laity of deanery synod by 1 July 2020. The relevant members of the house of laity will be the ones elected in 2017 (or subsequently to fill casual vacancies, even if the APCM has already taken place. Further details about this will follow nearer the time.

#### **PCC meetings**

As above, physical PCC meetings should not be taking place. Where possible, we do however encourage PCCs to continue to hold meetings using video or telephone conferencing facilities as part of preserving what normality we can, keeping parish mission and ministry on the go and subject to constructive challenge, and crucially as part of good charity governance. We are aiming to publish some guidance on some of the options available, many of which are free to use, next week. Parishes may like to consider starting small, by holding a remotely accessed meeting of the standing committee first and moving to a full PCC meeting when confidence has been built.

As an alternative, PCCs could consider having discussions and making decisions by email, or failing that post. Many parishes will have already have passed resolutions setting out parameters for this, but all parishes may now do so for any business the chair considers can properly be conducted by correspondence.

Where decisions are to be made, the PCC secretary must send proposals requiring the approval of members to each member of the PCC (and anyone else entitled to attend meetings if there is a group ministry). The chair should give instructions for a deadline for responding, and state how many members will need to object to prevent the proposals being approved. Unless the stated number of objections are received before the deadline, the proposals will be treated as approved by the PCC when the deadline passes. The PCC Secretary will need to keep records of all proposals made, noting whether they were approved, and the number of objections received from members.

#### **Other meetings**

Similar considerations apply to other meetings such as Deanery Synods. Unlike PCC meetings, there are however no provisions as yet relating to decisions being taken by correspondence.

#### **Archdeacons' visitations**

Along with all other non-essential contact, archdeacons' visitations are suspended. This applies both to visitations to swear in churchwardens (which could in any event not take place before Annual Parish Meetings have taken place) and to visitations to individual parishes. Parishes should however continue to maintain their log books. If your log book is kept in hard copy and you are not able to access it, please keep notes to enable you to update the log book when restrictions are eased. It would be wise to share those notes with others.

We will continue to try to address your questions as best we can. Please send them to [adminhelpdesk@chichester.anglican.org](mailto:adminhelpdesk@chichester.anglican.org) and continue to check the Church of England and diocesan websites for updates:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

<https://www.chichester.anglican.org/coronavirus-advice/>

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