



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

The Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales has issued the following Pastoral Declaration, the immediate effect of which is that all church services and gatherings for public worship and study groups and other events should no longer take place.

Further details are included in the Declaration below. These are trying times, and please keep a watching brief on your friends and neighbours who may be feeling particularly anxious or isolated at this time, and maintain contact with them by whatever means is appropriate.

Pray for all who suffer, including at this particular time those infected by Covid-19 around the world, for those who care for them, for health specialists and authorities who are combatting the spread of infection, and of course for all who at this time are feeling anxious, especially for those with friends and family in areas or occupations most at risk.

PASTORAL DECLARATION OF THE BENCH OF BISHOPS OF THE CHURCH IN WALES – COVID-19

Last updated: 17 March, 5pm

At such a time as this, and during this holy season of Lent, we are mindful of the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep. We are holding all who are anxious, all who are unwell, and all who are grieving in our prayers, asking that the presence of the risen Christ may be near to us, wherever we may be, throughout the difficult months ahead.

We are issuing this pastoral declaration in light of new governmental advice on Coronavirus (COVID-19). On the evening of Monday 16 March 2020 the Prime Minister advised that all non-essential social contact and all unnecessary travel should cease. During questions in the House of Commons the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care confirmed that the guidance relating to non-essential social contact includes faith groups and religious gatherings.

PUBLIC WORSHIP AND GATHERINGS

All church services and gatherings for public worship should no longer take place. This includes regular Sunday services and weekday services, as well as occasional offices (save as set out below). Study groups and other parochial events that gather people together should also no longer take place. We are awaiting further information from the government, which will help us all to measure and reflect upon the gravity and potential duration of this cessation. However, given the information we have available to us at present, the ceasing of public worship and gathering is the prudent course of action.

Vestry Meetings should not take place for the time being. Detailed guidance will follow as soon as possible.

BAPTISM

Baptism is the Church's hope-filled sign and seal of new birth in Christ. It is vital that baptism continues to be offered to all. Given the guidance on cancellation of public worship, baptisms will no longer take place in the context of regular worship. Baptisms should take place in the presence of no more than ten people (the minister, the candidate and up to eight others including parents/guardians and godparents).

For infant baptism it is preferable that the candidate be held by their parent/guardian rather than the minister. Where available a baptismal shell should be used to pour water. Full immersion baptism should not be used.

WEDDINGS

Unless the government changes the law, the common law right of parishioners and those with a qualifying connection to be married in a parish church remains. However, the date, time and other arrangements are, legally speaking, for the minister to determine. Weddings scheduled until 31 July 2020 should be postponed and any fees already paid refunded. Couples with a later wedding date should be free to cancel/rearrange without financial penalty.

If for pressing pastoral reasons a wedding must take place, it should be solemnized with a maximum of ten persons present (the couple, the minister, two witnesses and up to five others).

In the absence of a principal Sunday service, banns of marriage cannot be called. Any weddings which must go ahead (and for which Banns have not already been completed) would need to proceed by Common Licence.

Some couples (for example those with wedding insurance) may need a letter from the parish informing them that their wedding 'as arranged' cannot proceed at this time.

FUNERALS

Our guidance relating to the ceasing of public worship applies to funerals in church.

Clergy may continue to take a funeral service at the graveside (in accordance with their common law duty to bury the dead of their Parish) and at crematoria (adhering to such guidance as the crematorium authority may give).

Once the wider situation makes it safe so to do, the bereaved should be offered opportunities for remembering their loved ones in church at a future date.

CONFIRMATION

We are postponing all confirmation services scheduled between now and 1 June 2020 across the province. Dates subsequent to that will remain under review and updates will be provided periodically.

ORDINATION

Given that there are no public services of Ordination in the Province scheduled until June, we will consider the position on such services in due course. Please keep all candidates for ordained ministry in your prayers at this time.

PRAYER

We are clear that the duty of the Church to speak in the name of God, and to interpret the gospel of salvation continues at all times and in all places. Our obligation to pray without ceasing is paramount at this time, and we have been encouraged by the ways over recent weeks in which church communities have been enabling their members to sustain a life of prayer and devotion when gathering for worship has been difficult or impossible. These efforts should continue and intensify. Our church buildings can be kept open as places of prayer and contemplation – but notices should be in place about the washing of hands and the maintaining of social distance.

OUR COMMUNITIES

As the clergy and people of the Church in Wales, we have special care for all people in our communities, and especially the poor, the outcast and the needy. At this time, we know that there will be a burning desire to labour in God's service and to be alongside those in our communities who will be anxious, in pain and in need. This ministry will take many forms, including staying in touch by phone, by post and online with those who are having to stay at home; helping the most vulnerable with the delivery of food, medicines and essential services and supplies; and helping us all to look after our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Where foodbanks are hosted by our churches, extra hygiene precautions should be taken and consideration should also be given to other means of providing support. Churches providing shelter for the homeless should refer to specific government advice, recently updated.

Parishes are encouraged to review all external hiring agreements of church premises and liaise with all hirers as to what, if any, activities can safely continue.

THOSE WHO MINISTER

As chief pastors, we have a responsibility not only towards the wellbeing of clergy and those who minister in the Church's name, but also towards their families. For this reason, parochial meetings in parsonages should not take place. In addition to the usual notification procedures for sick leave, clergy should inform their Archdeacon if they are required to stay at home in accordance with the latest government guidance.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

On this page on the website, we will be including prayers, resources to support mental health and wellbeing and practical guidance for supporting congregations and communities. We are especially conscious that we want to continue to support the most vulnerable in our society through our various social outreach programmes, such as Holiday Hunger and Foodbank schemes, and that we must do this in a way that protects our many amazing volunteers. There will be a

Frequently Asked Questions section that will be updated and expanded as the situation develops.

At this challenging time, it is important that we are able to keep in contact with people via telephone and email, particularly as people start to self-isolate. We are conscious that many members of our congregations fall into the ‘at risk’ groups and this will probably become an essential way of keeping in touch over the coming weeks and months.

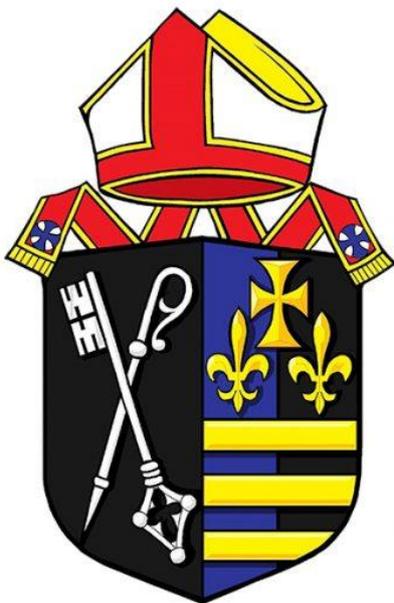
USEFUL EXTERNAL WEBSITES:

[UK Government advice on Coronavirus](#)

[Public Health Wales](#)

[WHO Coronavirus information](#)

You can read a transcript of Bishop Gregory’s message too: [Video Message 16 March](#)



A Prayer from Bishop Gregory

Dear Father, who created us, and redeemed us,
and who has promised us your love,
be with us in a time of danger and of worry.
May those who suffer, or who are ill,
know the blessing of your grace,
while we who are well be inspired by your Spirit
To be wise and to be servants, working for the healing
and wholeness of all, each in our own way.
Keep us calm and cautious, strong and open to service,
So that we take care of those around us,
and also ourselves.
We ask this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

Download [Bishop Gregory’s prayer](#) in response to Coronavirus

St Martin’s Church in Llay has created a prayer pack for use at home. It includes some forms of Prayer and Reflection for Lent, Holy Week and Easter: [Praying at Home](#).

Pool Mission Area has created a Service of [Morning Prayer at Home](#) and listed the [Readings from March to May](#).

Here’s a list of radio and TV programmes offering services/prayers:

Television programmes

Songs of Praise: Sundays at 1.15pm on BBC 1

Radio programmes

Prayer for the Day: daily at 5.43am on Radio 4

Sunday Worship: Sundays at 8.10am on Radio 4

Daily Service: Monday to Friday at 9.45am on Radio 4 Long wave and DAB only (see instructions below on how to find this on DAB)

Lent Talks: Wednesdays at 8.45pm on Radio 4 during Lent

Celebration: (Act of worship) Sundays at 7.30am on BBC Radio Wales

Choral evensong: Wednesdays at 3.30pm and the same service is repeated Sundays at 3pm on Radio 3

(The Daily Service is available on a Radio 4 DAB side channel which is automatically made available about a minute before the programme begins.

After tuning to Radio 4 DAB, select “Daily Service” (from your display) with the tuning wheel and press the selector button.

On some radios the side channel can be stored on a preset button and once it is stored there you simply need to press the preset. We recommend choosing a well established brand of DAB receiver.)

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