

Re: update mailing from the Bishop of Sheffield

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power and of love and of self-control. (2 Timothy 1.7)

Today the Archbishops have issued clear but challenging guidance for the Church of England, and I am writing to reinforce their message for the Diocese of Sheffield. These are difficult days and we are entering uncharted waters — but we have the Spirit of the Living God as our strength and our guide.

The Archbishops' letter can be found [here](#). They make five essential points:

1. In the light of the advice of the Prime Minister yesterday, and the application to faith communities made by the Health Secretary, public worship in the Church of England is to be suspended. Further advice will follow in the coming days with regard to baptisms, weddings and funeral, but for now we must assume that Sunday gatherings and midweek meetings will not happen in the usual way.

2. However, meetings of small numbers of healthy Christians to pray in homes and even in church buildings, to feed on the Word of God, to share in Holy Communion, and to intercede for the nation — this can and should continue in ways that are safe for all involved and creative. Numbers involved should be small, with physical distancing (2 metres between people) observed at all times; and obviously only those in good health should take part.

3. Every effort should be made to enable others, including older people and those with underlying health conditions, to pray at home, whether by accessing worship by live-streaming or using printed materials or other resources, such as those which can be found [here](#).

4. Meanwhile, Christians have a God-given responsibility to serve neighbours and neighbourhoods, and to care especially for the most vulnerable and for the bereaved. As many of our ordinary church routines are suspended, I hope many of us will be able to seize the opportunity — taking the initiative to make phone calls, to organise support networks, to ensure provision for food banks and so on.

5. In particular, the Archbishops are calling us to a day of prayer and action this coming Sunday (22nd March), to hold before God the sick and the anxious and all involved in healthcare. The Archbishops are inviting us all to place a lighted candle in a window at 7.00 p.m. as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished.

The Archbishops have also today published an appeal in the Yorkshire Post and the Daily Mail and you can find that [here](#).

In addition, I would like to communicate the following points:

a. Yesterday morning, I had already asked my PA, Wendy, to clear my diary as far as possible between now and Easter, to enable me to be as present to you and to our Diocese as I can be. In the event, over the past 24 hours, developments have been such as to free up my diary anyway! But I want you to know that my first priority in the next month, is to ensure that across this Diocese we meet these extraordinary challenges as effectively as we can, for the sake of the Gospel and of the coming kingdom of God.

b. To that end, I have convened a Coronavirus Response Team, which will meet online every morning and will issue a daily communications update. In addition to myself, the CRT will consist of the Dean of Sheffield, the Archdeacon of Sheffield and Rotherham, the Interim Diocesan Secretary, the Diocesan Director of Education and the Communications Manager. We will of course be drawing on the help and expertise of other staff in Church House and around the Diocese. If you have a questions, please write to CRT@sheffield.anglican.org — we may not be able to respond to every query, but we will include some responses in our daily update.

c. Church House staff and staff here at Bishopscroft are being encouraged to work as far as possible from home. At present we plan for Church House to remain open for a skeleton staff each day, but to visitors only by appointment. We are making arrangements for the reception phone line to be monitored remotely.

d. In addition, I have met this morning with the whole senior staff team, to pray and to plan and to address some of the most urgent questions. We have decided the following:

- i) The meeting of the Diocesan Synod on Saturday 21 March is postponed
- ii) The six clergy transition workshops scheduled between 23 March and 2 April are postponed.
- iii) The meeting of the Bishop's Council on 24 March is postponed.
- iv) The Leading Well day on Tuesday 31st March is postponed.
- v) Gatherings for 'Initial Ministerial Education' for curates are suspended.
- vi) Gatherings for the School of Ministry are suspended

e. Meanwhile, we are still considering arrangement for three key acts of worship: the Consecration of Canon Sophie at York Minster on 25 March, her installation as Bishop of Doncaster at the Cathedral on 28 March and the Chrism Eucharists on 6 and 8 April. Obviously, these cannot go ahead in the way that was originally planned. They may ultimately have to be postponed, but we are currently seeking ways to enable them to go ahead in a paired back way, supported by live-streaming.

f. You are also encouraged to consider whether your church building might be kept open for private prayer and pastoral care. Obviously, great attention will have to be paid to hygiene and physical distancing. But the opportunity to light a candle, or to sit in silence before the Lord, might be a great support to many.

g. Please ensure that you continue to check the national guidance daily. You can find it [here](#). The content is constantly being updated and is informed by the best available medical and legal advice. We appreciate that it is of necessity sometimes frustratingly vague, and requires local application. We will do our best to assist you if you are unsure what to do — but please trust to your own common sense and godly wisdom. You can help by taking responsibility confidently — you are after all the one who knows the local situation.

h. It remains the case of course that if you develop symptoms or if you discover you have been in 'close proximity' with someone who has symptoms (as a rule of thumb, that means within 2 metres for at least 15 minutes) you are expected to err on the side of caution and self-isolate for 14 days. If you are doing this, please inform us by email, addressing your message to CRT@sheffield.anglican.org so that we can support you. Please be assured that I intend to exercise discretion in such cases, so that absence in these circumstances will not be formally recorded as sick leave.

i. As you will be aware, the situation is changing very quickly, and I want you to feel empowered to take whatever decisions you deem necessary locally to ensure the well-being of yourself and your community (within the bounds of common sense and Christian godliness!). For example:

- i) Please assume that in these exceptional circumstances, communion by extension even led by church wardens is permitted.
- ii) Please assume that you have my permission, in these exceptional circumstances, to dispense with the obligation to ensure Holy Communion is celebrated in every benefice every Sunday.
- iii) Please assume that if it is not possible for you to hold your APCM before the end of May, you have my permission to postpone it.
- iv) Please encourage couples who had been relying on marriage by banns, to apply instead for a Common Licence. This involves a fee, I'm afraid — but with the suspension of public worship we cannot continue to call marriage banns.

In the providence of God, the appointed Psalm for Mothering Sunday (22 March) for the Principal Service is Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.*

Meanwhile, be kind to yourself and to those around you and be assured of my constant prayers.

with every blessing

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Pete Sheffield". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

The Rt Revd Dr Pete Wilcox
Bishop of Sheffield