



From the Bishops of Chelmsford Diocese to Clergy, Churchwardens and Lay Chairs

Wednesday 25 March 2020

Dear sisters and brothers,

Thank you so much for all you are doing in praying and ministering so differently at present and please know that you are prayed for in doing so.

We have become aware this morning that there is some confusion and indeed disagreement over the use of our church buildings in the current coronavirus restrictions. It seems this arises out of a difference between the current government advice and our own diocesan guidance based on the national church's instruction from yesterday.

The Church of England guidance does go further than the government guidance and comes from our own medical advice. In the light of that advice we believe we need to take the lead in demonstrating how important it is to stay at home and that we can still be the church without our buildings, hard though that is at present.

As your four bishops we are asking in the strongest possible terms that churches and clergy follow our instruction and guidance in these matters for the immediate future. As a reminder that instruction is as follows:

1. Our church buildings remain totally closed with a notice on the door explaining why, as provided previously. This includes for the clergy, such that no act of worship is led or streamed from inside the building.
2. Therefore funerals are not possible in church, which we know is distressing for grieving families, but is safest in preventing the spread of the virus. Funerals can only take place at the crematorium or at the graveside with numbers restricted to closest family (partners, children, parents) and the maintenance of social distancing.
3. For the support of the most vulnerable, food banks and other essential social services, where they operate out of the church building, can continue as long as strict distribution guidelines are adhered to (pick up of food outside at the door, again maintaining social distancing both outside and inside the building).





The Church of England  
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Diocesan Office, 53 New Street, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1AT

We have no comfort in asking you to comply totally with these instructions, but we do believe it is our Gospel imperative and shared pastoral responsibility to be seen to be setting a lead to the whole of society. Being entirely blunt about it - this is what may save lives at present.

We hope for the day when we can offer less restrictive guidance and pray that day may arrive sooner than currently anticipated. Please know that you are prayed for, especially where you need to explain and defend these guidelines to grieving families and others.

With our warmest Christian love and greetings,

+ Stephen Chelmsford

Rt Rev Stephen Cottrell  
Bishop of Chelmsford

+ Peter Barking

Rt Rev Peter Hill  
Bishop of Barking

+ John Bradwell + Roger Colchester

Rt Rev John Perumbalath  
Bishop of Bradwell

Rt Rev Roger Morris  
Bishop of Colchester



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