CORONA VIRUS (COVID -19) Update 20th March 2020

Clogher Diocesan Response Guidance

Updated information in red

Bishop's Pastoral Message

As you will be aware, coronavirus is presenting major challenges to the whole of society on the island of Ireland, including to the Churches. It is important that we respond responsibly and proportionately to these challenges. You will have seen that as well as the Diocese, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church have also issued guidelines today. Undoubtedly we will all have to do things differently, at least during the period of this emergency, and possibly beyond that time. However we need also to remember our calling to worship God not only "with our lips but in our lives" as we say in the General Thanksgiving.

Governments and the public health authorities, North and South, have provided us with very useful guidance, which they will continue to update. But they cannot be expected to know every detail of local circumstances and in light of developing circumstances it is now up to us as a Diocese and as parishes to apply and adapt the broad principles to make sure that their intention is effective where we live and work.

For that reason, as you will see, we are cancelling all normal church services as of today (17th March) until further notice. That applies to midweek services too. Funerals will of course continue to take place, but will need to strictly adhere to the public health advice on hygiene and physical distancing. Further advice on funerals will be provided.

Although the more usual phrase at the minute is "social distancing" I think it is better to speak of "physical" distance, as the last thing we want to do is to completely dissolve the social bonds of our families parishes and communities. Where possible churches will remain open at certain times for private prayer, provided the public health hygiene guidelines can be met. Further advice will be issued as occasion demands.

As parishes we will also need to think again about how we can be near to people, to demonstrate our love to them, in ways which may require physical distance but does not mean that we are cut off from one another. Clearly there are people who are more at risk than others. I would encourage clergy and parishes to ensure that the worship of God continues in some form (perhaps by people in their own homes saying Morning Prayer at an agreed time, and in

that way to be involved in "corporate" prayer. It may we'll be that civil authorities will ask churches to make ourselves (our human and physical resources) available to be of practical assistance and I know we will respond in the spirit of the generosity of God.

I need hardly say that I trust you will pray for all those who are anxious and fearful; all those who are vulnerable to this disease and, perhaps above all for all health care workers.

By showing our love and care for vulnerable parishioners and in the wider community, we should also demonstrate that we are a community of faith and hope. This is a medical epidemic which we should not allow to become an epidemic of despair.

I am writing this on St Patrick's Day and can't help reflecting that his calling from God to return to a land where he had been a captured slave must have tested his faith sorely. Even in the midst of his mission, the prospects of a successful outcome must have seemed remote. But with prayer and persistence Patrick fulfilled his calling to such an extent that he will be remembered in virtually every corner of the globe today.

Our own calling in these very trying times may not be as spectacular as Patrick's, but if we listen to the call of God in Jesus Christ we can have some confidence that in years to come we will be remembered as those who did what they could and perhaps even a little more when help was needed.

+John Clogher

This is a time of great challenge for the church, but also a time for the Christian Church to demonstrate a spirit of generosity and help to those in need. You will probably find a great desire from parishioners to get involved in this effort and all offers should be utilised as far as possible.

1. Public Worship

Services – All public acts of worship, including Sunday services, Lenten services, Baptisms and Confirmations (including preparation), should by now have ceased until further notice. Church buildings should not be open to the public for private prayer and reflection in order to avoid unintentional

gathering of people, and furthermore as it is very difficult to ensure physical distancing and hygiene requirements are adhered to.

Online & Media Resources – Resources for worshipping from home are available online at https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/9486/broadcast-online-worship-opportunities

Many parishes have already initiated such initiatives. If your parish co-ordinates worship resources that can be accessed online, please inform the Diocesan Communications Officer so that information of such can be circulated. Guidance for preparing online services is available at https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/9485/covid19-guidance-for-online-services?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=church%20of%20ireland

Innovate – Many clergy and parishes are already implementing alternative ways to offer worship and spiritual support to individuals and their community, those who have not are encouraged to consider doing so. Anxiety levels will rise and people will be looking for spiritual resources accessible at home to help them. Parishes should already be giving consideration to the preparation of resources for parishioners, including those without Internet access.

Daily prayers - Daily prayers can help give structure to our days for those who are housebound with more time for thinking and reflecting. You may wish to consider signposting people to the online resources at https://www.ireland.anglican.org/prayer-worship/book-of-common-prayer/2004-texts/texts and to produce local booklets to offer as *personal copies only* (please do not pass these around).

Prayer times – Parishes could consider setting up regular prayer times which people can join remotely rather than in person, using the church bell to sound the times of prayer, in addition to online conferencing facilities such as Skype, Facetime, Zoom, telephone prayer partners, in order to positively help establish a sense of corporate prayer and the strengthening of the praying community.

2. Pastoral Care

Clergy, Lay Readers and Diocesan Pastoral Assistants – The health and well-being of parish and diocesan clergy together with support staff and volunteers is of paramount importance, both for their own protection and for those they minister to. Those with underlying health conditions, those that

develop symptoms, and those over 70 years of age should adhere to government guidance concerning self-isolation and should inform a neighboring member of the clergy or supervising member of clergy of their availability / unavailability in order to enable the continuation of pastoral ministry in the parish. Clergy are asked to co-ordinate the provision of pastoral care in their parishes in cooperation with neighbouring clergy.

Home Communions – All Home Communions should have ceased by now until further notice.

Visitation Protocols – All pastoral visitations should have ceased by now until further notice. Instead Clergy and/or Diocesan Pastoral Assistants should contact those needing pastoral care in parishes by telephoning them. The hospital chaplains are no longer permitted to carry out hospital visits unless expressly invited to do so by hospital staff. Clergy who are asked to visit parishioners in hospital or residential care should only do so if permitted by the hospital/residential facility and with the consent of the individual's family. Hygiene and physical distancing measures must be observed.

Pastoral and practical support - Develop a plan for the pastoral and practical support of those who are vulnerable or housebound in the parish (the plan must of course adhere to safeguarding policies and hygiene practices). Consider developing a 'Love thy Neighbour' scheme for those in self-isolation with a team of volunteers to: Regularly contact by phone to alleviate loneliness; Report concerns as to their health; Collect urgent supplies & shopping; Post mail. You may want to consider offering to hold next of kin details for parishioners who live alone, but make sure any such personal information is stored securely and you have the individual's permission to have these details in keeping with General Data Protection regulations. Identify and brief lay people who can provide telephone support and prayer for those who are fearful or otherwise distressed.

Self-isolated - For those who need to self-isolate, consider how people can be supported with phone calls and via social media, and help with the delivery of shopping and / or medication. It is very important that all church members involved in such support are very clear on and committed to adhering to the Government's isolation and general hygiene advice.

Funerals – Funerals should ideally be attended by family members and close friends only in order to keep numbers in attendance low, it is strongly advisable that funeral arrangements *(time, date, venue)* are not publicly advertised in

order to avoid large gatherings. Congregational singing should be avoided, hygiene advice and physical distancing should be strictly adhered to, physical contact, including handshaking, and funeral teas should not take place. Copies of prayers for the sick and the dying and also a copy of the funeral service could be helpfully sent to those unable to attend the funeral of a friend or relative. Thanksgiving Services could be considered appropriate by those bereaved at a future date when possible. This information has been issued by the diocese to a number of undertakers, however some may have been overlooked, therefore it is important to refer local undertakers active in your parochial area to these guidelines.

Weddings – Weddings can take place under very restrictive circumstances in accordance with Government guidance, therefore it is preferable that weddings should be postponed.

Mental Health and Hardship – Efforts should be made to support those who may be struggling with mental health issues and/or hardship. It will be important to take measures, such as regular phone communication, to help alleviate loneliness and despair.

3. Community Response

Volunteer Mobilisation – In time volunteer support may be necessary for medical staff and for individuals in the community. Churches are well placed to channel information, particularly on requests for volunteers. Information will be circulated to clergy and parishes when available.

Public Reassurance – Clergy can offer important public reassurance through "the sacrament of presence" and being seen to be "present" and available. This does not include physically visiting those diagnosed with COVID-19 or those who are self-isolating: clergy need to protect themselves and others, making sure they adhere to hygiene precautions. Clergy can also be a trusted voice in a community and help with the distribution of government advice ensuring isolated members of the community are aware of the precautions they can take. Network as appropriate with local health, welfare, safety networks, funeral directors and other service providers. Ensure contact details for these service providers are held by key parish leadership. Be aware of local information and peculiarities eg changes in public utilities or services that affect your community specifically.

4. Parish Administration

Premises - All public parish premises should be closed by now until further notice, this includes Churches and Church Halls. Church buildings should not be open to the public for private prayer and reflection in order to avoid unintentional gathering of people, and furthermore as it is very difficult to ensure physical distancing and hygiene requirements are adhered to. In due course there may be need for church premises to be made available for civic response purposes, these can be considered compassionately as they arise.

Easter Vestries – All Easter Vestry meetings should be deferred until further notice and existing officers should remain in post until circumstances allow. Legal advice concerning rescheduling has been obtained.

Select Vestries – All Select Vestry meetings should be deferred until further notice. Matters requiring urgent consideration by a Select Vestry should be considered using electronic means such a teleconferencing, email circulation.

Parish Organisations – All parish organisations, including Sunday School, Youth Organisations, Senior Citizen Activities, External Groups that utilize parish facilities etc should by now be cancelled until further notice.

Charity Returns and Annual Accounts – The charities regulators in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have both confirmed that organisations should follow government advice and that organisations will not be considered to be in contravention of the Act in this respect. Further information is available at https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-information/

Continuation of Ministry – A template document to facilitate the continuation of ministry in parishes has been circulated to clergy.

5. Diocesan Office

The Diocesan Office is closed until further notice. Mail will be received at the Diocesan Office and forwarded to the relevant person. Staff will be working remotely and can be contacted by email or by telephoning the **Diocesan Office – 02866347879:**

- Administration Assistant – S McCabe, opt 1 *(voicemail only)*, admin@clogher.anglican.org
- Diocesan Accountant – A Brown, opt 2, accountant@clogher.anglican.org
- Communications & Magazine Editor – B Donaldson, opt 3 – dco@clogher.anglican.org
- Youth Officer – J Phenix, opt 4 – dyo@clogher.anglican.org
- Diocesan Secretary – G Moore, opt 5, secretary@clogher.anglican.org
- Archdeacon – B Harper, opt 6 – enniskillen@clogher.anglican.org
- Dean & Enniskillen Cathedral Office – B Rennick, opt 7 – enniskillen@clogher.anglican.org
- Properties – H Robinson, opt 8 – properties@clogher.anglican.org
- Safeguarding & GDPR – M Skuce, opt 9 – safeguarding@clogher.anglican.org

6. Communications

Diocesan Magazine – The April edition of the Diocesan Magazine will be produced as planned. A free digital version will be made available on the diocesan website. Unfortunately hard copies of the magazine will not be produced. Parishes may wish to print off hard copies, or sections of the magazine from the online version once it is available, in order to provide copies to those within their parish who are unable to access the online version.

Information and Guidance – The diocesan website will be used as the principle point of communication to provide regular updates for parishes and the general public. Information will also be made available through the diocesan Facebook page and through press releases. Information particularly for the attention of parishes and clergy will be circulated via email.

Reaching out – Parishes, with their own websites and Facebook pages and those without these are welcome to use the Diocesan Website and Facebook Page to communicate the latest advice to parishioners and worshippers. Please email dco@clogher.anglican.org with information.

7. Diocesan Diary

All Diocesan meetings and training events have been cancelled until further notice.