

All Church of England churches are to close with immediate effect, including for private prayer, in an effort to help limit the transmission of the coronavirus COVID-19.

The archbishops and bishops of the Church of England have written collectively to clergy, through their dioceses, urging them now to close all church buildings - other than where they are needed to keep a foodbank running, but even then under strict limits.

There will be no church weddings until further notice; funerals will not take place inside church buildings and the only baptisms will be emergency baptisms in a hospital or home.

It follows the announcement by the Prime Minister last night of wide-ranging restrictions as part of a national and international effort to help limit the spread of the disease.

"These are unprecedented times," the bishops write.

"We are all having to get used to being the Church differently.

"It is not easy. However, our belonging to Christ has never been measured by the number of people in church on a Sunday morning (though we long for the day when this way of knowing Christ can return) but by the service we offer to others.

"Therefore, and despite these very harrowing restrictions, please do all that you can to minister to your people safely, especially to the sick, the vulnerable and the poor."

The letter also seeks to provide clarity that churches will now be closed for all private prayer – including by priests.

Clergy live-streaming worship should do so from their own homes and are being urged to be as creative as possible with streaming services and other resources.

"We must take a lead in showing our communities how we must behave in order to slow down the spread of the Coronavirus.

"We must also do all that we can to provide resources and support for those who are isolated, fearful and vulnerable.

"But we have to do this from our homes."

The Church of England will be offering a national weekly service which will be broadcast online each Sunday via social media and daily audio of prayer during the day and night prayer will also be available.

This is in addition to a wide range of resources local churches are sharing.

An estimated [five million people heard or saw a service](#) led by the Archbishop of Canterbury streamed online and broadcast through dozens of radio stations on Sunday – the largest single ‘congregation’ in the history of the Church of England.

The bishops add: “It is also imperative that as the Church of Jesus Christ, called to offer hope and light in the darkness of this world’s ills, we maintain a praying presence for our community, though from today onwards this must happen from our hearts and from our homes.

“Our Church buildings are closed but the Church must continue to support and encourage our communities making use of telephones and other forms of technology to keep in touch with people and ensure pastoral care is maintained, and as shepherds of Christ’s flock we are committed to making this happen.”

On specific questions the bishops make clear that:

- Emergency baptisms can take place in hospital or at home, though subject to strict hygienic precautions and physical distancing as far as possible.
- Funerals can only happen at the crematorium or at the graveside.
- Only immediate family members can attend.
- That is defined as a spouse or partner, parents and children – all maintaining a physical distance.
- Live streaming of a service is still permissible from homes and clergy are encouraged to be as creative as possible with streaming services and other resources.
- Foodbanks should continue where possible under strict guidelines and may have to move to be delivery points not places where people gather.

More information

- [Read the full letter to clergy](#)
- [Detailed advice and guidance to churches on coronavirus COVID-19](#)
- [Church online - resources and live streams](#)

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