Tuesday 24 March 2020

**To all Clergy in the Diocese of Leeds**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for the remarkable and creative ways you are helping to lead the Church in these times for which there is no template. We often talk about ‘re-imagining ministry’, but now we are all just doing it. Thank you.

One very creative response thus far has been the explosion of live-streaming and use of social media to keep people connected. However, it is clear that some clergy feel that they are failing if they aren’t using technology in this way. You are not! Our primary and fundamental ministry here is to pray – and we don’t need a gadget for that. So, please leave the technology to those who are comfortable with it (or curious to explore it), but be confident about your own ministry. Celebrate those who can, but recognise that this is about mutual resourcing, not a media competition.

The **worship** of the Church continues. It is being done differently. Through the prayers of clergy and lay ministers, through prayer in homes and families, via social media and streaming, we still meet, pray, care and worship.

All church **buildings** and cathedrals are to close for public worship and private prayer. Live streaming must be from your home, not from the church. There are no exceptions and no ambiguity. You will find attached a notice which can be amended/completed, printed and put on the church door or outside noticeboard.

Please also find attached to this letter the latest **letter** from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, agreed by the diocesan bishops nationally.

**Weddings:** cannot now proceed. This is a very sensitive matter, but all we can do is handle couples with sensitivity and clarity. Queries about licences and legalities should be referred to the Registry.

**Funerals:** Funerals cannot now be conducted in our church buildings. Clergy can commend the deceased and commit the body at the crematorium or graveside directly.Local authorities are beginning now to bring in emergency measures requiring bodies to be taken directly to the crematorium – in some cases without accompaniment of mourners. Please try to offer memorial services later in the year, where appropriate for those whose loved ones will have been interred or cremated without a service or any family in attendance. Further directions may follow from local authorities on how many mourners (if any) might be allowed at the crematorium or graveside, but this is likely to be superseded very soon as the volume increases.

Please consider being in direct touch with your local funeral directors in order that they know whom to contact, how to contact, and that we are available as things develop. The funeral directors themselves might well need some pastoral contact from local clergy – please discuss with colleagues in your deanery (digitally, probably).

Clergy are going to be in demand for funerals. This will be challenging, especially if the volume increases as expected in the weeks to come. Please ensure that you are in touch with your colleagues, area bishop, archdeacon and area dean. Your pastoral care and mental health will need attention and we are here to support you.

**Hospitals:** The area bishops will be looking this week at how we might complement local chaplaincy support – for staff as well as patients.

**In other news:** the Lambeth Conference has been postponed until July 2021. It is likely that the July General Synod will be postponed. Consideration is being given to arrangements for those due to be ordained this Petertide.

**The last-ish word:** the diocesan bishops are meeting via Zoom twice each week and trying to keep both up-to-date and consistent with advice across the country. The bishops of this diocese are meeting daily via Zoom. Please do keep in touch with your bishop and archdeacon as this pandemic unfolds/accelerates. No query will be deemed insignificant and no call for help, advice or support will be seen as anything other than collegial, professional and important.

That said, we are aware of how the national guidance can sometimes appear to be out of kilter with the government’s line and this is not easy to communicate clearly. So, please be patient with us as we try to navigate our way through and try our best to offer you clarity at each stage.

Please pray for us as we pray for you. And, if you are interested, I am posting daily reflections/comments on my blog at www.nickbaines.wordpress.com. Please keep looking at the websites for daily updates (where appropriate). I will write again later this week when one or two further implications of these measures have become clearer.

With my continuing prayers and best wishes.

Rt Revd Nick Baines

Bishop of Leeds