

Law & Religion UK

Issues of law and religion in the United Kingdom – with occasional forays further afield

Coronavirus (COVID-19): more guidance from Church of England and government

Posted on **12 March 2020** by **David Pocklington**

This post summarizes the information published on 12 March 2020 by the **Church of England** (at 12:50 and 15:17) from which we have reproduced *extracts from the new information* [here](#). An index to all our posts on COVID-19 is in a separate post [here](#).

Also on 12 March, a statement on the current situation was made by the **Prime Minister**; the web page **Coronavirus (COVID-19): UK government response** includes links to a number of relevant area, in each of which there is a substantial amount of information on specific area. The Policy Paper **Coronavirus action plan: a guide to what you can expect across the UK**, published on 3 March, has a section on the government's response to the current coronavirus outbreak. This includes: details on current planning; and the phased response – the Delay phase, the Research phase and the Mitigate phase.

Church of England Updates

The main feature of the Church's two updates are:

- All guidance has been reviewed and streamlined;
- Generic healthcare and policy information removed with links to relevant NHS and GOV.UK pages for latest information;
- All information consolidated to a single page;
- FAQs updated to include questions on [baptism](#), [ordination](#) and the [laying-on of hands](#);
- A Planning Ahead section has been added to include a [Parish Continuity Plan template](#) for local use
- There is an updated **Online resources section** with a blog on live streaming
- Additional FAQs have been added on **care homes**, **instances of no running water**, and **hospitals**.

[Sections with an unique URL are in [blue](#), above; for others, access is by scrolling down on the **main page**. Emboldening is as in the original]

Guidance for churches

In light of the continued increase of Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in the United Kingdom, our guidance is to **suspend the administration of the chalice** as well as physical contact during the sharing of the Peace, blessing or “laying on of hands”. We advise that all priests should:

- **Offer Communion in one kind only** to all communicants i.e. the consecrated bread/wafer/host, with the priest alone taking the wine;
- **Suspend handshaking or other direct physical contact during the sharing of the Peace;**
- **Suspend direct physical contact as part of a blessing or “laying on of hands”.**

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have [written to clergy](#) to update on this guidance.

What should churches do now?

Please note that ‘Washing hands’ always refers to washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand-sanitiser with minimum 60% alcohol content. [See NHS guidance](#) and [download a poster version](#) to display.

1. **Ensure everyone maintains good hygiene** (we should be doing this already as part of normal good practice) at all gatherings, whether services or other occasions. This includes those handing out books etc or having other direct physical contact with numbers of people, as well as those administering the Eucharist (see below for more guidance):
 - Provide hand gel at entrances and ensure there is a good supply of soap or hand gel in cloakrooms and kitchens and any other appropriate areas.
2. The best way of protecting us from the spread is for everyone to use **universal good hygiene**, – this means everyone, all the time, which will effectively disrupt the spread of the virus. Display the public information poster attached, which states:
 - **Catch it** – sneeze into a tissue.
 - **Bin it** – bin the tissue.
 - **Kill it** – wash your hands.
 - **Do not touch your face** unless you’ve washed your hands.
3. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have [written to clergy](#) to **advise that the Common Chalice/Cup now be suspended until further notice**. We advise that all priests should
 - Offer Communion in one kind only to all communicants i.e. the consecrated bread/wafer/host, with the priest alone taking the wine;
 - suspend handshaking or other direct physical contact during the sharing of the Peace;
 - suspend direct physical contact as part of a blessing or “laying on of hands” (see **FAQs** below for more information on this)
4. Churches are encouraged to complete a [Coronavirus Parish Continuity Plan](#) to ensure, as far as possible, their continued mission and ministry.
5. **Intinction is not recommended** as an alternative to the Common Chalice/Cup. It is a route for transmission from the individual through handling the wafer/bread/host, and tiny fragments could affect people with allergies to gluten etc.

6. Please note that the **distribution of individual cups** for use by communicants is **not a lawful practice** in the Church of England.
7. Ask **those attending services to wash their hands** as they come into church.
8. Ensure **ministers of the Eucharist wash their hands** before and after distributing communion.
9. **Suspend catering** (teas, coffees etc.) where multiple people touch mugs, utensils and foodstuffs.
10. **No pastoral visits should be undertaken to people who are self-isolating** until isolation ends. However do offer phone support.
11. When **visiting parishioners at home**, wash hands before and after giving the sacraments.
12. **Refrain from passing collection plates** around.
13. **Suspend the use of holy water stoups.**
14. **Wash vestments** (surplices, cassocks) on the hottest cycle you can without damaging them. Chasubles etc. which could become contaminated, may not be able to be washed. Instead, they should be securely stored away from people, ideally in a well ventilated and brightly sunlit area, for at least 48 hours before re-use,
15. **Visits to people in care homes or Hospitals** should follow advice from the staff on infection control.
16. Ensure **good regular cleaning of surfaces people touch regularly**, including such things as door handles, light switches etc.

FAQ: Can baptisms, confirmations and ordinations still proceed?

At this stage, there is no advice to cancel any services, however the following precautions are advised:

Baptism

- The Priest must wash their hands before and after making the sign of the cross on the candidate's forehead.
- Where possible, if the candidate is a baby or small child, they should be held by the parents/godparents rather than the priest taking them in their own arms.
- It is preferable for water to be poured on the candidate's head using a baptismal shell.
- If chrism/oil is to be used the priest should use a spoon or similar implement.
- In any event the priest should wash their hands before and after the baptismal act.
- Baptism by Immersion should not take place as this represents a transmission risk.

Confirmation

- The Bishop must wash their hands before and after the laying on of hands for each candidate.

Ordinations

- **Deacons:** The Bishop must wash their hands before and after the laying on of hands for each candidate.

- **Priests:** The Bishop must wash their hands before and after the laying on of hands for each candidate. Two priests (but not more) should be invited to join with the bishop in the laying on of hands. Those priests must wash their hands before and after the laying on of hands for each candidate.
- **Bishops:** Three bishops (but no more) must lay on hands and must wash their hands before and after the laying on of hands for each candidate.

Chrism/Oil

- This should be administered using a spoon or similar instrument.

Communion rails and other objects

- Where possible, communicants should be encouraged to stand to receive communion and where this is not possible they should be asked not to touch the rail with their hands.
- No objects within the church, including crucifixes and images, should be kissed or unnecessarily touched.

Foot Washing

- This practice should not take place as it represents a transmission risk.

FAQ: What if there is no running water, or we can't get hold of hand-sanitiser?

If neither are available, use a thermos flasks, individual bowls and paper towels which should be thrown away immediately after use. Please note that wet-wipes are not a suitable alternative, as they are not effective in killing or removing viruses.

FAQ: Is there specific advice for visiting/giving Communion in Care Homes?

Residents of Care Homes are vulnerable so please follow carefully the hygiene advice of the home.

- Do not go in to the Home if you are unwell and observe strict hand hygiene before touching anyone, distributing the wafers etc.
- Avoid handing out reusable service sheets and observe the archbishops' advice not to use the Common cup.
- Wafers should not be placed in mouths unless this is the only way an individual can receive communion due to disability – then wash hands immediately before and after. Remember to wash hands between rooms and before leaving the Home.

Comment

As indicated above, this post contains *extracts* from the *new* guidance materials only. Reference should be made therefore to the original documents for the complete guidance.

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2 THOUGHTS ON "CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): MORE GUIDANCE FROM CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND GOVERNMENT"

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