



The Bishop of Norwich
The Rt Revd Graham Usher

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Norwich

12th January 2021

To the Licensed Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Norwich

Dear Colleagues,

Further to my letter of 5th January it is hugely worrying that the cases of Covid, along with admissions to hospitals and the tally of death, continue to rise in Norfolk and Waveney. The Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, said yesterday, *"The most important thing is that people take the current rules very, very seriously. We shouldn't do anything outside them, and in fact, even within them we should be doing our level best to minimise unnecessary contacts. That will help relieve the pressures in the next few weeks."*

As you will know, the Government currently allows worship with a congregation physically present in the church building. Whilst this is still permissible, it is increasingly becoming inadvisable.

Around 90 per cent of our churches in the Diocese are not now having worship with a congregation physically present and many have moved back online for the coming weeks. Yesterday the Dean and Chapter took the decision, with a heavy heart, to do this at the Cathedral. I am grateful to all our churches for grappling with this question and making careful choices, but as the situation changes unfortunately we have to revisit these decisions.

I would now strongly encourage all incumbents, churchwardens and PCCs not to have physically present worship (except funerals and urgent marriages) in the next few weeks. The risks are now too great, even with all of the precautions that we have so painstakingly put in place.

I hope that as many church buildings as possible will remain open at some point during the week for the solace of individual prayer, following the guidance and after a risk assessment. Worship can still be streamed from church buildings and I would encourage that a minimum number of people who are involved with leading the service are present. Some places are pointing people to the online provision of neighbouring churches or to our diocesan Sunday Hope podcasts.

In and through all of this I know that our ministry will continue to bring hope to many. Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx (d. 1167), who we commemorate today, said, "The best medicine in life is a friend." That should inspire us as we continue to care for the vulnerable, isolated and bereaved, and as we pray for all whose lives and livelihoods are impacted by this dreadful pandemic.

In these ways we will show love to our neighbours in the coming weeks.

I remain grateful for all that you do, and this comes more than anything with my continued prayers.

With every blessing,

+ Graham Usher

