

Thursday 22 July 2021

To all churches and parishes in the Diocese of Leeds

As you know, the government lifted pandemic restrictions from 19 July. Whilst welcomed by many, this has also caused apprehension for many others. Emergence was always going to prove challenging as responsibility would shift from edict to local choice.

It is evident from communication I and my colleagues are getting that there is anxiety around about our current uncertainties and where responsibility lies for elements of responding to the relaxation of these pandemic restrictions. This focuses particularly where there is a dispute between those who wish to “go back to normal now” and those who are more cautious amid the ongoing risks and uncertainties ahead.

Responsibility for decisions about local arrangements will fall on the incumbent and PCC. We urge you to move slowly, step by step, being careful to love your neighbour and seek to protect the vulnerable. In particular, we urge that you continue to receive Communion as we have done for the last eighteen months while we monitor change and public health risk. It is not clear that we are on an ever-rising trajectory to ‘freedom’; people on all sides of the political divides are worried about further restrictions or lockdowns in the autumn and winter, and that will be harder to manage than taking it slowly now.

In his letter to the church in Philippi Paul urges his readers to “look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (2:4). This means possibly sacrificing our own ‘rights’ on the altar of other people’s needs.

Please consider also the particular pressures upon clergy and lay leaders at this time as they seek to do what is right and (pastorally) best for all. Uncertainty is always difficult to navigate; we need to hold together as we do it.

Your bishops and their colleagues pray for you. Your archdeacons and area deans are ready to support you in your decision making. But, in all things be patient, kind and generous as we seek to be faithful to Christ and to one another in the months ahead.

In Christ who set our pattern.

The bishops of Leeds, Kirkstall, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Ripon and Bradford