

The Bishop of Carlisle
The Right Reverend James Newcome
Bishop's House, Ambleside Road,
Keswick CA12 4DD

Dear colleague,

New Lockdown

I am writing to you this morning following the Prime Minister's televised statement last night in which he signalled a return to a national lockdown in England, with the rules becoming law in the early hours of Wednesday.

This means that people across the country are required to stay at home except for a handful of permitted reasons, as detailed in [new Government guidance](#) issued last night.

By now, you will probably be aware that churches are able to remain open for public worship despite the new lockdown, a move which differs from the lockdowns of last March and November.

This morning, in my position as the Church of England's lead bishop for healthcare, I joined the Lambeth Palace COVID group to discuss the situation further. There was an understanding amongst members of the group of the stress and anxiety that this creates for clergy as they and their PCCs look to decide whether or not to close their churches temporarily. In such a situation, this is a decision which must be reached at a local level.

However, whatever decision is reached, I want to reiterate my message of support to you, as contained in the clergy briefing dated 30 December, 2020. As stated in that briefing, you should not feel pressurised to open church buildings at this time if you feel a safer option would be to offer digital and online services.

Questions have arisen about the need, under Canonical law, to write to a diocesan bishop to signal a decision to temporarily close a church for public worship. **Please note that you are not required to do this if you choose to close your church building for worship during this latest lockdown.** Of course, if a decision was made to close for longer than the lockdown, then such correspondence would be necessary.

If – in consultation with your PCC - a decision is taken to keep your church open for public worship, may I advise that risk assessments are as rigorous as possible, particularly bearing in mind the virus's new strain which demonstrates significant increased transmission levels.

I continue to be thankful for the careful and sensible ways in which clergy across the county have ensured that their churches have offered safe spaces for communal worship. With transmission levels in Cumbria increasing, we must continue to do all we can to ensure that the NHS is not overwhelmed at this time.

If you have particular questions as to any of the above I would ask that you direct them to your Archdeacon. However, both Bishop Emma and I shall also be looking to make personal contact with all clergy across the diocese in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, for your information I also attach a statement from the Rev Andrew Towner, chair of the Diocesan Board of Education, which has been circulated to all headteachers in our 104 church schools across Cumbria this morning.

Finally, I appreciate that there will be many who choose to close their churches – opting for online worship – whilst others may wish to continue to offer services in person. At this time, more than ever, it is so important that we continue to demonstrate a Christian love and respect for one another, as together we look to a time when our county is able to move on from this terrible pandemic.

As ever this comes with my continued prayers and my warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the page.