

# Covid-19: an evolving situation

*Paul Mackness, Archdeacon of St Davids, answers some frequently asked questions about our church services, conferences, meetings and governance under the current restrictions*

I have been asked to try and give an overview of developments and news in relation to church life under Covid-19. Please note that the information given is changing all the time and that this article is correct as at the time of writing. I have also attempted to keep things simple. If you have questions you should direct them to your local clergy, archdeacons or the Diocesan Office and we will do everything we can to assist.



## **Church Re-opening – Services, Weddings, Funerals and Music**

Many churches are now re-opening for varying forms of worship. We are currently in the Amber Phase, as determined by the Welsh Government, which allows for limited public worship. This means that the worship we can offer is “barebones” not the normal worship we would normally expect.

In Amber Phase we are permitted to hold Services of the Word, a simple Communion Service and Baptisms (but not by full immersion) in church. Worship with a maximum attendance of 30 persons is also permitted outdoors on land controlled by the Church. You are also now permitted to meet in a church hall for worship.

We are also allowed to hold weddings and funerals in church again. However, these are by invitation only and are limited to the number that can be socially distanced in each building. You cannot be married by banns at present; usually only by Common Licence from a Surrogate.

Music, but not singing, is permitted and the Welsh Government has recently agreed to allow the playing of the organ again. The group working with Welsh Government on faith matters is trying to get movement over the matter of singing – even if this is only for choirs initially.

Virtually everything above is subject to a risk assessment that requires the Archdeacon to sign off on. Clergy and laity in LMAs are working hard to ensure that they are realistic in the number of services they can offer and are also trying, where possible, to offer online worship as well.

Comprehensive and definitive guidance on the above can be found on the Provincial Website: <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>

## Governing Body

The Governing Body (GB) is due to meet physically but socially distanced on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> September, with a limited number of members (enough to form a quorum) gathering to pass legislation to allow the GB to meet electronically. If this is passed, the full GB will meet the following two days via video conferencing in order to transact its business. It is hoped that legislation will also be passed which will allow AGMs and other meetings to happen electronically.



There are also plans to look at extending the meeting of the GB in September 2021 by an additional day in order to catch up on business missed by the cancellation of the April 2020 GB.



## Diocesan Conference 2020 & Diocesan Elections

The Standing Committee has reluctantly been forced to postpone/cancel the 2020 Conference and it has also been forced to extend the length of the current Diocesan Conference by up to a further year. The reason for this is the inability to be able to hold the elections for

Conference members, which are now based upon LMAs. The current Conference will cease to exist as soon as we are able to hold elections in LMAs.

It is hoped that an Extraordinary Conference may be able to be convened in the spring of 2021 (subject to Covid-19). This might be physically but we are also looking at options for meeting electronically (which will require GB legislation).

The Revd Caroline Mansell has resigned from her post as Clerical Secretary to the Diocesan Conference and I have been asked to serve as Interim Clerical Secretary for a short period to oversee matters until the Bishop and Standing Committee are able to appoint a new Clerical Secretary.

We are hoping to hold the appropriate triennial elections for the Governing Body, Representative Body and other provincial bodies during September and October. These will be slightly different from how we have done things previously, they may end up being done electronically or a mix of methods, please watch the diocesan website for further details.

## LMA Governance

As stated above, the GB will hopefully bring in legislation to allow AGMs to be held electronically. There has been an added complication this year in that in 2020 we are required to completely revise our Electoral Rolls and also elect our representatives to the Diocesan Conference. It is this that has proved the stumbling block to being able to meet electronically as the AGM is an open meeting for the whole Parish/LMA. The Bench of Bishop's has currently said that AGMs can now be held up to 31<sup>st</sup> October, however Covid-19 regulations have hindered our ability to do this.



Church officers have been given permission to remain in post until AGMs can be held and clergy have been permitted to appoint wardens where there is a vacancy on a temporary basis until they can be ratified in post (if a People's Warden).

Some LMA Councils are, however, able to meet electronically and are working hard to keep churches in touch and informed about what is going on and trying to plan for working under new methods and “new normals”. The same is true with church committees, which are also meeting electronically or occasionally socially distanced, outdoors.



## Annual Returns

The Annual Returns that are submitted to the Representative Body (RB) in Cardiff can now be completed and sent in. This can be done electronically and in the case of LMAs this will mean that the RB will be able to consolidate accounts for the whole LMA for the RB's returns. Any accounts submitted will

also have to be subject to approval by the AGM of each LMA but can be sent in with this provision, as the RB documents are not legally required ones, unlike the annual parish report, which is.

During lockdown the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) has been working hard to look at ways in which we can support LMAs in producing accounts for the future based on the fact that each LMA is the trust body for all of the churches under its care. A pilot scheme is going to be trialled in Narberth and Tenby LMA to see if this is possible, and to see what additional support may be required or provided. We are also looking at ways to assist with the registration of all LMAs with the Charities Commission.

The diocese will also be sending out returns to be filled in to give updated contact details for LMA and Church Officers, this is so we can be in touch with the relevant and correct people to keep you informed and notified of developments and news.