**COVID-19: Personal Risk Factors**

(14 .07.20)

On 15 June the House of Bishops Recovery Group published guidance about personal risk factors for clergy, church workers and volunteers.

The NHS advice is clear for those who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, (they should be advised not to consider employment or volunteering outside their home) but less specific for those in the Clinically Vulnerable group. The document also identifies risk factors for clergy and church workers which are age, sex, ethnicity, occupation and presence of comorbidities. It concludes that:

'Clergy, Church Workers and Volunteers in other ‘at-risk’ groups should discuss their situation with their Diocesan Bishop, employer or incumbent with regard to the type of work or voluntary activity they are able to perform.'

We believe that the Department for Health and Social Care is working on a risk assessment pro-forma based on the same information, which will attempt to quantify relative risks, though we don’t yet know when it will be available.

In the meantime, as churches begin to resume public worship, questions arise about the nature of the discussion which those ‘at risk’ should have with their Bishop, employer or incumbent.

The NHS advises that those who are Clinically Vulnerable should be able to go to work if they cannot work from home. This advice does not, by definition, apply to volunteers, but we have considered its implications.

**Some underlying principles:**

The advice we offer should be consistent for stipendiary, self-supporting and retired clergy, Readers, churchwardens and DBF employees. PCC employees are in a different category, but PCCs may find this paper useful.

As the pandemic continues, no individual should be placed under any pressure, explicit or implicit, to work or serve in any way or situation where they feel unsafe or exposed to a level of risk with which they are uncomfortable.

Individuals in ‘at risk’ groups are responsible for their own decisions.

They should make that decision after a conversation with their incumbent, employer or Bishop (or their representative) – see below

There may be circumstances which require more detailed individual discussion and review.

**Process:**

We believe those in this category should be empowered to make an appropriate personal decision, but one properly supported, informed and accountable as infection control involves mutual risk for both minister and the communities with whom they interact.

Thus, those who fall into the ‘at risk’ category should:

Discuss their situation with their Incumbent or Training Incumbent; or Area Dean in the case of incumbents. Churchwardens and Readers in parishes in vacancy, and retired clergy offering ministry across a number of parishes should talk with their Area Dean, and the Warden of Readers may be consulted. The Archdeacons may be consulted if there are any points needing clarification or further direction.

Communicate their decision and its implications for their normal practice of ministry or volunteering to those who need to know (this includes the same note to the relevant Archdeacon to ensure parity of approach across the diocese and keep the Bishop informed for proper pastoral support and care).

Questions to be considered and discussed might include:

* Do I need to seek medical advice about my level of risk, if I have not already done so?
* Do those who know me best (including my immediate family) have any concerns about what work or ministry I should be undertaking? How have I discerned my response to those concerns?
* Given my personal circumstances and health, what form and extent of public ministry is it appropriate for me to undertake, for my own well-being?
* Given my personal circumstances and health, what form and extent of public ministry is it appropriate for me to undertake, to avoid undue anxiety among others?

**The Venerable Jenny Tomlinson, Archdeacon of Birmingham**

**The Venerable Simon Heathfield, Archdeacon of Aston**

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