WORK TO FACILITATE THE RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES FOR PRAYER

Following on from the COVID-19 Guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic published by the Government today and the subsequent posting on the diocesan website by the Bishop – in the light of both of which – this should be read: I am issuing this further guidance for the benefit of incumbents, churchwardens and others responsible for church buildings which, from tomorrow, may open for private prayer.

In order to facilitate the re-opening of churches for prayer during the currency of the current health emergency, churches will be making some temporary changes. Because of the fact that they are temporary and are modest in nature, most of these will not require approval by the grant of a faculty by the Chancellor. Thus temporary signs, tapes to indicate social distancing, the temporary moving of furniture and similar will not require a faculty, because the way they adhere to the actual fabric of the building will not impact physically on that fabric.

In order to comply with the above and other health guidance issued by the Government, provision will have to be made for hand and other sanitising arrangements. Freestanding hand sanitisers and the like may be introduced into the building without the need for any authority. If there is concern about the potential theft of these items careful consideration needs to be given, as the Bishop says in the context of applying government guidance, to someone (in authority) being present.

But installation by physical fixing to the fabric of the building of a hand sanitiser dispenser (or anything else) will require a faculty. However, there can be no objection to the installation on a temporary basis of a hand sanitiser dispenser or the like where the fixing does not harm the historic fabric of the church and where the work to install it is reversible. I will grant an interim faculty for such work where the incumbent or churchwarden can assure me that there will be no damage to the historic fabric; that the work is reversible; and that, if appropriate, the sanitiser and its fitting will be removed at the end of the emergency. A simple e mail to the Registry is all that will be required by way of application.

As I have already implied, there may be other items of temporary work that, like the physical fixing of a hand sanitiser, require a faculty. I will treat such items in a similar way. Any paperwork (albeit electronic) is to be regretted but it is hoped that the arrangements here set out will not prove unduly burdensome. What is required above all is the application of common sense. Cases of doubt, as always, should be referred to the Archdeacons or Registrar.

His Honour Judge Seed QC,
Chancellor
12 June 2020