

DOING THINGS VIRTUALLY

1. This is a joint note from the Provincial Vicars-General, the Provincial Registrars and the Joint Registrar of the Provinces Canterbury and York. Following extensive correspondence and discussion we have been able to reach a common position on most of the questions that have been raised with us concerning whether and how various things that would normally be done face to face may be done by virtual or other means.
2. Our advice is as follows.

Institution, induction and licensing etc.

3. It is recommended that the institution of new incumbents – the act which confers the cure of souls on a priest and makes him or her the rector or vicar – does not take place while church buildings remain closed and the current lock-down arrangements are in place. While it is legally possible for institution to take place privately, it should normally take place in the parish church. Deferring institution so that it can take place publicly at a later date would seem desirable. If a bishop considers that there are compelling reasons why a priest should be instituted during the current situation (rather than temporarily being licensed as priest in charge – as to which see below), the bishop should seek specific advice from the diocesan registrar as to how this might be done.
4. Induction of new incumbents – that is conferring on them possession of the church and the property of the benefice – cannot currently take place while church buildings are closed. Induction will need to be deferred until churches are able to be re-opened.
5. The licensing of clergy as priests in charge or as curates can be carried out during the current situation. In the case of priests in charge and curates, it is the grant of the licence under the bishop's seal which confers authority on the minister concerned. Bishops will need to find means of complying with the canonical requirement for the taking of oaths and the making of the declaration of assent by those who are to be licensed. We consider that if the oaths and declaration are dealt with via virtual means such as Skype or Zoom, the licence will be valid. However, bishops might appoint a suitable person who can be physically present where the oaths are taken and the declaration made to act as the bishop's commissary for this purpose. There is nothing in the canons to exclude the possibility of that person being an adult member of the household of the person being licensed.
6. Permission to officiate can continue to be granted in writing in the usual way without the need for any special arrangements.

Meetings of parochial church councils

7. We consider that parochial church councils can, if they wish, meet using virtual means such as Skype or Zoom which enable the members to see and hear each other.
8. However, care must be taken so that members of a PCC who are unable to participate in a meeting in that way are not excluded from the PCC's deliberations and decision making. The Chair should take steps to ensure that they are able to participate so far as possible, including where necessary by means of the procedure for conducting business by correspondence set out in rule M29 of the Church Representation Rules.
9. We recommend that following a virtual meeting, decisions such as the authorising of expenditure, entering into contracts or those that require a formal resolution of the PCC are put in written form and circulated for formal approval under the correspondence procedure in rule M29, which under Rule 76 can be conducted by email.

General

10. This advice is necessarily of a general nature. Questions about specific issues should be referred to the diocesan registrar for advice.
11. Registrars are welcome to contact us if they would find it helpful to understand our reasoning or to discuss issues that arise.

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April 2020