

## Statement from Faith Communities

As leaders of faith communities in Wirral and Merseyside, we are taking very seriously our region's extremely high infection rate and the added concern around the spread of the new variant of COVID-19.

We believe that faith communities make an essential contribution to the common good - not just in the spiritual support which is provided, but in the practical action which is undertaken by faith groups, for example through our foodbanks or our education and support groups.

Unlike in previous lockdowns, the government has not prevented public worship, although a large number of places of worship have voluntarily suspended their services. The higher infection rates of the new variant mean that we must be correspondingly more alert to the possibility of infection.

For people of faith, human life is sacred. We are called to model a responsible reaction to the current situation, and that by our actions we can show leadership within our communities. We do this with the active support of Julie Webster-Director of Public Health in Wirral.

We call members of our own faith communities, as well as people across the region of any faith or of none, to the following actions:

- In all aspects of our lives, including in the practice of our faith, we must maintain COVID-secure behaviour so as to care for one another.
- We strongly encourage everyone to take up the vaccine offer when it is made to us, and we must support other people in receiving the vaccine.
- In these stressful days we must show kindness to one another, and especially to the anxious and those more vulnerable than ourselves.
- Where asymptomatic mass-testing is available, we should participate in order to play our part in protecting others from infection.

Where faith communities are continuing to offer public worship, we expect our colleagues to have formal risk assessments, ensure that hand sanitizer is used, good quality face masks are worn, and proper distancing is rigorously observed. If a faith community cannot maintain public worship safely, then we expect them to suspend their services until the infection rates have decreased to a safe level.

We recognise that these times are difficult for all. But we ask people, of all faiths and none, to commit to the actions which we list above.

The Rt Revd Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead

Canon Stephen Coonan, Roman Catholic Church Wirral

The Revd Dr Sheryl Anderson, Liverpool Methodist Church

Rev Heather Cooper, Circuit Superintendent, Wirral Methodist Circuit

The Revd Phil Jump, North Western Baptist Association

Imam Ibrahim: Leader of Wirral Dean Centre

Kailash Kadampa Buddhist Centre

Ian Smith, United Reform Church

Jeff Hughes United Reform Church

Aaron Partington, Assemblies of God

Roger Batt- Salvation Army

Greg Epton, Senior pastor Gateway Church and Together for Harvest Wirral

Dr John Sloan, Chair Together for Harvest

Phil Dickson, Together Wirral Churches Forum

Elisabeth Hachmoeller, Ecumenical Officer. Churches Together in the Merseyside Region

Dave Frodsham, Jubilee Church Wirral

Rev Colin Orr, Kings Church Birkenhead

Josh Walsh, Cornerstone Church

Darren Jones, Wirral Gospel Partnership