

26 March 2020

Dear Members,

Reform Judaism and Liberal Judaism have taken a difficult decision to restrict the physical attendance at all funerals to solely the rabbi, cantor or *shaliach tzibbur* (service leader). This means that no family members will be able to attend in person. These are exceptional times for our world and it is important that we uphold the value of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life). In taking this action we are seeking to ensure that the health and the lives of you, your families, your clergy, your service leaders, the cemetery staff and the funeral directors are all protected to the best of our abilities.

Our Synagogues are individually constituted bodies and as such we issue guidance and not directives. We hope that you agree that this guidance is to support you and keep your service leaders safe, guarding them from being put in a position in which they feel they cannot say no to endangering themselves.

As the days go on we are adapting and innovating at a rate that is beyond what we thought we were each capable of. Funerals will continue to be conducted with the utmost of respect and *k'vod hamet* (honour to the deceased). Should family wish it, and we hope they will consider it, Reform Judaism has the resources to support you live-streaming the funeral utilising the cemetery staff and a mobile phone. We also have Zoom accounts for you to create a virtual shivah and we are already running weekday schacharit and ma'ariv for anyone who would like to say a communal Kaddish. Our funeral and shivah books are online to support you.

This applies to all funerals, not only those from Covid-19. This crisis is putting a strain on all of our essential services and we must ensure that we all recognise that we are individually responsible for doing everything we can to reduce the strain and protect our vital services. It is in these times that we must lead by example.

We know that this will be terribly painful for you and we can only express our profound gratitude for your support in upholding this decision, a decision which we hope will contribute to saving lives, minimising strain on the NHS and other essential services, whilst ensuring that the greatest mitzvah of all, burying the dead, is done in a way that honours the lives of loved ones.

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The Rabbis and Cantors of Reform Judaism are always on hand to support you and please be in touch if you would like some pastoral support, by emailing Senior Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner on rabbilaura@rjuk.org.

With prayers for all of us at this time,

Senior Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism

Rabbi Fabian Sborovsky, Chair of the Assembly of Reform Rabbis and Cantors

Rabbi Jackie Tabick, Convenor of the Beit Din