

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



The Suffragan Bishop in Europe
The Right Reverend Dr. David Hamid

2nd April 2020

To the Clergy, Readers and Churchwardens of the Diocese

Approaching Holy Week and Easter

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We have already become ‘a different sort of church’ in unprecedented ways. The very place in which the body of Christ finds its identity, offers prayer, and receives solace in time of crisis—that is, the church building—is not available to us, and, as in the early days of our faith, public gatherings of Christians outside the home are forbidden. Nevertheless, we are finding ways to join in prayer and intention; to cry ‘Abba, Father’; and to recognise we are all buried with Christ by baptism into his death, that we might walk in newness of life. The present situation does not nullify the joy we have been granted in the resurrection, but it will be lived out this year in different ways.

This year Holy Week and Easter will give us opportunities to reflect on all of these matters. In the annual commemoration of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we explore who we are and our relationship to the God who loves us. We are enabled to realise, quite counter-culturally, that everything that we have that is good is a gift, and not a right. We, as humans, do not always have the answers.

We can reflect that, even in the hardest of times, even in the prolonged ‘Holy Saturday’ of emptiness in which we find ourselves, there is always hope. God, whose nature is mercy, sent his Son, who experienced the fullness of our own human suffering and makes all things new. We are still called to serve those inside and outside the church, and to have care for the most vulnerable.

In these dark times, when it is not possible to recall the death and resurrection of Christ in our church buildings (whether our own or borrowed), we have the opportunity, through marking Holy Week at home, of discovering how what we are now experiencing may contribute to our own ongoing journey as God’s people. The homes to which we are primarily confined offer us a place in which our faith can be discovered afresh, where we can find ‘the Church within’.

Use of our Church Buildings

We expect that as a general rule we will all (clergy and laity) be staying at home, praying in our homes and, where appropriate, streaming services from our homes. Our church buildings are closed. This accords with guidance issued by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York attached ‘Stay home, protect the NHS and save lives’.

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Nonetheless, we recognise that our multiple national contexts are different from the context in England, and, in particular, as a minority church we do not have the same ecumenical and inter-religious public health leadership responsibility. Our considered advice is therefore as follows:

- It is permissible for clergy to continue to use their church building for private, personal prayer if their home adjoins the church, i.e. if they can move from their home to the church without going outside or through any outside area that would be open at any time to individuals outside the clergy household itself. Travelling to church to pray is not an ‘essential’ journey.
- In some cases, a chaplaincy will have good reason (practicality, availability of filming equipment, very low public health risk) for streaming a weekly worship service from their church building. This can be done:
 - o Only if all relevant local public health regulations are strictly complied with
 - o With minimum numbers of people involved (consideration should be given to limiting those in attendance to members of the household only)
 - o After consultation with the relevant archdeacon.

Celebration of Holy Communion

The Eucharist is a core element of our Anglican spiritual practice. The word ‘Eucharist’ relates to a verb: it is fundamentally something we, the whole people of God, do. It is the activity of thanking God the Father as a gathered community in which we offer praise and thanksgiving through Christ our Lord. The Eucharist is very important, life-giving and life-sustaining, but when it cannot be received, God can still bless us, be with us, feed us.

- During these times when the community cannot gather, most of us will be fasting from the Eucharist. This is hard, especially when we feel that Lenten discipline should be moving into Easter joy. Nonetheless, most of us will, in these times of crisis, not be receiving the elements of holy communion this Easter Sunday, and that includes us as your bishops. We await in eager anticipation an occasion, hopefully within the Easter season, when the community can gather again to make Eucharist.
- Many will be familiar with the tradition (set out in the rubrics for the service of the Visitation of the Sick in the Book of Common Prayer and Canon B15) of making a spiritual communion. This practice embodies an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the sacrament and to know his loving embrace as though we had received him in the elements. We attach a possible service order for this that some may wish to use, for example on Easter Sunday.
- Some priests may nevertheless wish to stream a service of Holy Communion from their homes (or possibly from their church building – as above, following strict public health guidelines) with members of the priest’s own household forming the congregation. We are making a general dispensation for use of clergy homes until the end of June under Canon B40 to permit this.
- Participants in a streamed service of Holy Communion should not be encouraged to place bread and wine before their screens. Joining together to share in the one bread and the one cup as those physically present to one another is integral to the service of Holy Communion; this is not possible under current restrictions, and it is not helpful to suggest otherwise. Any idea of the ‘remote consecration’ of the bread and wine should be avoided.
- There may be some priests (and we have in mind single clergy especially) for whom a periodic celebration of the mass is something they feel they simply cannot do without and there is no household member to constitute the congregation. There is no tradition of ‘solo’ celebrations of the Eucharist in the Church of England. However, in these

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exceptional times, priests who wish to do this are invited to be in touch with the Suffragan Bishop to seek permission. We would hope that priests wishing to do this would be able to indicate some way in which a wider community is involved in celebration, e.g. through prayers said in other places at the same time.

- Quite apart from the sacrament of holy communion, this is an ideal time to encourage families and households to observe an *agape* meal on Maundy Thursday. We attach a simple order of service, and you can search out other online and printed resources.

Diocesan Events

We know that most liturgical and spiritual life is focused on the local chaplaincy and we don't want to duplicate or distract. But there are some things we can do centrally. In particular:

- We have in mind a diocesan wide Renewal of Vows to take place at **11:00 CET on Maundy Thursday** via Zoom for clergy (chaplains, locums and PtO clergy). This is experimental! But it could provide some opportunity for togetherness and shared re-commitment to ministry at a difficult time. Our diocesan Zoom licence allows hundreds of people to participate.
- There will be a Service of the Word broadcast by the Diocesan Bishop from his home for Easter Sunday.

Other Matters – Finance

We are very aware of the economic consequences of the crisis. Chaplaincies where a high proportion of income comes from tourism, special events, rental of facilities and plate giving are especially affected. The Finance Committee of the DBF met on Monday and assembled in outline some proposals that we hope are both generous and responsible. The Finance Committee meets again next Monday, and shortly after that the Chief Operating Officer will write to chaplaincies with some measures to help.

And last but not least – Time Off

Ministry during the crisis is bringing with it particular strains and stresses: keeping our communities together over the ether, learning to use new technology, sustaining the many who are worried and anxious, devising virtual means of pastoral care. We are humbled and impressed by the creativity and imagination of our clergy and Readers. But attending to one's own personal resilience is of the essence. And this is tiring work. So we do encourage you to find good ways of getting some rest and time off after Easter, all too aware that travelling to a holiday destination or to be with family is not going to be possible for the vast majority of us this year.

With the assurance of our continuing prayers for grace and strength for you in your ministry,

Yours in Christ,

+ David

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