



*To all the Church of England clergy*

Thursday 19 March

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

As our letter made clear the other day, although public worship in the Church of England must stop for now, the life of prayer goes on.

Some people have quite legitimately asked for further clarification of what this means.

Although it is impossible to answer all your questions, we hope that these guidelines will enable us to act together across our dioceses, and also enable us to look positively at the challenges and opportunities before us.

It is important for us to act consistently and we do urge you to follow this advice and to share it with all your clergy and others in the dioceses.

**1. Daily Prayer**

Wherever possible clergy and authorised lay ministers should continue to sustain a daily pattern of prayer. Even though we cannot invite people to join us, it is important to let people know that this prayer is going on. The lay ministers who are able to help lead these services are all Readers and Licensed Lay Ministers, churchwardens, or other lay ministers who either hold the bishop's license (such as Church Army Evangelists) or those who have some sort of local/diocesan authorisation.

However, in order to sustain this life of prayer, especially in rural communities, we encourage each diocesan bishop to give their blessing and permission for the Incumbent and churchwardens of a benefice to invite suitable individuals to help lead the prayer.

**This is not public worship by other means.** Only those who have been specifically invited by the Incumbent should take part, and of course all the protocols about touch and physical distancing must be strictly observed.

Chairs, for instance, where they are used should be placed apart from each other at a distance of two metres.

When someone turns up at our churches when this prayer or the Eucharist is taking place, they should be politely invited to sit somewhere else in the building and then afterwards it can be explained that because of physical distancing and other guidance we are following to protect

people public worship is not taking place, but that they and the whole community is being prayed for.

## **2. Live streaming**

Some of you have already found ways of live streaming your worship. If you have a smart phone, the technology is not so difficult to master. However, there is information about churches that live stream their worship on the Church of England website (<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>), and where cathedrals or parish churches are live streaming morning and evening prayer every day, please let your parishes know this is available and do add services and events to [www.AChurchNearYou.com](http://www.AChurchNearYou.com).

## **3. The Eucharist**

Some parishes will continue with a daily Eucharist. Again, the protocols of refraining from touch, distancing ourselves from each other, sharing the peace differently, and only receiving Holy Communion in one kind remain.

The Eucharist is, sadly, no longer a public act of worship. Therefore, only the priest and one or two others should participate, though the Eucharist itself is offered for the whole people of God and for the whole parish, and for the wider community.

Not receiving holy communion is a serious loss for the people we serve, and we must acknowledge this. There is information on the Church of England website about what is called ‘**spiritual communion**’. Please encourage people to use this service at home.

Furthermore, we need to encourage our people to rise to the challenge that even though they cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the way they are used to, they can be the presence of Christ in their homes and their communities, and they can be a praying presence wherever they are and whatever their circumstances.

## **4. Other resources**

Other resources for worship at home are available on the Church of England website and we are sure you are providing resources in your diocese.

## **5. The occasional offices**

Baptisms, weddings and funerals are having to be conducted very differently. Please consult the advice on the Church of England website about what to do. This advice is being updated every day.

Further liturgies are being worked on especially in relation to short funerals and memorial services.

## **6. Being a people of prayer**

This is probably the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity of all. As we said in our letter earlier this week: “Being a member of the Church of England is going to look very different in the days ahead. Our life is going to be less characterised by attendance at church on Sunday, and more characterised by the prayer and service we offer each day.”

As well as the online resources that we have referred to above, please take every opportunity to provide help and encouragement to the people in your diocese, enabling them to be rooted in a daily rhythm of prayer.

Encourage families to pray together and to use resources such as those provided for Thy Kingdom Come to ensure our faith is alive in our homes and houses. In this regard we have much to learn again from our Jewish brothers and sisters. Let us make our homes alive with our prayers and our hopes.

The cancellation of meetings and services has probably given us all more unscheduled time than we are used to. Perhaps we should use this time to deepen our own prayer life and think about how our dioceses can produce resources for prayer, both for the church, but also for the wider community.

Everyone is feeling very anxious at the moment. Many are fearful. Even though we cannot invite people to our church services, let us make sure our buildings are open, and people know they can come and spend time in church on their own, or with a loved one. Make sure there are prayer resources for people to use. Make sure that the fact that the building is open is well-publicised.

Further government guidance may even prevent us from offering our buildings in this way. But while we can, let us enable people to come in this way (please see attached notes on keeping safe in this regard).

## **7. Being a people of love**

It is a remarkable strength of the church how much we do to ensure the life of communities flourish and the work we do with the most vulnerable and marginalised. Now more than ever we need to be alongside people in safe and appropriate ways. You will we know be ensuring people are taking their normal lead in neighbourhood initiatives and connecting with the elderly and those in real need.

As those who understand we are loved by God, however hard we find that personally to accept we are also those who need to show love to other in practice and in our daily lives.

## **8. Holy Week & Easter**

Our celebration of Easter this year is going to feel very strange as we will not be able to get together in the way we would wish. But Holy Week could be a profound experience of walking the way of the cross and experiencing the isolation that Jesus experienced as everyone fell away and he faced the cross alone. We need to think about how we can provide resources to help people walk the way of the cross at home. If you have any ideas that you wish to share more widely, or resources you have developed for people to use at home or online, please let us know. For example, the book *Walking the Way of the Cross: Prayers and Reflections on the Biblical Stations of the Cross* (Stephen Cottrell, Philip and Paula Gooder) and others like it, will come into their own this year.

## **8. Outside worship**

Finally, some people have asked whether the suspension of public worship in our church buildings also includes acts of worship organised outside. It does. In order to slow the progress of the coronavirus and to enable our health service to deal with the massively increased demand

it is facing, we all need to take responsibility for keeping to the letter as well as the spirit of our guidelines.

Prayer continues. But it continues in our hearts and in our homes, not in our churches. And those of us who through our ordination have been given the particular responsibility to lead the prayer of the church do this for the nation each day, even though we are unable to invite people to join us.

Do keep referring to the Church of England coronavirus webpage (<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>) for FAQs and advice. This page is constantly being updated.

We are keeping all of you in our prayers as we know you are praying for us. As we speak especially to the bishops may we encourage you to give clear guidance to all your clergy and parishes. As we live in such anxious if not to say fearful times, we do need to lead but to lead in a new and prophetic way. This is difficult for all of us but please join with us in demonstrating that the Church of England has indeed a Christian presence in every community and we are praying for all and working alongside all in these very troubled times.

With every blessing,



+Justin Cantuar



+Sentamu Eboracensis