



The Bishop of Chichester
The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner

19th March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

As promised, this Ad clerum brings updated and new information about our response to the present situation. Please continue to check regularly on the CofE and Chichester Diocese Coronavirus website pages.

Please note that a briefing note about finance, PCC regulation, and fees for a marriage licence will be issued tomorrow from Church House, Hove.

In my own prayer reflection on this global crisis, I have been reminded of the important role that older people play in the Bible's account of God's plan for our salvation.

Abraham and Sara, Eli, Naomi, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna are all examples of the decisive intervention or response of an older person, out of which comes hope and blessing. In most cases, they are also closely connected with hospitality and the worship of the temple.

This epidemic requires us to pay special attention to anyone who is vulnerable, and especially to the older people in our society. Learning the art of paying that attention is likely to be a very good thing for us.

We need to listen before we judge, to learn before we patronise, and to be patient in understanding the needs of people whose fragile dignity we should be protecting.

These are skills that should also characterise our attention to holy scripture and to the texts of divine worship. It is through the practice of attention to scripture and worship that we can become what we are now most urgently called to be; agents of prayer and hope, walking signs and sacraments of God's love.

These Ad clerum communications are, I hope, instructive in giving you the best advice that we have for meeting the challenges we are facing. But above all, it is the humble and persistent instinct of the wise pastor and priest that most of all I see, and wish to encourage, in you.

We are fortunate in each other, as priests and ministers in this diocese. There are a lot of us. And through the contribution of each person, we have an amazing diversity of gifts, experience and tradition. These gifts, the distribution of the Holy Spirit, will enable us to do what is needed to present the love of Jesus Christ to the communities we serve.

Thank you for your responses and questions from the previous Ad clerum – they were overwhelmingly helpful and positive. Please continue in the joyful and confident exercise of your calling and ministry.

It is a ministry, first, of prayer – letting people know we are praying for them and will bless them (but no physical contact!), and will teach and encourage them to pray. Second of presence – being seen in the streets of our communities (while this is permitted), praying as we walk. Third, convening people and resources to meet material need, wherever possible.

This note brings the assurance of my prayers for all of you, for those who love and support you personally, giving thanks for the apostolic calling that we share.

1. The instruction to cancel all public worship means that there will be no public observance of Holy Week. This includes the Chrism Eucharist, which will not take place this year. A limited supply of all three oils will still be available from the Palace in Chichester.
2. Some clergy plan to stream or record an act of worship and share it with parishioners. NB A note is attached for those who plan to record or stream some form of worship and how to address the copyright issues. It would be good to make an entry in the Service Register of recorded or streamed services during this historic period of our life.
3. Although our churches should remain open (subject to security, insurance, etc: further advice on this is being sought), they do so for individual devotion but not for liturgical prayer or worship. Please remember to have hand gel or wash available where possible. Where there is a local shortage, you could leave a notice reminding people of the importance of frequently washing their hands for at least 20 seconds when they have the opportunity to do so.
4. You should have a notice to say, for example, "You are most welcome! Please refrain from touching any books, icons or other artefacts whilst visiting our Church." or remove books etc, altogether if you think that is easier.
5. Priests who wish to celebrate the Eucharist may do so, but no public access to that celebration. This was stated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and has been echoed by the regulations issued by the RC Archbishop of Westminster. This Ad clerum gives permission for any priest (licensed or with PTO in this diocese) to celebrate the Eucharist without a congregation, during the course of the present restrictions.
6. Communion should not be taken to people at home, nor should there be home visits for general pastoral reasons.
7. There should be no bell-ringing (change ringing), though a single bell may be tolled.
8. The rites of baptism, marriage, funeral, and induction to a benefice should happen in the presence of the smallest possible number of people: as a guide, no more than 5 people. Warn people about this now. Hygiene requirements should be observed and care taken not to put older people at risk of infection. All confirmations will be postponed until restrictions are lifted.
9. Lent groups or home groups of any kind should be cancelled unless they are convened through a remote provision.
10. Ministry to the dying remains an important pastoral responsibility for priests. In the case of a person with a contagious or infectious disease it should be undertaken after guidance from a person with medical responsibility. The words of absolution, the declaration of faith, and the commendation, do not require touch; the dying person can be anointed with oil on a cotton wool bud, which should then be burnt. There should be

no laying-on of hands, though hands may be extended over the person you are praying for.

11. NB Please also encourage people to support the Archbishops' initiative to put a candle in the window on Sunday evening at 7.00 pm, as a sign of solidarity and prayer, to ring someone who might be isolated and to make a contribution to a food bank. Attached to this Ad clerum is a poster for people to put in their window after this Sunday as an indication of their prayer as a gift for their neighbours. Some people will need a copy printed off for them.

12. Many older people are happily getting used to social media: we should also be using phone numbers as an important means of communication for those who are not comfortable with other media.

13. Work is being done in the Apostolic Life department to explore some kind of identity badge that you could issue lay people as evidence of being from the local parish church. While we work on that, please be vigilant in looking out for fraudsters who are already targeting older people.

Finally, please let us know what we could do right now that would help you most? What do you need from us? Please would you respond, to your archdeacon or to me. We can't promise to meet every request, but we will do our best, within the limits of regulation, time and finance.

We plan to convene what resources we can to meet the needs that are emerging.

In addition to the need to sustain our spiritual life, we are also very concerned for all who work in public service, all whose livelihood is threatened or already destroyed, and families and young people navigating exams and future life plans.

But most importantly, please be assured of our daily prayer for you – it is not all, but it is the best we can do for each other.

+Martin

TO KNOW · LOVE · FOLLOW JESUS

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