



The Bishop of Chichester
The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner

26th March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

The pilgrimage of faith is taking us into challenging territory: let us walk together in hope and in the certainty of the presence of Jesus Christ as our companion and guide.

Government regulations on how we now live must be observed. I believe that as Christians we have a moral duty to do play our part in the disciplines needed to contain the coronavirus. This means that our church buildings must be closed and not used for any gathering. Baptisms and weddings in church are also suspended.

The Archbishops have written to clergy, and the Church of England website notes the following specific guidance from that letter:

- Emergency baptisms can take place in hospital or at home, though subject to strict hygienic precautions and physical distancing as far as possible.
 - Funerals can only happen at the crematorium or at the graveside.
 - Only immediate family members can attend.
 - That is defined as a spouse or partner, parents and children – all maintaining a physical distance.
 - Clergy are encouraged to be as creative as possible with streaming services, teaching, and other resources.
- NB If you are streaming from home, this must also take into account demonstrating attention to both hygiene and safeguarding regulations.
- Foodbanks should continue where possible under strict guidelines and may have to move to be delivery points not places where people gather.

In this diocese I would also encourage clergy to use the Government's allowance of daily exercise as an opportunity to check that church buildings and their contents, for which you are responsible, are safe. We will be providing further guidance from the DAC on this duty of care.

Many clergy have asked about whether they are forbidden to enter their churches. It is vital that we model best practice in terms of public safety, protecting the limited resources of the NHS, and attention to the care of the most vulnerable to infection. Nothing we do should compromise these concerns or the regulation of them by Government instruction.

If you can ensure that these requirements are met, and you still decide to go into church to pray and celebrate the Eucharist, I would respect your decision on the basis that it is made in conscience and informed by legitimate pastoral, spiritual, missional and legal considerations. Thank you to all who streamed services and messages last Sunday. Any service must clearly be solo-streamed or you should explain that it is being done with the aid of a person who lives in your home.

Many of you have also asked about celebrating the Eucharist alone, without a congregation. In some cases clergy will wish to do this at home. I repeat the permission of the Ad clerum on 19 March that gives an exceptional dispensation to a priest (licensed or with PTO in this diocese) to celebrate the Eucharist without a congregation, during the course of the present restrictions.

If it is your practice to reserve the consecrated elements in your church, then please ensure that they are replenished. If you are celebrating the Eucharist at home, then you should take a supply to church for this to be done.

If you are not celebrating the Eucharist at all, please consume the supply of consecrated elements that have been reserved and leave the place of reservation open and unlocked.

You should not reserve the sacrament at home. I have asked for legal advice on this and that is the advice I have been given. The purpose of reservation in the Church of England is the giving of communion; any devotional practice is recognised as a consequence of this.

The continuation of reservation in church would be as a confident and symbolic statement that it is the place of holy communion for the gathered people of God, and the potential for that gift to be recovered is not being intercepted.

The dispensation to celebrate the Eucharist without a congregation can seem generally foreign to the Church of England's tradition. What are we to make of it? How are we to do it?

There is perhaps some guidance from the book of Exodus, when the children of Israel are going through their desert experience.

This resonates with this season of Lent. It is also a model for our life as a pilgrim people, journeying together in "darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1.79), with our sights fixed on Jesus Christ, the source of light and peace.

In the provisional dispensation of this pilgrimage, we read that "Whenever Moses went out to the tent [of meeting], all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent" (Exodus 33.8).

There are further details of the rituals of this meeting and the role that both Moses and Aaron are given. These two Old Testament figures were foundational for the Church of England self- understanding of itself in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. They feature in the title page of prayer books and the King James Version of the Bible; they are prominent in the decoration of many churches in this period.

The focus of the ordained minister interceding for the people in ritual is well-established in the Church of England's imagination, though it is now overlaid by other important

considerations of the nature of the Church and the active participation of the whole people in worship.

When an incumbent is inducted, the ritual of going to the church door, tolling the bell and being placed in a stall all have meaning. The priest is the doorkeeper (just as Jesus describes himself as the Door of the sheepfold). The bell is the indication of proclamation, witness to the Church's activity of prayer, and the stall is the study desk of scripture, liturgy and meditation. These distinctively Church of England rituals are indicative of a profound sense of the church as temple, a building that expresses in its sacred geometry a material delineation of the body of Christ.

It is important, however, that we draw from our scriptural and ecclesial tradition in order to make arrangements that will meet the provisional limitations which are likely to be with us for some time.

Moses, and on other occasions, Aaron, go into the tent alone, in order to pray for the people. But the people are not passive. They go to the door of their dwellings as witnesses to this work. They stand in the presence of God with them: they watch, and they pray.

This dispersed work of prayer is also the work of Christian laity. It is what we are now being asked to nurture in their lives, as well as our own, of as we emphasise and celebrate the link between the corporate worship of Church and the domestic worship of home. In each home, for example:-

- the chair in which you sit to read the Bible is the domestic lectern where together we hear read what the daily scriptures are saying to us.
- your front window is the pulpit where the mystery of Christ in your life can be articulated. In the diocese of Chichester we have offered an A4 Passiontide poster that proclaims, Praying for you. [Here](#)
- your meal table is the place where you give thanks for creation, for the food by which God sustains your life, and for the mystery of Christ who is present to us in this same manner as the food of the Eucharist. (Grace at times of meals could reference this more carefully.)

The role of the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist is to bear all this to the altar in church through the rites of word and sacrament that unite earth with heaven and thereby give glory to God the Father.

The celebration of the Eucharist without a congregation should heighten our awareness that this act does not belong to the priest.

The celebrant of every Eucharist is Jesus Christ, the new Moses. The gifts on the altar are the manifestation of the life of the people of the new Israel, the Church, in their daily working life, and in prayer and worship in their homes. Jesus unites these gifts with the offering of himself to God for the salvation of the world.

How do you celebrate this without the people of God being present? (This would also apply to celebrating the Eucharist in your own home.)

1. As a priest, remember you also belong to the people of God. You are a sinner like any other Christian. In offering the gifts at the altar, you also come in search of mercy and forgiveness.
2. Extra special preparation is needed for this distinctive celebration. Liturgical texts, vessels and bread and wine must all be in place and easily accessible. Work out carefully how you will place a lectern, altar and chair or stool and move easily between them.
3. Speak at a volume that you would use in conversation with a person who is in need of reassurance. Imagine you are speaking to any one of the people who are saddened by not being able to get to church.
4. Prepare carefully what you intend to bring to God in the offering you are about to make, i.e. the names of people, places, etc.
5. Light the candles, vest and go to the altar as you normally would.
6. Remember that the Eucharist is a conversation: with the members of the Church on earth, and with the angels and saints in heaven, and with the persons of the Holy Trinity. The text of the rite should be essentially the same as you would use if a congregation were present. You should say only the words of the priest or reader, and the words that priest and people say together. Do not say the responses of the people who are not present.
 - Do say, “The Lord be with you.” Do not say, “And also with you.”
 - Do say, “Let us pray.”
 - Do not say the responses in a responsorial psalm
 - Do not say, “Thanks be to God” after the OT and/or NT reading
 - Do not say the responses to the announcement and conclusion of the gospel
 - Do not invite an exchange of peace
 - Do not say the people’s response in the Sursum Corda
 - Do say the Sanctus and Benedictus
 - You may say the Mystery of faith and you may say the Agnus Dei
 - Do say the invitation to communion and its response
 - Communicate yourself in both kinds
 - Do say the blessing and dismissal
7. Think carefully about where you focus your attention, given that no one else is present. Read the texts carefully; look at the gifts you place on the altar.
8. Allow time for silence. This is especially important after the gospel and after holy communion. Ensure that there is a chair or stool conveniently nearby.
9. Enter the celebration in the services register, noting that there was no congregation, under the terms of permission from the bishop, to meet Covid-19 restrictions. This will be a significant record for history.
10. Make sure that after the liturgy you set aside time for thanksgiving.

Finally, please ensure that you take good care of yourselves, spiritually, emotionally, medically. There is much that will cause anxiety and grief in the weeks to come. I hope that you will also carve out time for spiritual refreshment, reconnection (safely!) with friends and people who encourage you in your ministry and faith. Look, too, at what will enliven your

hope and imagination. Even now, we might begin to think about what we will be wanting to do and to be, when this dark episode draws to its close. What will we have learnt?

I leave you with some words from a Bible commentary by St Bede (spoken of so brilliantly by Karen Kilby at our last Clergy Conference):

Christ is the morning star who, when the night of this world is past brings to his saints the promise of the life and opens everlasting day.

With thanks and with joy in sharing with you our apostolic calling,

+Martin