**To all Licenced Clergy and Clergy with PTO**

13 May 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

This *Ad clerum* marks a turning point in our continued celebration of Easter. It also gives information about a turning point in the guidance of the House of Bishops on the use of churches.

I start deliberately with Easter because this is the foundation of our life as baptised Christians.

**We set ourselves the task in Eastertide of reading again the Acts of the Apostles. The readings appointed for the Eucharist each day remind us of our apostolic inheritance and mandate: “we are witnesses” is a recurrent theme.**

**In our own time we have to wrestle with incomprehension and misunderstanding, just as Paul and Barnabas did at Lystra. In the daily reading of the gospel we also hear the promise of Jesus, recorded by St John, that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus said.**

**The fulfilment of that promise, celebrated at Pentecost, is what we now begin to look towards, as the 50 Day Easter celebration reaches its culmination.**

**In following the lives of Peter and Paul, leaders in the apostolic mission of evangelisation, we note that Pentecost will coincide with the conclusion of Acts. This takes us to Rome and the tradition of martyrdom, a reminder of the essential character of being a witness. As we know, “martyr” and “witness” is the same word, in the Greek text of the New Testament.**

**As clergy you have, I know, been finding ways to witness to the apostolic mission of evangelisation that is our inheritance today. There will have been many times when this has perhaps been costly. Thank you for your fidelity, your imagination, and your perseverance.**

I wish to emphasis again that there is to be no league table in assessing how you undertake this task of witnessing. I trust your judgement in deciding whether to use IT and social media, or to use other channels of communication, better suited to rural contexts and older members of the congregations you serve.

What matters most is that your communication is authentic, worthy of the life-giving message it conveys, and sensitively attuned to the capacity of those for whom it is intended. People from across the diocese have told me how much they appreciate the ministry that you continue to exercise.

The House of Bishops has now updated its guidance on the use of church buildings and asked each diocesan bishop to issue guidance on how this is to be applied locally.

In this diocese, I wish to encourage all of you to pray in your church at least once a week. (In rural, multi-parish benefices this might need to be adjusted to your particular context.) I believe that this would be an expression of your work as an ordained minister, and that you should regard the Prime Minister’s speech on Sunday evening (Sunday 10 May), and subsequent statements issued by Government, as encouragement to undertake that work.

As with the issue of using electronic forms of communication as part of your pastoral work, there is no compulsion for you to go into your church; it is a matter for your judgment.

Please note, however, that the church building must remain closed for public access. This means that you may not open your church building for public worship attended by a congregation. It is you as a minister of religion who have the right and permission to undertake that duty. In circumstances where you share that responsibility with a curate, it can be undertaken by you both, and details of necessary hygiene precautions are given in the attached note from the Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division (CCBD) of the Archbishops’ Council.

Please read that note carefully and act on its advice, where applicable

The note gives information about practical precautions you should take if you are the first person to enter your church building after an extended period of closure. The advice has been written to cover every type of church building: some guidance will, inevitably, not apply to your church building.

For ease of reference, I attach the *Ad clerum* of 26 March 2020, and repeat what was stated then and on 19 March 2020, giving “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”. Guidance for a celebration in that context is also given in the 26 March *Ad clerum*.

I also wish to draw your attention to some other important details.

1. You will be informed of important updates on the note from CCBD. Please ensure you check these updates, which will be posted on the diocesan website.
2. You should keep a log of every occasion when you enter the church building and of anyone else who is present (to assist in streaming an act of worship, for example). This record can be made by you in the Register of Services. See details in CCBD notes, Part 2.
3. Canon F8 requires at least one bell to be provided “to ring the people to divine worship”. The CCBD notes do not forbid ringing the bell as a sign that even in the absence of a congregation, prayer that is divine worship is taking place in a parish church or chapel. It states: “If you can do these activities from ground level and without the need for other people present, then current restrictions do not forbid this”. “These activities” include winding the church clock and raising and lowering the flag.
4. If you have not been into church since before Easter, please ensure that it does reflect the joy of the resurrection. Cleaning the building in which you pray could itself be a very good form of prayer! The rule of St Benedict commends this as manual labour. I have had to do some of that myself, re-visiting the Brasso tin after a very long gap!

**I welcome the relaxation in the guidance from the House of Bishops. It is essential that we do not become obsessed by our church buildings. Equally, we would be unwise and irresponsible stewards of the mysteries of faith if we did not also reverence them as sacred space and visible signs of the kingdom of God in our local communities.**

**As we look to the future, the interruption to our routines of worship should have made us re-examine what a church building is for, and why it matters to us and to the people for whom it is the house of God where they find hope and encouragement.**

**In this regard, I commend an observation on the nature of our life’s work as the Body of Christ, the Church, which begins, is nurtured and matures through the drama of worship, until finally, in death, we embody that drama in the hope of resurrection:**

* **Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become “bread that is broken” for others, and to work for the building of a more just and inter-connected world.**
* **Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realise that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: “You yourselves, give them something to eat” (Matt 14.16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world (Pope Benedict XVI).**

**Finally, we are also preparing to celebrate the festival of Pentecost, and the renewal in our lives of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is also a season when we pray “Thy kingdom come” as we long for the people of our nation to respond with joy to the good news of Jesus Christ.**

**In order to deepen our prayer for the people of this diocese in the time of this pandemic, and in the nine days of prayer that form a novena between Ascension Day and Pentecost, I invite you and the people of your congregations to join me in prayer each day at 12.00 noon, for around 15 minutes, in a live streaming of intercession, worship and silence from the Bishop’s chapel, here in Chichester.**

We shall pray for all the parishes in the diocese, and the days on which your parish and deanery is prayed for are listed below. If there is a particular person, situation or cause that you wish me to pray for in your parish, please let me know in advance by post, or email to bishop@chichester.anglican.org.

In addition to a reading of scripture and a list of the people we are praying for, there will be 5 minutes of shared silent prayer, asking God to hear us, to deliver us from this present evil, to use us for his glory and to bring us into the fullness of his kingdom in the perfection of heaven.

Please join me, daily at 12.00 noon, from Friday 22 to Saturday 30 May. Joining details will be on the diocesan website.

Yours in the risen Christ and the life of the Holy Spirit,

***+Martin***

A novena of prayer: Thy kingdom come!

Daily, at 12.00 noon, streamed from the Bishop’s chapel, Chichester

Friday 22 May Parishes of Brighton and Midhurst deaneries

Saturday 23 May Parishes of Eastbourne and Hove deaneries

Sunday 24 May Parishes of Arundel & Bognor and Rye deaneries

Monday 25 May Parishes of East Grinstead and Westbourne deaneries

Tuesday 26 May Parishes of Battle & Bexhill and Petworth deaneries

Wednesday 27 May Parishes of Dallington, Storrington and Chichester deaneries

Thursday 28 May Parishes of Hastings, Horsham and Uckfield deaneries

Friday 29 May Parishes of Hurst, Rotherfield and Worthing deaneries

Saturday 30 May Parishes of Cuckfield and Lewes & Seaford deaneries