An Open Letter To the Members of Parliament whose constituency is in the Diocese of Chichester

The Church’s celebration of the festival of Pentecost (Whitsun) this past weekend prompts me to write to you about the status of our churches.

It was a privilege to be in Chichester cathedral to record the Pentecost Eucharist, while observing all the distancing and hygiene regulations.

The Bishop of London has underlined our commitment in the Church of England to complying with all the guidance and regulations concerning distancing and hygiene regulations. From her professional nursing career she fully understands this.

She speaks for Church of England bishops in underlining our commitment to working with Government and other relevant authorities, in the expectation of opening our church buildings **“**in a phased way as soon as it is deemed safe and practical to do so. We [the Church of England] have already been actively planning to that end.”

I hope that you would lobby for an urgent review of the continued closure of our church buildings to individuals who seek solace in such places.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols has also spoken out about this, making a clear statement about the Catholic Church’s planning and commitment to best practice for opening Church buildings, and about recognising the importance for every faith tradition of its place of worship.

The Cardinal also reminded us that we use our places of worship differently, and it is with this recognition in mind that we ask for churches to be opened for individual private prayer.

At a time when tensions run high, I believe that there is a deep thirst for access to churches and cathedrals as places of prayer for people of committed faith, or for anyone who is in search of space in which to find peace.

I am fortunate to live near to Chichester cathedral. Each day I see individuals peering in through its glass doors. I know from personal experience what pressing and intimate needs find expression in the prayers that they write down and leave behind.

We urgently need places and experience that build hope, trust, and endurance. The capacity of the Christian Church to engender those virtues through prayer and stillness in its buildings should not be underestimated.

I am making this letter public, in order to indicate to those who have made comments to me on this matter that I have shared their concerns with you.

Please be assured of my daily prayers for you and for your staff, as you seek to serve your constituents and the common good at this challenging time in our national life.

+Martin Cicestr:

1 June 2020