

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



The Suffragan Bishop in Europe
The Right Reverend David Hamid

9 June 2020

For Chaplains, locum clergy, PtO clergy resident in the diocese, Readers, Churchwardens

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We have just celebrated Trinity Sunday, the day that sums up the Church's liturgical year with its focus on the awesome and wonderful reality of the three-personed God. The Father-Creator, the incarnate, crucified and risen Son, and the Pentecostal Holy Spirit are together acknowledged and worshipped on a Sunday which marks the liturgical transition from the telling of the events of salvation to the twenty plus Sundays of 'Ordinary Time'. In these Sundays, we work out the Christian message of faith, love and hope on a journey towards Advent and the completion of God's work of the restoration and healing of humanity and the created order.

In 2020 these Sundays are, however, much less 'ordinary' than usual. We are all struggling to work our way towards some kind of 'new normal'. We are not sure what this will be like, although we can be fairly sure that the continuing threat of Covid-19 means it won't be the same as the 'old normal'. In each country, strategies of deconfinement are in progress. Across the diocese and in each chaplaincy, clergy and councils are working out if and how to 're-open', deliberating over local and diocesan guidance, and putting in place new safety procedures.

The great theological virtue that sustains us in all of this is our Christian **hope**. This hope is the future dimension of faith and it is to a large extent the test of faith. It is neither given by ourselves nor is it to be kept to ourselves. As a pilgrim people we live in a hope that is renewed and fostered every day by the Holy Spirit. And it is this hope that helps us cope with all our struggles and trials of life in our diverse context and situations.

On a purely human level, it is striking how some of the most powerful stories of how people have coped with incarceration are founded on hope conjoined with love. The 1990s Academy Award winning 'Shawshank Redemption' tells the moving account of how a young white banker survives decades of harsh imprisonment through friendship with an older, black inmate without giving into despair. The best-selling 2018 novel 'The Tattooist of Auschwitz' describes the love between a young couple which enables them to hold onto hope in the darkest of conditions. In both these stories, hope is revealed as a remarkably powerful quality that keeps people alive in the bleakest circumstances. For Christians, hope is an eternal virtue, stretching out beyond this mortal life: 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1).

For many of us these last months of lockdown have been a hard experience when we have felt isolated and lonely. Deconfinement now brings a different range of stresses and anxieties. We will have to find new ways of caring for one another as we seek how to be church and how to offer in-person church worship with physical distancing, with proper hygiene, and with some of our members not yet being or feeling ready to join in congregational gatherings.

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Further to our guidance of 26th May, you will find attached to this letter some liturgical resources that may help you as you restart physical church gatherings. These resources are issued by the Church of England's Liturgical Commission under the auspices of the 'Recovery Group' chaired by Bishop Sarah. They are written for the UK – and the pdf format doesn't make it easy for our diocese to customise them – so please bear in mind that they must be subject to the rules of your own, local, jurisdiction. They cover:

- Re-entering our church buildings – prayers and scripture for private or public use
- Prayers of Lament, Thanksgiving and Restoration
- Remembering and Memorials.

We are also attaching Advice on Pastoral Care and Visiting, and particularly visits to the sick and to the dying. We have tried to customise this Advice to meet the needs of our Diocese. Clergy will already be aware of the need for the caution that this document recommends, but it is good to have these specific recommended practices spelt out clearly. Again, we stress that this Advice is subject to the rules issued by the public authorities in your own national jurisdiction.

You may have heard that churches in the UK are going to be allowed to open to the public for private prayer. This carries risks. As well as observing hygiene and social distancing requirements we recommend that any buildings that are open are properly supervised at all times. Please do not feel pressure to open buildings to the public until you are fully ready to do this.

Finally, on administrative matters our Chief Operating Officer writes:

'We have given a lot of consideration to issues of church governance and meetings in recent weeks. If you have any queries about Chaplaincy Meetings and Elections etc. please do not hesitate to contact me or your Archdeacon. It is always better to ask if you are in any doubt than to feel you have to come up with a solution. Meanwhile, you may be interested to know that a Zoom gathering of Diocesan Synod members is planned for June 23rd though this cannot be a formal meeting.'

We will provide you with a further update and guidance on managing the challenges of Covid-19 in your chaplaincies in two weeks' time.

Thank you for all you are doing to sustain church life, whether virtually or in person. We do appreciate that this is demanding, and that it requires patience and stamina. We trust that you are actively planning a break over the summer, aware that travel plans depend on government regulation – including the UK's decision to introduce quarantining. If you need locum cover for holidays, please do discuss this with your Archdeacon.

Please know the continuing assurance of our prayers and support in these demanding times.

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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