

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



The Suffragan Bishop in Europe
The Right Reverend Dr. David Hamid

29th April 2020

To the Clergy, Readers and Churchwardens of the Diocese

Practical Guidance once lockdown is eased and church buildings can be used for public worship

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In some European countries such as Germany, Austria and Denmark, lockdown measures are being slightly eased and there is the possibility again of chaplaincies offering public worship in a limited way. Where this is possible, and only in those jurisdictions where gatherings for public worship are legally permitted, considerable care is needed in how any opening up for worship is managed, and a number of important principles and precautions need to be observed for the safety and protection of all concerned. This is because Covid-19 continues to pose serious threats, and we will need to live with this reality until there is a vaccine and/or an effective cure. So we are writing to you to address, narrowly, the question of safe conduct of public worship, in countries where it is permitted, but where Covid-19 remains a reality for us all.

In every country, the release from lockdown is cautious and gradual. Different countries in our diocese will be at different points in the step by step withdrawal of the lockdown. In any country, the advice of the national government is of the first importance. Clergy and chaplaincy councils need to pay close attention to national/provincial regulations, as well as drawing on the advice of our church partners. Inevitably, we are needing to run slightly ahead of national Church of England advice in England. We continue to liaise with bishops in England, and it is quite likely that eventual advice in England will be similar to what we are setting out here.

The protection of our neighbour is a key element of our Christian faith, and the Easter message affirms that the life of integrity, courage and compassion is never wasted or lost. What is done for the good of others has a way of rising and returning to gather all and rise again. That neither disease nor death can finally overcome the best in human solidarity and resilience is both a lesson of secular history as well as sound religion. It is in that spirit that this guidance is offered, updating our last guidance notes issued on 6th April 2020.

Where **Public Church Services on Sundays and Special Occasions** are again permitted by local law or state guidance, these can be celebrated either in church buildings or in the open air. However, our advice is that services should only be held if principles of hygiene and physical distancing can be firmly adhered to as follows:

- For individuals attending church: carrying of tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, and binning the tissue continues to be important. In addition to this, it is recommended that each individual or each family carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer.

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- Disinfectants and hand washing/sanitizing facilities should be provided at the church entrance; door handles and hand railings need to be disinfected on a regular basis.
- All sidespeople/welcomers should wash their hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer. No handshaking or other physical touch. The ministry of welcome now assumes additional importance and consideration should be given to ensuring responsible lay people such as churchwardens are directly involved in it.
- **Seating arrangements in churches should ensure that there is a two-metre distance** between persons in all directions during a service, whether this is standing or sitting. This is the requirement that should also determine the seating capacity of a church.
- The seating areas will need to be marked in a way to aid ‘distancing’.
- Families and individuals who live in the same household can sit together if they are living together.
- Church balconies should not be used, as they are difficult to keep safe.
- Liturgy and hymns should be shown on screen or printed and made available to be picked up rather than being distributed by hand. Use of worship and hymn books will need to be avoided. A slightly shorter liturgy may be appropriate in order to keep the service to a maximum of one hour.
- The use of protective face masks is regulated differently in different countries, but is recommended.
- Congregational singing is problematic because singing appears to increase significantly the transmission of potentially infected droplets. A small choir (3 to 5 people) could sing, keeping greater distance from each other and the congregation. If congregational singing is envisaged, it should be very softly, and even greater physical distancing will be necessary.
- Again, to reduce the possibility of transmission of potentially infected droplets, wind instruments should not be used to provide music or musical accompaniment.
- Readers, preachers, leaders of intercessions etc., should take care not to touch lecterns or pulpits.
- Instead of shaking hands with neighbours at the peace, a sign of reconciliation can be conveyed in a different form, such as, bringing together the palms of one’s hands and bowing to the other with a smile, as in the Indian Namaste greeting. This greeting should continue at a distance.
- Our continued guidance is that Holy Communion is distributed in the form of bread/wafer only. Both elements will be consecrated, but the wine should not be distributed. It is a clear principle of Anglican theology that the sacrament of Holy Communion is present and complete in either of the consecrated elements.
- For the time being, it is preferable that only the presiding minister handles the vessels and administers Holy Communion. Given that it will be in one kind for now, and in most places for not more than 50 persons, it is much easier to control hygiene if this is one person’s responsibility.
- Priests presiding at the Eucharist should wash their hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- We emphasize the need for the priest to use a face mask and gloves. If the priest, for theological reasons, finds using gloves difficult, extra measures in terms of hygiene need to be adhered to. The priest should not touch anyone during the administration of the Holy Communion or in giving individual blessings, or laying on hands for prayer or for healing.
- The bread/wafer is safest distributed with communicants approaching in a single line standing with a sensible distance between them.
- Holy Water stoups remain discontinued.
- The celebration of Holy Baptism will require special precautions. Only one candidate should be baptized at a given service. The font should be emptied and disinfected before any subsequent baptism service. The presiding priest should wear a mask. An infant should be held by his or her

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parents – the minister should not take the infant into his or her own arms. Water should be poured over the head of the candidate, using a shell or other such vessel, and no physical contact should be made between the priest and the candidate. Pre and Post baptismal anointing can be done with a cotton swab, again avoiding physical contact between the minister and the candidate. If there are any questions related to these measures, please contact the lead bishop.

- Offerings are to be placed on a tray at the exit. Those who count the collection at the end of the service should wear gloves. Better still, use this as an opportunity to encourage online giving and direct debits.
- Wardens are requested to ensure that ordered entry, seating and exit is maintained.
- If church is filled to permitted capacity, no further entry is possible. Recognising that refusing entry to a church is always undesirable and difficult, chaplains and councils may wish to consider booking systems where seating cards are requested and issued in advance.
- In some places more than the normal celebrations of Holy Communion may be needed, to ensure that the entire community is able to receive the sacrament. Do consider ‘hybrid worship’ (where services with a small congregation are broadcast live) especially for the benefit of those who are afraid or reluctant to enter church buildings too quickly.
- Pre and post service gatherings for fellowship and refreshments should not happen.
- Sunday School and junior church gatherings must adhere to the current national norms for gatherings of children in schools and daycare centres. Leaders of these events will need to be appropriately briefed on how to ensure distancing between children and more leaders than normal may be required.
- **We emphasize that scrupulous cleaning of churches will need to be arranged after each use. Cleaning personnel should be carefully briefed/trained, supplied with proper gloves and disinfectants and (if working more than singly) equipped with masks.**

We fully appreciate that these measures are onerous. Chaplains and chaplaincy councils will want to take their time to decide how and indeed if they are able to recommence public worship safely. In our Covid-19 environment, offering spaces for public worship is a serious responsibility and does need careful, prayerful thought. Moreover, congregations will need to be aware that the ‘feel’ of church worship in this environment is going to be different from before the crisis.

These are testing times for all of us, but we take courage in the words of St Paul: For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, not things present, nor things to come, nor powers, not height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8.38-39).

With the assurance of our continuing prayers for grace and strength for you in your ministry,

Yours in Christ,

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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