



## **AD CLERUM Update 10**

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

Dear Colleagues,

According to John's Gospel, far from delighting in news of the empty tomb, the disciples were paralysed by fear and barricaded themselves into a house in Jerusalem. We too find ourselves in lockdown. Many who are vulnerable feel particularly anxious and fearful, others tense and cooped up, and some unbelievably lonely. Just as locked doors were no barrier to the risen Christ, so this Easter once again he stands on the inside of our lives, speaking words of peace.

### **From loneliness to solitude**

If you are a devotee of *Desert Island Discs*, you will know that towards the end of the programme, the presenter (currently Lauren Laverne) asks the celebrity how they will cope living alone on their desert island. The implication being that isolation, chosen or enforced, is something to get through. There are many who feel like that. Loneliness is destructive. 'It is not good that the man should be alone' says the Lord God (Genesis 2.18). Loneliness robs us of the warmth of human companionship and undermines our well-being. Solitude, on the other hand, can be creative. Solitude is not a vacuum, but an invitation to learn to be rightly alone so that we can live rightly with others. And as the prophet Elijah discovered, it is often in solitude that we are surprised by God's still, small voice (1 Kings 19.12).

One of the unexpected challenges of this lockdown is being confronted by ourselves, with little room for manoeuvre or escape. The journey that God invites us to go on in his company is one that leads from loneliness to solitude. Thomas Merton, the Trappist and spiritual writer, says, 'This is a country whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. You do not find it by travelling but by standing still.'

The word 'isolation' derives from the Latin word for an island: *insula*. From it comes also the word 'insulation'. The Government continues to plead with us to isolate and insulate. Stay home: save lives. We are islands, observing 'social distancing', but human beings are social animals and we still need to stay connected. As ministers, we

need to give energy and imagination to enabling connectedness in our communities and minimising the destructive power of loneliness.

### **Easing of restrictions**

We are fortunate in the South-West to have the lowest number of cases of Covid-19 and (so far) to be the region with the lowest number of deaths. This does not mean we can afford to be less vigilant or complacent. That said, although there is no overall change in the Government policy of lockdown, certain restrictions are being eased. For example, the Government has asked local councils to re-open closed cemeteries and has lifted restrictions around grass cutting and the tending of graves. Subject to local protocols, where a Care Home or NHS Trust believes it is possible, a relative is now allowed at the bedside of a dying patient to say goodbye. With regard to funerals, the Government has said that, when requested, a minister of religion should be allowed to officiate. In such ways the Government is tweaking its guidance. So please consult regularly the official guidance published on the Church of England website which has just been updated:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

### **Communicating well**

No matter the speculation in the media, it is highly unlikely that social gatherings will be permitted anytime soon. Restrictions are likely to continue to apply to sporting events, pubs and clubs, and churches will remain closed – perhaps for some months. So please ensure that you keep your websites up-to-date and continue to explain to people locally what is happening as the country moves into the next phase of the pandemic. Please don't assume that everyone in your community knows.

Andrew Beane, the Archdeacon of Exeter has put together a great 10-point checklist for churches to help you ensure that your website is as up-to-date and helpful as it can be. Here is a link to it on the diocesan website:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance/coronavirus-resources/>

Secondly, please don't underestimate the power of a poster on the church door, noticeboard, in the local post office or shop, advertising the fact that although the building may be closed, the church is still very much open for business: online and on the phone. It needs to have clear information about how to view online services and how to contact people. Frustratingly, many of you are doing great live-streamed worship, but not mentioning it on your websites, which are often still all about coming along to the church building on Sunday or, worse still, simply announcing that the church is 'closed'. If people think that church isn't happening at the moment, how are we showing them on the ground that it is?

With the prospect of increasing numbers of funerals, people also need accurate contact information. If a family member has died, it is vital that they can easily contact

the vicar or someone responsible, not an unmanned office. One bereaved person recently contacted the Diocesan office in desperation, totally unable to find a phone number anywhere on the website of the parish where her mother lived.

### **Pastoral care**

It is wonderful to hear how many of you, free of the stuff that invariably clogs up our diaries, are giving renewed priority to pastoral care and rediscovering its joys as well as its challenges. This national emergency is testing our pastoral mettle and forcing us to innovate and explore new ways of being Church. What the shape of the 'new normal' will be after the coronavirus pandemic has burnt itself out, none of us knows, but things will be different. Too much has changed simply to revert to old ways of doing things. We will be adjusting to a new reality.

With many people forced to work from home, there is a renewed sense of 'home' as a place of security and identity, and with it a rediscovery of the importance of family and neighbourhood. But home can also be a place of tension and even violence. Nationally, cases of domestic abuse and violence against women have risen by 25% over the last six weeks, in part triggered by the enforced lockdown. We do need to be alert to safeguarding issues.

We need also to re-think our ministry to the bereaved. Bereavement is a long journey as a person moves from mourning to remembering. That journey is more complicated when leave-taking has been inhibited, when family and friends have been prohibited from attending the funeral or, worst of all, when the funeral was conducted with no mourners allowed to be present. In such situations, pastoral support for the bereaved is vital, even if it cannot be face to face. Phone support may not be ideal, but it is better than nothing. Philip Sourbut, the Director of Mission and Ministry, has drawn up some useful guidance which accompanies this letter. The guidance can also be found on the Diocesan website by following the link below:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Prayers-and-pastoral-ministry.pdf>

### **Prayers for use during the coronavirus outbreak**

Not everyone has access to online resources. So last week Church House Publishing (CHP) produced a downloadable/printable selection of *Prayers for use during the coronavirus outbreak*. The booklet includes prayers for children, as well as a simple form of morning and night prayer designed for individuals and families to use at home. The files can be freely downloaded, e-mailed or printed by anyone via the Church of England website, with versions suited to [sharing digitally](#), printing [at home](#), or [printing professionally](#).

Alternatively, you may wish to purchase copies for your parish. Orders can be placed online using the links below or by calling the CHP distributor, Norwich Books and Music on 01603 785925.

Packs of 10 for £4 (i.e. 40p per copy) with free UK P&P:

<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/PCO10/prayers-for-use-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak---pack-of-10>

Packs of 50 for £15 (i.e. 30p per copy) with free UK P&P:

<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/PCO50/prayers-for-use-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak---pack-of-50>

Please consult the main Church of England COVID-19 Guidance on the distribution of printed literature. Most of you will already be aware of the need to use the postal service, and use printed resources only to reach those who are self-isolating and unable to access materials online. But what a wonderful way to reach out to people on the fringe and help them to pray.

### **Self-care**

I am conscious of the amount of energy that was poured into Holy Week and Easter, and the exhaustion that many experience when the adrenaline pump is switched off. We have left the 'heroic phase' of this crisis and we need now to change gear and look after ourselves. You may wish to re-visit the paper on 'Trauma' I circulated at the end of March. Please don't be surprised if you feel low and anxious one day, and hard to get your brain in gear the next.

Self-care, attending to our own well-being, is vital if we are to stay the course. That includes the basics of good rest, eating and exercise, but it also includes having people you trust with whom you can share and making sure you keep in touch with them. You are not on a desert island. There are phones and if you or a member of your immediate family is in difficulty, the Diocesan Counselling Service for clergy, readers and their families is at your disposal with free and confidential advice.

You may also wish to check out the Farming Community Network which has compiled a comprehensive list of 'Services & Support in Devon for Mental Health & Wellbeing'. The list is not just about support for farmers and is worth consulting:

<https://devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/content/pages/documents/1549564824.pdf>

As the lockdown continues, we have a golden opportunity to develop ourselves in new ways. Some of you will relish the chance to read the book that you never got round to. Others may prefer something more interactive. Our normal CMD programme is 'on hold' until meeting becomes possible again, but we are developing various ways to offer input online or signpost easily available options. Philip Sourbut will be writing to you shortly with these opportunities. Finally, on a happy note, I am delighted to share with you news of two new appointments.

### **New Principal of SWMTC**

After a rigorous and open process, the new Principal of the South-West Ministerial Training Course is to be the Venerable Dr Mark Butchers. Mark has been

Archdeacon of Barnstaple for the last five years and has been an outstanding priest and pastor to the people and parishes of North Devon. I know they will miss him sorely, but it is good that we won't lose sight of him. He will bring to his new role not only considerable experience of ministry, not least in rural contexts, but also his undoubted gifts as a teacher and theologian. He will lay down the baton of archdeacon at the end of June so that he can have a bit of a sabbatical before being licensed by Bishop Nick to his new role on 6<sup>th</sup> September. It will not be possible to begin the appointment process for his successor until we emerge from the lockdown and people are free to move. So until a new archdeacon is in post, I have asked Prebendary Giles King-Smith to be Acting Archdeacon of Barnstaple, and I am grateful to him for being prepared to undertake these additional responsibilities.

### **Bishop's Chaplain**

I am also delighted to announce the appointment of the Reverend Nigel Mason as my new Chaplain. Many of you will know Nigel from his time as Chaplain at Searle House, the Hospice in Exeter. Nigel is currently working as Associate Priest in the White Cross Mission Community in East Devon. With everyone in the Gatehouse working from home, he is not after all able to start his new work next month as originally planned. Meanwhile the new incumbent of White Cross cannot move to Devon! So Nigel has agreed to hold the fort there until the current impasse shifts.

### **Looking ahead**

Although we will still be in lockdown, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May will soon be here. You may wish to draw people's attention to the Diocesan commemoration, led by Bishop Nick which will be available on the Diocesan website and YouTube on the day. Are there ways you can mark the anniversary in your own community too?

I'm sure that like me you have been standing on your doorstep and 'Clapping for Carers' on Thursday evenings. It's been a powerful experience of solidarity. The 5<sup>th</sup> July is sometimes observed as the 'birthday' of the NHS and this year it will certainly be marked up and down the country. Even if our church buildings are still closed in July, is there a way your church can be at the heart of saying thank you to the NHS and to all the key workers in your local community? Let's not miss an important way of engaging with our community.

Looking further ahead to the eventual re-opening of our churches for public worship, can I urge you to begin thinking *now* about how best to do this, including perhaps holding a special memorial service for the bereaved or a community service of thanksgiving in celebration of the army of volunteers who have gone the second and third mile for neighbours?

This crisis is forcing us to travel unknown ways. But the risen Christ walks with us as once he walked beside Cleopas and the other disciple to Emmaus, as once he stood

among his frightened disciples in that locked room in Jerusalem and spoke words of peace. And to him we make our prayer:

Risen Christ,  
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts,  
that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,  
to the praise of God the Father.

*CW Alternative Collect for Second Sunday of Easter*

May God bless you with his peace. Keep safe and well.

+ Robert Exon