THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

To All Church of England Clergy 17 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

We wanted to write to you today to offer you advice and encouragement at this very difficult time for the whole of our country. Please find attached to this letter some careful guidance. We write this letter having consulted with the bishops across the Church of England and are grateful to them for their wisdom and help.

Thank you for all that you do and will continue to do as disciples of Jesus Christ and ministers of the Gospel. We recognise what a very unusual and painful time this is for everyone and we want to stress that we are praying for you all and are very grateful for all that you are doing.

It has always been the historic vocation of the Church of England to be the church for everyone. William Temple, one of the great Archbishops of Canterbury and York of the last century, is often quoted as saying that we are the one organisation which exists for the benefit of its 'non-members'. As the challenge of the coronavirus grips the world, and as the Government asks every individual and every organisation to rethink its life, we are now asking the Church of England in all its parishes, chaplaincies and ministries to serve all people in a new way. Public worship will have to stop for a season. Our usual pattern of Sunday services and other mid-week gatherings must be put on hold. But this does not mean that the Church of England has shut up shop. Far from it.

We need to look at new ways of serving everyone:

1. Where you can and where it is prudent, we encourage all clergy to continue their pattern of daily prayer and, if it is your practice and can be done within the constraints as set out, a daily Eucharist. It is vital to observe strictly the protocols of hygiene and, where necessary, self-isolation and social distancing. This will not be public worship that everyone can attend, but an offering of prayer and praise for the nation and for the world.

   Please do of course keep the church buildings open for private prayer wherever possible as we know so many do all the time.

2. If churches and worshipping communities have the resources to live stream then they should do so. This will enable the people of God and anyone and everyone who looks to God for support and meaning in this time of crisis to participate in the life of worship at home. At the same time, both nationally and in our dioceses, we will produce and provide resources for prayer and worship in the home. This will be especially important for those who are self-isolating, but also for the benefit of everyone.

3. Many people are going to suffer during these coming months as the coronavirus reaches its peak. Tragically there will be deaths and so many will be grieving and fearful. We, the Church of Jesus Christ, with our sisters and brothers from other Christian churches, must be in the forefront of providing practical care and support for the most poor and the most vulnerable, and we offer our services to all those who are beginning to think through how best to provide for those in need.

Being a part of the Church of England is going to look very different in the days ahead. Our life is going to be less characterised by attendance at church on Sunday, and more characterised by the prayer and service we offer each day. We may not be able to pray with people in the ways that we are used to, but we can certainly pray for people. And we can certainly offer practical care and support. Please do carry on supporting the local foodbank and buy extra provisions for it. Ensure the night shelters wherever possible are kept open. There are many very encouraging schemes happening right across our country in communities to focus on caring for the most vulnerable, so do continue to play your part in those.

Then by our service, and by our love, Jesus Christ will be made known, and the hope of the gospel – a hope that will counter fear and isolation - will spread across our land.

We have called, along with our fellow church leaders, for a day of prayer and action this coming Sunday - Mothering Sunday (22nd March). Mothering Sunday has always been both a day of celebration for many and a sensitive and emotional day for some. Wherever you are this Sunday please do join in this day of prayer and action and remember especially those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in our Health Service. As one action, we are calling on everyone to place a lighted candle in their window at 7.00 p.m. as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished.

This is a defining moment for the Church of England. Are we truly a church for all, or just the church for ourselves? We urge you sisters and brothers to become a different sort of church in these coming months: hopeful and rooted in the offering of prayer and praise and overflowing in service to the world.

Please, therefore, join us in this great challenge; and pray for our Government and nation, for each other, and especially for those who work in our health and emergency services.

With every blessing,

+Justin Cantuar

+Sentamu Eboracensis