



The Diocese of Southwark

17 March 2020

The Bishop of Southwark

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun

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To All Clergy of the Diocese of Southwark

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Many of you will, by now, be aware that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have announced that 'our usual pattern of Sunday service and other mid-week gatherings must be put on hold'. They went on to say that 'this does not mean that the Church of England has shut up shop'. I want to echo that sentiment and, in this letter, to offer, in consultation with my colleagues on the Coronavirus Task Group, which I set up yesterday, some practical and pastoral advice for the coming days and weeks.

I commend the guidance from the Archbishops:

'Where you can and where it is prudent we encourage all clergy to continue the 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.'

If you have the possibility of streaming your services I encourage you to do so. Please let us know if you are doing this so that we can list churches on our website. The link to the Church of England's guide on streaming can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/digital-labs/labs-learning-blog/beginners-guide-going-live-your-service-or>

Please ensure, if you have one, that the church bell is rung before you begin your services, as the Canons suggest, so that people know we are still praying for everyone, especially at this time. It is also important that we keep our churches open to offer people a space, especially if they are cramped at home. Please put a note on your church door and your website alerting people to times when your church will be open.

As the Archbishops have said, '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'. Please give careful consideration to arrangements for pastoral and practical care and support, not forgetting local food banks and night shelters. Please check your lists of pastoral contacts and set up a small group willing to share in telephone ministry.

It is so important in these difficult times that we are there to offer hope in the face of fear. As we hold onto hope whilst facing reality, I want to invite you to pray together for our nation and for all those affected by the coronavirus at 1pm each day. Please pause in whatever you are doing and say the Lord's Prayer and again at 7pm. Where it is safe to do so perhaps you could light a candle in your window each evening as a symbol of Christ's light in our world at this dark time.

We will work to make the cycle of prayer more prominent on the front of our Diocesan website as an aid to you all in your parishes to pray together even if we are apart.

Many of you have asked about weddings, baptisms and funerals and it is important to think about how we manage these. It is likely that people will want to postpone weddings and baptisms. However, weddings can be performed legally with just two people as witnesses and baptisms should still be offered if people want them and especially in extremis. Funerals can take place although it is very important that numbers at these occasional offices are restricted and that all the guidance concerning safe distances should be heeded.

The Archbishops have rightly told us all that 'this is a defining moment for the Church of England', one in which we need to re-define what it means to be church today. This crisis is our opportunity to live out our faith by acts of love and kindness to others. So please make sure that you offer the appropriate safe help to those who may need to self-isolate or who will be especially lonely at this time. Make sure that people know that you are praying for them and care for them.

From today Diocesan core services will continue to operate but most staff will be working remotely with email although some staff will attend Trinity House, on occasion, for essential work that can only be undertaken in the office:

- the Diocesan Secretary will be present at least two days a week, her landline will be diverted when she is not in the office so that you can still contact her
- Safeguarding, Human Resources, Faculties, urgent property repairs will function as usual although the teams will be working remotely most of the time
- payments will continue to be made
- post will continue to be opened and actioned
- arrangements are being made for DBS checking to continue
- the safeguarding mobile phone will continue to be answered and monitored
- our priority will be to finish building works which have already begun and to make sure that urgent repairs are carried out. New incoming works will be delayed until nearer the time that the vacancy is due to be filled
- the Area Offices will continue to offer core services but may be dispersed
- the Board of Education will work remotely and will send a separate communication to schools
- all communications regarding our response to the coronavirus pandemic will come via Press and Communications
- we are likely to be in contact about APCMs and any other areas of work pending legal advice

Should you have any questions please email ctg@southwark.anglican.org this email will come to Press and Communications who will ensure that the queries are dealt with by the appropriate person.

I will be making arrangements for the Chrism Eucharist on Maundy Thursday to be streamed from Southwark Cathedral. I will bless the oils and they will be ready for collection at the Cathedral which will be open 9.45am-3.45pm every day. I would like you to renew your ordination vows on that day at around 11am wherever you are and will send out an order for this. Please know that my prayers and those of the Area Bishops will be with you as we pray for each other.

The Archbishops have called us all to a day of prayer and action this coming Sunday (22 March) and resources for this will be released by the national church shortly. Our Mission Department is also working on other prayer materials for us to use in the coming weeks.

It may be that there are those of you who feel that it is wise or necessary to self-isolate. We would urge you to do what you need to do and not to worry that you are having to do this. Please tell your Area Dean and Archdeacon that you are doing so and let them know how you are. It is important too that all those who fall into any category outlined as vulnerable in the government's advice take note of this and stay inside. This is especially true for our older clergy and I want to reassure them that there are clergy at the Cathedral and elsewhere who can cover services that they are unable to take because of the restrictions.

The Coronavirus Task Group (CTG) will meet again tomorrow and Thursday and regularly in the coming weeks. We will send out further communications as necessary.

We are living through hard realities at present but as we do this we hold onto strong hope; the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. The light of Christ will not be extinguished as we seek to live Christ-centred, outward-focussed lives, we can be a light to those around us in these difficult times.

With my thanks for all we share in the Gospel and for all you are doing to bring comfort to your parishioners at this difficult time

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Southwark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun
The Bishop of Southwark

On behalf of the CTG (The CTG is Bishop Christopher, The Diocesan Secretary: Ruth Martin, the Venerable Alastair Cutting, the Very Revd Andrew Nunn and the Director of Press and Communications: Revd Canon Wendy Robins)