The Bishop in Europe:

**The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes**

The Suffragan Bishop in Europe

**The Right Reverend David Hamid**

6 March 2020

To the Clergy of the Diocese

Dear Sisters and Brothers

We wrote to you at the beginning of February regarding good practice concerning coronavirus and control of infectious diseases in general. We want now to update our advice in the light of changing circumstances over the past month.

The Church of England publishes guidance to all clergy and congregations here:

[https://www.churchofengland.org/coronavirus](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fchurchofengland.us2.list-manage.com%2Ftrack%2Fclick%3Fu%3D50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45%26id%3De9e6ec2c1f%26e%3Dfc77074a53&data=02%7C01%7Cbishop.europe%40churchofengland.org%7Cfe39f78330854db0327708d7c140c37c%7C95e2463b3ab047b49ac1587c77ee84f0%7C0%7C0%7C637190356220094386&sdata=JRTmr5hD3r%2F2sbF4B7IyI4xtRLX3uhybpmhzJVITOwc%3D&reserved=0)

We have decided to go somewhat beyond this advice in certain respects because of the mobile and international nature of our congregations and in the light of medical advice we have received. We preface this advice by re-iterating that coronavirus appears to present a particular risk to elderly people and those with reduced immunity or a pre-existing health condition. Our advice is given out of a mutual concern for the wellbeing of all members of our chaplaincies.

1. We encourage individuals and congregations to follow good hygiene practices, including:
   1. Carrying tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, and binning the tissue
   2. Washing hands with soap and water (for 20 seconds) or using sanitiser to kill germs.
2. If possible provide hand gel at entrances and ensure there is a good supply of soap or hand gel in cloakrooms and kitchens. In addition, priests presiding at the Eucharist, communion administrators and servers should wash their hands, preferably with an alcohol-based sanitiser. Sidespeople/welcomers and those serving refreshments should take similar precautions.
3. Try to clean hard surfaces such as door handles and communion rails regularly.
4. The exchange of a gesture of peace prior to sharing Communion is for many, a much-loved moment in the service. However, we recommend that, for the time being, this gesture is restricted to a smile and words of peace to those in closest proximity rather than physical contact (kiss or handshake) with everyone in the church.
5. We recommend that communion is distributed in the form of bread/wafer only. Both elements will be consecrated but the wine should not be distributed. Congregations can be reassured that this does not diminish the nature of the Eucharist. It is a clear principle of Anglican theology that the sacrament of Holy Communion is present and complete in either of the consecrated elements. (We are aware that distribution of the elements in one kind only has already been adopted by some chaplaincies.)
6. We recommend that the use of holy water stoups is discontinued for the time being.
7. a) In some regions, most notably parts of Italy, the authorities have disallowed religious gatherings. These rulings have to be obeyed. However, in these circumstances we encourage congregations to stay in touch with each other, to look out for older and vulnerable parishioners and to find imaginative ways of sustaining worship. (See, for example, the ‘Virtual Eucharist in Genoa’ <https://europe.anglican.org/main/latest-news/post/1548-virtual-eucharist-in-genoa>.)

b) The Swiss authorities have introduced a regulation requiring members of congregations to ‘sign in’, so that possible spread of the disease can be traced. It is possible that other countries may follow suit, and these regulations must be respected.

Infectious diseases seem to cause higher levels of public anxiety than other threats, perhaps because we can’t see them or sense them. And although social media can satisfy our desire for information they have the capacity to fuel anxiety. Avoiding panic is a key part of responding to coronavirus for all of us in positions of leadership.

This guidance is intended as a prudent response to an unusual challenge. It represents a set of sensible precautions to promote health and wellbeing in the conditions of our diocese.

We will keep in touch with you as the situation develops and plan to write again in the next couple of weeks. If you have any questions do contact us or your Archdeacon or our Chief Operating Officer. We will continue to monitor the situation and guidance closely. At the same time, our Diocesan website will continue to carry the latest updates from official sources – national governments, WHO and EU – so please keep an eye on this also.

Meanwhile, we pray that our chaplaincies and congregations can be oases of peace, loving fellowship and hope in times of anxiety. We continue to pray for those infected by the coronavirus, for those who care for them, and for health specialists and authorities who are combatting the spread of infection.

Yours in Christ

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