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Coronavirus - a pastoral statement

Revised Guidelines for the Scottish Episcopal Church have been issued today by the College of Bishops. They are available at www.scotland.anglican.org/coronavirus-updates/.

The Guidelines call us to make drastic changes to our church life:

- public worship is suspended in all our churches and chapels.
- churches may, but do not have to, remain open for individual prayer if people observe hygiene rules.
- funerals will have to be taken at the graveside or crematorium, with very few family members present, but may be followed by a public memorial service when the situation allows.
- weddings will have to be celebrated in private or postponed until the situation changes.
- face to face meetings of Vestries, Committees and all Church groups are suspended.

These are drastic and stringent sacrifices for us to make, but we make them out of love not out of fear, for the protection of the people among us who are most vulnerable to infection.

But we also have to think and act *positively* as churches. Our congregations have to think about 'gathering' in a different way, and our clergy and lay readers have to think about being priests and pastors in a different way:

- the SEC will be providing online Eucharistic worship on Sundays. We can follow information about this and participate from home, via the SEC website: <https://www.scotland.anglican.org>.
- some clergy in our Diocese are arranging to put their own live or recorded worship online for their congregations. Please let the Diocese know, so that we can send out the information to others who may also wish to participate in this online worship. Instructions on live-streaming services on Facebook are at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhnR0hahkD0&fbclid=IwAR39NRhUxZul2aWD39aXILEzhGPG534cAf66sSlS8wDDfsYCR6zwd7yWtk>
- I am encouraging the clergy to continue to celebrate the Eucharist for Sundays and Feast Days for the community, and Daily Prayer on weekdays, at the usual times, even if they are alone in the Church. I hope they will either share this online with the congregation, or ensure that they know it is happening and can participate prayerfully at the usual time using the set readings and prayer resources they have been provided with.
- I encourage everyone to use Daily Prayer, perhaps from the SEC website, and for congregations to pray for their community and each other each day.

- There are good online resources for liturgical prayer and lectionary reflection, such as:

SEC liturgies:

<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/who-we-are/publications/liturgies/>

SEC Daily Prayer:

<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/prayer/morning-prayer-tuesday-17-march-2020/>

CofE Worship resources:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources>

Daily reflections:

<https://pray-as-you-go.org>

Episcopal Church USA, Sunday and weekday lectionary readings texts:

<https://www.lectionarypage.net/>

- Please keep in regular contact by phone with your clergy, other members of your congregation, and with people in your community. Tell the clergy and others if you are ill, or if you need pastoral support.
- But please remember that your clergy and lay ministers also need to stay healthy and to take care. Many of them are vulnerable to this virus, too, and may need to reduce their social contacts in order to keep safe.
- Above all, pray for those most at risk, for the medical services, and for the whole community. I invite everyone to respond to the suggestion of the Archbishop of Canterbury, that we all **light a candle and place it in a window for people to see, at 7.00pm this Sunday and every Sunday** as long as the situation lasts. Make it an act of prayer for the world and a sign of Christ, the Light of the World.

The present situation could go on for quite a long time, but the Church of God has continued to serve people through epidemics, disasters and wars for centuries. Coronavirus will not prevent us from being the praying, caring Body of Christ. We just have to learn to do it differently for a while, and, as Jesus often told the disciples, not to be afraid.

With prayer and blessing,

+Ian St Andrews