



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST
A PROVINCE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF

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Message from Archbishop Michael:

WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST

The present moment feels unprecedented. Levels of anxiety and disorientation are high in many places and we who are Christians are finding that we are not exempt.

For many of the congregations of our diocese, public worship has been discontinued for the time being and until further notice, because the civil authorities, whose guests most of us are, have decreed that it should be. Situations vary, but everywhere at the moment is experiencing greater or lesser amounts of disruption and discontinuity.

The essentials of good health advice, some of them simple but vital, must of course be followed, and I know that all are taking care that that shall be so.

Prudence, but not panic, must be our watchword.

I pay warm tribute to the imaginative response of some of our clergy and lay people who have devised methods of offering communal prayer by way of different sorts of media. Staying in touch with one another by email, messaging, and telephone will be essential and I know that that is already happening. Pastoral care will be variously possible and variously expressed but now is the time for much energy to be put into it. We shall seek to serve and minister not only to our fellow worshippers but to the wider community too as much as we possibly can.

Community is a sometimes devalued word. Now is the time to give it full weight. The most irreducible community is the community of all humanity. That means that nothing that happens to any of our fellow human beings, anywhere in the world, is beyond our concern and compassion. As Christians we believe that the world is God's and that humanity is part of the divine Creation. We say that all of us are called to realise that we are sons and daughters of the universal heavenly Father. There should be no mental or physical pulling up of drawbridges or circling of the wagons.

Most specifically, we say that the Church is the Body of Christ. The words are regularly embedded in the heart of the eucharist. The image itself is embedded in Scripture. No single Christian exists in isolation. No single congregation stands alone.

Therefore there is existential pain when we cannot, or cannot fully, gather physically together to say and know that we are the Body of Christ. Only when the authorities have explicitly requested and required us to suspend common worship have I gone along with them, and it feels painful.

A phrase in use in some places in these days is *social distancing*. *Isolation* too is much talked of. There are practical reasons why for medical purposes we must take note of what is being conveyed by competent experts, though opinions vary and change. But we need to be clear that the Christian

faith and the Christian Church normatively stand for the very opposite of both isolation and social distance. A glory of Christian congregations in our diocese and in many other branches of the Church is that we are a polychrome mixture of East and West, rich and poor, successful and struggling, older and younger, apparently acceptable and apparently unacceptable in the eyes of the world but not of Christ.

I offer the following in case the prayers and thoughts are helpful in these days.

With blessings.

In Christ.

+ Michael Cyprus & the Gulf

The Collect for St Barnabas

Bountiful God, giver of all gifts,
who poured your Spirit upon your servant Barnabas
and gave him grace to encourage others:
help us, by his example,
to be generous in our judgements
and unselfish in our service;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Anxiety

God our healer,
who walked upon the chaotic waters
and said to the storm: 'Be still',
you know the frailty of our hearts,
how easily anxiety can overwhelm us.

It lurks in the shadows of the mind,
spreads its coils around us,
throttles life within us,
and shuts the door of our generous hearts.

God our Saviour,
set us free
we pray
from the curse and burden of anxiety;
and by the miracle of your grace
show us how
perfect love casts out fear.

For your love's sake.
Amen.

Patrick Woodhouse, from 'With you is the well of life'

Seasonal prayers that reflect on Christ's example, our need of grace, service and humility

Post-communion prayer for Ash Wednesday

Post-communion prayer for Lent 2

Collect for Lent 3

Post-communion prayer for Lent 5

Collect and post-communion prayer for Palm Sunday

From a prayer by John Henry Newman

I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about.

Lord, in these days of mercy,
make us quiet and prayerful;
in these days of challenge,
make us stronger in you;
in these days of emptiness,
take possession of us;
in these days of waiting,
open our hearts to the mystery of your cross.

Angela Ashwin

From the Church of England website

A PRAYER FOR ALL THOSE AFFECTED BY CORONAVIRUS

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.