



The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

The Rt Revd Dr Richard Treloar
Bishop of Gippsland

***A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Richard
for distribution to the people of the Diocese via email***

Palm Sunday
5 April 2020

Dear clergy and people of the Diocese,

As we enter Holy Week, the grief we feel at being unable to gather together as Christ's body is acute.

Perhaps this week's journey to the foot of the cross will show us aspects of our Lord's sufferings as none other – or, rather, his may interpret ours – as we experience the absence of friends, the sense of being behind closed doors for fear of the unknown, wondering what the future holds.

Precisely in the midst of such uncertainty, anxiety, and constraint, there has been much creativity, purpose, and faithfulness in the way our parishes, chaplaincies, schools, agencies, and diocesan mission initiatives have been reaching out to those who are isolated and most vulnerable in the community.

I express our collective gratitude to the clergy, Lay Readers, and laity who have generated new forums for worship and fellowship in online platforms, through email databases, telephone trees, and letter box drops, among other examples. We expect *The Gippsland Anglican* to be delivered to parishes this week, and hopefully to homes from there. *The Melbourne Anglican* has moved to an online format only for April, and we will follow suit for the May edition and beyond, until further notice. Staying in touch with one another by these and other means is vital; not only for wellbeing, but as an expression of our mutual belonging in Christ.

Whilst our clergy may not be leading Sunday or weekday services of public worship in familiar ways, they are still hard at work, exercising much-needed leadership, facilitating pastoral care, and partnering with our people and the Diocese as a whole to help steer a course through this crisis. Thank you for your care and support of those in holy orders in their particular loss at not being able to minister liturgically, which is at the heart of their calling, along with your compassion for all whose vocation or livelihoods are under threat, including in our own families.

As we all know, our baptismal identity and ministry is not confined to what happens on Sundays or when 'at prayer', important as corporate worship is in our life-long growth into these mysteries. We are to be the church no less when the doors of our buildings are shut, and there will no doubt be things for us to learn or recover in this moment that may make us better equipped for our share in God's mission to the world.

To that end, Bishop in Council has wisely moved to establish an Executive Committee to enable the governance of the Diocese to be responsive to these new circumstances. The Executive is meeting weekly to gather and analyse information, to assess immediate, medium and longer term needs, and to plan ahead – including with respect to recent government initiatives as they may apply to our structures.

Diocesan Staff (Archdeacons, Regional Deans, The Dean, Registrar and Anglicare Victoria Parish Partnerships Coordinator) are also meeting regularly – all via Zoom, of course – to evaluate ministry needs and opportunities, and identify ways to support colleagues.

At the level of the wider church, the Bishops of the Province are working closely together, the General Synod Office is providing helpful advice and advocacy with government, and our positive ecumenical relationships in the Gippsland region are seeing us collaborate in the sharing of resources and coordinating outreach.

That said, there will be significant challenges for us as a diocesan family arising from the temporary closure of churches, Op Shops, and other operations, and from the general socio-economic impact of the entirely necessary current restrictions – an impact which may well lag behind and outlast the worst of the pandemic itself.

As with the bushfire crisis – and our relief and recovery work on that front continues unabated – we are in this together, and for the long haul. The Registrar is already consulting with Treasurers and Wardens to look at ways of riding out the months ahead, so that we are best placed to resume core activities when the time comes.

In responding prayerfully, and in carefully measured ways, to any changes this situation should demand of us, be assured that we are determined to look after our people and our faith communities, and to preserve the capital and infrastructure needed to proclaim the gospel using the best of our living, and thus always evolving, Anglican tradition.

I'm conscious that some of our clergy and people have been extraordinarily generous in their financial stewardship and in their willingness to use leave entitlements or find other means of managing expenses in their local context. Thank you for whatever support you are able to continue to offer while our normal income streams and mechanisms for giving are suspended. The Registry Office and Bishops Court are among those cost-centres to have made changes to staffing and allowances so as to minimise the burden on the diocesan payroll.

The day after public worship was suspended, I began offering the Eucharist daily in the Chapel at Bishops Court on behalf of the clergy and people of our Diocese. It is a privilege to be able to do that (thanks to the readiness of Leanne and/or our children to be conscripted as a congregation!) and I will continue to hold you in prayer at that altar-table throughout this period, for as long as it lasts.

If you tune in to the pre-recorded services on the diocesan website for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, you will see the Bishops Court Chapel being used for those occasions and I hope and trust you will come to regard it as yours and feel welcome and 'at home' there. As well as the sermon series I'm offering for Holy Week, starting with the Palm Sunday Eucharist from the Cathedral which is viewable from this morning (www.gippsanglican.org.au) I'm grateful to be able to share, with his blessing, a set of Holy Week reflections from +Jeffrey Driver, which you'll find attached to this letter.

Whatever form your worship will take in this strangest of Paschaltides, may you draw comfort and strength in the the company of the divinely prodigal Son, who emptied himself and spent everything in the far country of our flesh; who goes before us yet and still in those places where we feel most alone, most fearful, even most abandoned by God, only to find the one he called Father waiting outside the gate to find us, raise us up, and call us home to that table where we may indeed keep the feast.

Take care of your household, stay close to your household of faith, and let us continue to be a people of hope.

Grace and peace,



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