

Dear sisters and brothers,

I'm so thankful for what you are doing to reach out to your congregations and communities as we move into the second week of 'lockdown'. Some are recording or live streaming the Eucharist, others are celebrating alone while linked to people praying at home. Many are keeping people connected through social media, websites, or telephone. It is all helping people to know that they are still the Church, even if church buildings must remain closed for a while.

I hope that recent communications from the College of Bishops about worship have been helpful. The Church of England has asked clergy not to enter their churches, even to celebrate the Eucharist, but to do this at home. We have decided not to restrict local decisions in the same way, and it remains open to you to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist either in church or at home. If it is in church, you should be alone or accompanied only by someone who lives in your home.

I also hope you are finding it possible to help people to understand and to practise Spiritual Communion when participating in the Eucharist from home. A recent College of Bishops message was on this subject, and there are other resources available online. It is important not to lose sight of our call to be a Eucharistic church, even in circumstances that challenge our normal practice of Eucharistic worship. Spiritual Communion has a long tradition coming from the early Church, especially in times of adversity or persecution. It is absolutely not the same as people using their own bread and wine to participate from home, a practice which we should be strongly discouraging, and which in the long run would eventually diminish what we understand to be the meaning of 'communion', 'church' and 'incarnation.'

A former SEC priest, now serving in England, Darren McFarland, is producing a weekly resource for his congregation, and I attach this Sunday's version here, in case any of you feel able to do the same kind of thing in future.

Please get in touch with me at any time if you have questions, needs, or just want a listening ear on the end of the phone. It would be good to hear from you.

Warm regards,
Bishop Ian

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