

# DIOCESE IN EUROPE

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THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

Bishop in Europe:  
**The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes**



The Suffragan Bishop in Europe  
**The Right Reverend Dr. David Hamid**

6<sup>th</sup> November 2020

To the Clergy, Readers and Churchwardens of the Diocese

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We write to you in this season of remembrance. All Saints Day, All Souls Day, Remembrance Sunday, and Armistice Day call attention in different ways to those who have gone before us in faith, those whom we have lost and remember, and those who gave their lives for others in the field of human conflict. In 2020 this season is given added poignancy because of the pandemic. Some of us will have lost friends or family members to this disease. Many of us will have been unable to attend funerals of a loved one due to travel restrictions, or have been saddened that a loved one was not able to have the funeral they deserved. And now across large parts of Europe a second lockdown is coming into force that severely limits the possibilities of gathering for worship, even for important events such as Remembrance Sunday.

A few days ago, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishop of London wrote a letter to all the clergy of the Church of England. What they said was focused on the English context, but much of their letter applies equally to our diocese too. They express sentiments which we as your Bishops share, and which we join with our Archbishops in offering to you. They write:

“A second lockdown will be upon us on Thursday. It is going to be different from the first one. The days are getting shorter and colder. We are anxious for ourselves, for those we love, especially those who are vulnerable and elderly, and for our families. We know that this pandemic is having a devastating effect on our economy and on people’s mental health. Thousands of people are dying. The Health Service is being stretched to its limit. We also know and must continue to bear witness to the fact that the poorest communities are suffering the most. We are in for a long haul. It is going to be a hard winter.

But this second lockdown will also be different in other ways. There is much that we have learned from the first lockdown and there is much to celebrate and be proud of. Of course, we are full of gratitude and respect for the amazing courage and commitment of all key workers, especially those in our Health Service. Their contribution is rightly and widely recognised. We also applaud the many creative ways that churches have been serving their local communities and working with others to make sure that the hungry are fed and the vulnerable cared for. We have managed to maintain and, in many cases, extend our outreach by streaming worship online and by developing other ways of building community online.

We are grateful for people’s energy, hard work and creativity in making this happen and we hope and pray this will continue. We are grateful that the new guidelines being introduced not only allow

Rue Capitaine Crespel 47 box 49, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +3222137480; E-Mail: [bishop.europe@churchofengland.org](mailto:bishop.europe@churchofengland.org),

Diocesan web site: [www.europe.anglican.org/](http://www.europe.anglican.org/)

churches to remain open for private prayer but also enable online worship to be broadcast from the church building. We were cautious about these issues during the first lockdown - perhaps overly so - but in this second lockdown we want to encourage church buildings to remain open for private prayer wherever possible, making sure our buildings are Covid-secure in ways that we have learned in recent months, and to broadcast services from our church buildings. However, if you do not have the resources or wherewithal to do this, please do not feel that you have failed in any way. The good thing about provision of worship online, is that people can join in from anywhere and therefore we can support each other more easily in this endeavour. Our national digital team will continue to offer training and support and provide national services each week.”

As your bishops, we are aware that worship online still means that the people of God do not have access to the sacraments which are so central to our life in Christ. This is a huge loss. In England, that loss has been made more difficult to bear because government did not consult church leaders or faith leaders more generally before suspending public worship. Indeed, faith leaders have joined in writing to the UK government to argue that public worship should be restored for the sake of spiritual and mental health, social cohesion and connectedness, and as a vital sign of hope in dark times.

Across our diocese, national regulations now vary considerably. Where public worship is allowed, we urge you to offer it, in accordance with your national regulations and our diocesan Covid-secure advice. And for those who have come into office since we last wrote, we attach a handy resume of diocesan Covid-safe church worship practice (SANITISERS).

The Bishops of the Church of England have issued a Call to Daily Prayer during this second lockdown. We encourage chaplaincies to join in with this in a way appropriate to your own contexts. Of course, we know that most of us already have a daily rhythm of prayer. But others may want to commit themselves anew to daily prayer at this time. If so, we attach some accessible resources and themes for prayer, which members of your congregations may wish to use – incorporating them into existing routines or setting aside a fixed time each day to pray using them.

Over these last nine months many people have appreciated our periodic diocesan Zoom gatherings. We plan the next one for 18:00 CET on 30<sup>th</sup> November, St. Andrews Day. This will be a service for Advent, marking the beginning of a new liturgical year. You will be aware that the gospel on which the lectionary focuses in the coming year is St. Mark, and so we have invited Dr. Clare Amos to give us an introductory tour through Mark’s gospel as part of that online event. We hope this may whet the appetite of the preachers and teachers amongst us.

And finally, we have been learning perhaps that Covid-19 is not so much a problem to be solved as a trial to be endured. Endurance is the Christian antecedent of our modern idea of resilience. So in the words of a verse for All Saints-tide, “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”.

In these times of isolation, anxiety and stress, please know our continuing prayers for grace and strength for you in your life and ministry,

Yours in Christ,

*+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe*

*+ David*

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