



# THE DIOCESE OF SINGAPORE

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## A Pastoral Note to All Anglicans in our Diocese

4<sup>th</sup> April 2020

### Re: Body Life, Duty to Nation and Holy Communion During the Suspension of Church Services till 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020

My Precious Flock-in-Christ,

It is a topsy-turvy time. Fear and anxiety abound because of the escalating COVID-19 crisis.

We are kept steady by the truth of God's Word: The Lord is on the throne. He is the God of mercy and might. His awesome power and steadfast love will see us through. Through prayer, staying in touch with a circle of close Christian family members and friends, and the support of the wider Church, we are nourished and made strong by the Holy Spirit for the tough times we are in.

It is incumbent on me as Diocesan Shepherd, aided by a band of senior Anglican leaders, to help our Church keep in step with God and with the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. I write therefore to update you on decisions I have had to make this week regarding the practice of Holy Communion during this critical month of April. I write with reference to our flock in Singapore, but I trust there are sound principles for our Deaneries as well.

### The Gravity of the Situation

Singaporeans have just heard from our Prime Minister on 3<sup>rd</sup> April that more severe 'circuit-breaker' measures are needed to combat the spread of the coronavirus. These new measures will be in force till 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Singapore is at a critical stage in its battle with the coronavirus. Locally transmitted cases are on the rise, with new clusters emerging and at the same time a growing number of unlinked cases. The danger to all, the actual suffering of those infected and the pain of death are all very real.

*How should we respond under God, especially when the Holy Week is just ahead of us?*

### Combining 'Cure of Souls' with 'Welfare of the City'

The 'cure of souls' refers to the pastoral care and building up in the faith of the people of God. The Church is to be strengthened, not least during times of severe adversity, to hold fast to God and to be faithful in her witness and ministry.

At the same time, Christians are to promote the 'welfare of the city' by socially responsible behaviour, good works and prayer. So, I pondered this question before God: "How should Your people respond to the need of the hour to limit physical gatherings and the movement of people?" A difficult question especially with the significance of the Holy Week round the corner.

The Lord drew me to 'the Way of the Cross' which is the Church's focus of attention during the period of Lent (the forty days leading up to Easter Sunday when we celebrate Jesus' bodily resurrection). The essential teaching of the Way of the Cross, so poignantly demonstrated to us by the example of Jesus Himself, is that we are to lay down our lives in sacrifice and self-giving to promote the well-being of others.

Should Anglicans then give up their need *for* and right *to* this God-provided, time-honoured ‘means of grace’ – the sacrament of Holy Communion?

## Reaching A Decision: To Temporarily Forgo our Practice of Holy Communion

Earlier this past week, the senior leaders and I had begun to explore ways in which Holy Communion could be duly and rightly administered to our members, with the ‘Just10’ measures adhered to. We took care to find ways in which members (not exceeding 10 but preferably in 2s or 3s to minimise the coronavirus transmission) may partake of Holy Communion, via an online worship service. We thought that during the online service, members can partake of the Holy Communion elements (duly consecrated by a Priest) together with those present with them, and in unison with all others participating in the service from their various locations. The ways under study were adaptive, temporary ways to preserve what is at the core of the Bible’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper: namely, the oneness of the body of believers (*1 Cor 11:17-34*), the abiding in Christ (*Jn 6:22-58; 17:20-23*), and the proclamation of the finished work of Christ till His coming again (*Lk 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:26*).

But should we go ahead with these ways, even though I felt we had our theological and pastoral bases sufficiently covered?

*Lord, how are You leading us as a branch of Your one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in the present circumstances?*

Through prayer, I found the peace of God to lead our Anglican Church in Singapore to forgo our practice of Holy Communion during this time, when we critically need to safeguard the nation’s well-being by minimising social gatherings and physical movement of people.

Hence, on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March, I had communicated to our Vicars and our senior Anglican leaders a message to this effect:

*“Honouring the Lord & following the Way of the Cross, the Anglican Church in Singapore **will serve our society’s pressing need at this critical stage by not availing ourselves of Holy Communion**, whether in person or through an online service’s provision of the rite. This **voluntary forgoing** of Holy Communion will be from 4<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> April.”*  
*(This has now been extended to 4th May in view of the ‘circuit-breaker’ measures just announced.)*

*“**However, for pastoral reasons, and with all precautions in place, Communion to the Sick or Communion to a few persons jointly, can be considered** by the Vicar or Priest-in-Charge during the said period on a case-by-case basis. Such Communion is to be conducted by a clergyman, or an authorised lay reader using elements that have been duly consecrated by a Priest.”*  
*(In view of the newly announced ‘circuit-breaker’ measures, this provision will now have to be reviewed in consultation with MCCY. The update will be provided in our next Diocesan Advisory)*

## Pastoral Provisions during this time

The Diocese and our parish churches will continue to provide the resources (including online worship services, as far as possible) for our members to worship the Lord weekly, whether individually or as a household. In addition to online services provided by several of our parish churches, the Diocese is making online Holy Week services available for all: for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter services, go to [cathedral.org.sg/holyweek](http://cathedral.org.sg/holyweek).

As Anglicans, we value very much the gift of Holy Communion as a means of grace by which we have sacramental communion with the Lord. We believe we are nourished by the powerful life of Christ through the elements when received with repentance and faith. We shall miss the practice of the sacrament during this one-month period. But let us use this time of forgoing Holy Communion to ask God **to increase our desire for Him** (*Ps 63:1-8*). Let **the longing** for our regular worship services and for sacramental communion with the risen Lord **grow** (*Ps 42:1-6*). This thirsting and longing for God will be incorporated in the prayer time of some of our online services.

Although we forgo sacramental communion with the Lord for a period of time, let us remember that the Lord’s presence is not restricted to His presence in Holy Communion. Remember that the Lord has promised us His presence until the time of His bodily return in glory:

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name, **there am I among them.**”* (Mt 18:20)

*'And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**"'* (Mt 29:18-20)

So, whenever we worship the Lord, even without the celebration of Holy Communion, let us desire and expect that we will encounter His presence by the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe the Lord will not leave us impoverished spiritually at this time.

## **A Unique Time In God's Hands**

In fact, it could well be that in God's good and mysterious way, the very conditions brought about by COVID-19, where we lose our normative experience of Church services, body life and Holy Communion, are precisely the conditions in which the Lord wants to wake His Church up spiritually, build us as disciples and use us effectively to bring HOPE to our nation and beyond.

**This is the Year of Discipleship, and God has chosen the context.**

Beloved, the LORD God Almighty is on the throne and he is working out His purposes through this time of shaking. Firstly, the Lord is drawing me and many other leaders to a level of dependence and intimacy with Him not known before. Secondly, the Lord is bringing His people to a deeper and more thorough-going repentance that will lead to amendment of life and winsome holiness before a watching world.

Thirdly, I can see that the Lord is connecting His body across denominational lines and uniting us in mission and ministry. Finally, I see in my mind's eyes a mighty harvest of new lives coming to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord!

## **Braced for the Long Haul**

The message from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 3<sup>rd</sup> April is a sobering and rallying call. The nation has not stemmed the tide of COVID-19 yet. We need to take decisive and painful action now as well as prepare for a longer-term battle and recovery period.

The whole world is facing a continuously evolving situation with a very high level of anxiety and uncertainty. Singapore's national leaders and frontline personnel are doing their very best and God is blessing their efforts. **But this battle with COVID-19 is beyond human conquest.** Only the LORD God Almighty can turn the tide and restore life, and light, and joy! He will, as His people pray beseechingly and seek His face. And I am confident He will do so in His time!

A continuously evolving situation means that the Advisories of our Diocesan COVID-19 Task Force will constantly need to be updated. The Task Force will put together an Advisory to follow-up on measures announced in PM Lee's speech and after receiving MCCY's Advisory to all Religious Organisations. Pray for the Task Force, all your pastors, the senior Diocesan leaders and me.

By the Spirit's power, let us constantly remember the unshakable victory of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us not shrink back in fear but step forward in faith to live for God in the midst of the adversity.

People of God, support one another in the body of Christ and minister to people in need around you (Gal 6:10).

I close with a text from Scripture that binds us all in common faith and duty:

*'...he (God) has said, "**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**"...*

*Do not neglect to **do good and to share what you have,**  
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.'*

(Heb 13:5c, 16)

In God we trust,



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