

**Dear Friends,**

Instead of a briefing today, we have a Good Friday reflection from Canon Rowena Pailing, Canon Missioner at Blackburn Cathedral:

"COVID-19 has thrown into sharp relief the fragility of human life and of our bodies. Bodies, and what it means to be embodied, are also at the forefront in Holy Week: the words 'this is my body' and the washing of feet at the Last Supper; the wounds inflicted on the cross on Good Friday; the missing body on Easter morning.

Paul uses the body as a way of exploring our relationship and communion with Jesus, most famously at 1 Corinthians 12: *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.* It is a striking image, and through it Paul emphasises not just our togetherness, but also the variety of human gifts: *If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

Each one of us is called to be part of the body of Christ, but as ourselves, different and unique. That is always the case, but now especially we can see that for some people this means working in difficult circumstances. For others it means holding themselves apart, away from the limelight, allowing themselves to be served. This is just as important a role, but we know from Peter's reaction when Jesus washes his feet at the Last Supper, that such humility and trust can be an enormous challenge. In some cases, our task as members of the body of Christ even means doing the very opposite of actions which are normally central to Christian life: keeping church doors locked, instead of offering welcome. In fact, most of the rules we have probably taken for granted no longer apply.

The reasons are completely different, but the disruption and dismissal of previously accepted norms gives us a glimpse into the upheaval experienced by the first disciples. Never again will I suggest that perhaps they should have listened to Jesus' teachings more carefully, and anticipated the Cross and Resurrection! When the world as we know it is turned upside down, the only constant is God.

It is easy to say we are all in it together, and we just need to be patient. But each person's experience will be different, whether we are 'eyes' or 'ears' or 'noses'. It is especially hard for those who do not feel safe in their own homes. For them, patience takes on its true meaning – not just 'waiting' but 'suffering'. Many people are searching for the good: celebrating acts of kindness and building stronger communities. There is no doubt it has raised the profile of the social isolation experienced by many *before* the pandemic, and the hope must be that when it is all over, the positive steps which have been taken to address this will continue.

The fixtures of our lives have changed, and the world around seems barely recognisable. But though we are many, we are one body. As members of the body of

Christ we can still walk with him this Holy Week, and on Easter Sunday celebrate the hope and joy of the promise of new life in the Resurrection."

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Unless there are urgent developments there will be no further briefings until Easter Tuesday. However please note that the Coronavirus email address will be closely monitored throughout the weekend and members of the task group are always available.

Any question or queries, please email: [coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org](mailto:coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org).

***Please also email if you are unwell or self-isolating.***

Please be assured of our prayers for you and those you serve as we keep the Great Three Days of Holy Week and commence our celebration of Easter.

***Keep us, good Lord,***

***under the shadow of your mercy***

***in this time of uncertainty and distress.***

***Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,***

***and lift up all who are brought low;***

***that we may rejoice in your comfort***

***knowing that nothing can separate us from your love***

***in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

***Amen.***

Yours,

**The Coronavirus Task Group**