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| [View this email in your browser](https://mailchi.mp/94c743541051/plans-for-holy-week-and-easter-a-message-from-bishop-james?e=d016ef36b7" \t "_blank)  |

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| Thursday 2 April, 2020  |

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| **Plans for Holy Week and Easter - A message from Bishop James** |

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| **To all role holders in the Diocese***A downloadable version of this message is available* [*here*](https://mcusercontent.com/0b375b1912f2d9f546f580f63/files/4d04ab41-ae89-488b-b270-1cf18389ab1e/Bishops_Easter_letter_2020_04_02_J_to_Diocese_re_HWE.pdf)Dear Brothers and Sisters **Holy Week and Easter**Walking together’, whether literally as on a March of Witness or figuratively, is very much part of our normal approach to this season of Passiontide and Easter. We may speak of walking together with our Lord in the Way of the Cross.  Not being able to be with one another physically over this season is likely, therefore, to be very difficult for many of us. We will miss those services, gatherings and shared spiritual disciplines in which we would normally participate for our spiritual nourishment and renewal. For many, therefore, there will be a very real sense of loss – privation, even. But what is becoming clear is that, while we may not gather together in our various places of worship, people are preparing all kinds of means by which the season may still be observed with devotion and joy. I do believe that, despite that which will not be possible, we will find ourselves discovering new insights and riches as we enter into the narrative of our Lord’s Passion and Resurrection in new ways. Especially in this time of uncertainty, anxiety and suffering, we may perhaps learn more of what it means ‘to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings’ (Philippians 3.10). As you consider, individually and in your dispersed communities, how you might journey through this season, there is an increasing range of resources available from a variety of sources.  These include opportunities to share together online and also suggestions for prayer and activity within a household. **Online resources**There is a new [‘Holy Week and Easter’ section on the diocesan website](https://www.rochester.anglican.org/resources/seasonal/easter-and-holy-week/) which gathers some of these resources. Here are three links which I would particularly like draw to your attention.  1. **Our Cathedral** has recorded [acts of worship](http://www.rochestercathedral.org/worship-online) for Monday to Wednesday of Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Morning.  These will be at [www.rochestercathedral.org/worship-online](http://www.rochestercathedral.org/worship-online) and include music, readings, prayers and reflections.  Service sheets are also available to download for use alongside the recordings or on their own.  You can use these at any time on the relevant day.

  1. **The Church of England** nationally has [collated some really useful information and ideas](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-parishes/holy-week-and-easter-2020). This includes material and guidance appropriate to different ecclesial traditions, and also points to services which will be broadcast.  I will add some further comments below.

  1. **Churches Together in England** is promoting [‘Sing Resurrection on Easter Day’](https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/571592/Home/News/Latest_news/Sing_Resurrection_on.aspx) – details at This is an invitation to people across the country to sing two Easter hymns from our doorsteps or windows at 10am on Easter Morning.

  1. **#PalmCrossSelfie and Take Up the Cross Challenge** - across our Diocese, we are invited to take part in some virtual signs of witness on Palm Sunday and during Holy Week. More details on our dedicated [Holy Week and Easter page.](https://www.rochester.anglican.org/resources/seasonal/easter-and-holy-week/)

 **Maundy Thursday**In addition to the services mentioned above we have some specific plans for Maundy Thursday:  * **Service of Renewal of Ministerial Commitment:**We will be sharing a pre-recorded service of re-dedication, ‘as live’ at 10.30am on Maundy Thursday; this is when our usual Chrism Service will have taken place. This will be shared on our [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/CofERochester/?ref=settings) and on [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/user/Roffensis1?feature=mhee). It will be an opportunity for us all to recommit ourselves to God and our various ministries, whether they be ordained or lay. A downloadable service sheet will be available on our [Holy Week and](https://www.rochester.anglican.org/resources/seasonal/easter-and-holy-week/) [Easter webpage](https://www.rochester.anglican.org/resources/seasonal/easter-and-holy-week/) from the Wednesday of Holy Week and will also be shared in the The Digest on Wednesday 8 April.

  * **Maundy Thursday evening Agape:** Some may wish to consider some form of Agape meal, which could be shared on (for example) Zoom.  If anybody has a copy of ‘Lent, Holy Week and Easter’ (no longer published), there is an outline for such an event.  And of course such an event is to be seen neither as a misappropriated Jewish Seder, nor as a celebration of Holy Communion.

  * **Easter message**: I will be filming an Easter message which will be available on our [Diocesan YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/Roffensis1?feature=mhee) and [Vimeo channels](https://vimeo.com/user7938830). Links will be shared on social media and in The Digest.

 **Holy Communion**An additional word on this. [The national document referred to at 2 (above)](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-parishes/holy-week-and-easter-2020), refers to the celebration of Holy Communion by bishops and priests in their homes, whether alone or with their household. Such celebrations may of course be live-streamed.  While a celebration of Holy Communion by a priest on their own may (even in church) not be normal practice in the Church of England, in the present circumstances I am pleased to confirm that: 1. priests may celebrate Holy Communion in their homes;
2. such celebrations may be by the priest alone;
3. where reservation of the sacrament is required (less likely as we are unable to distribute to the sick), this also may be in the home in a suitable and seemly place.

  That section of the document also suggests that some will abstain from receiving Holy Communion for as long as the whole people of God may not receive – that is my current practice, though that is my personal choice.  There is also a section on the practice of what is called [‘Spiritual Communion.’](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance%20on%20Spiritual%20Communion%20and%20Coronavirus.pdf) For further reading on these and related issues: * My Chaplain, Lindsay, has written [on her blog](https://revteapot.wordpress.com/2020/04/01/hiatus-in-public-worship-a-reflection/) about this matter.
* There is a relevant article in the current edition of [The Tablet by Thomas O’Loughlin](https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/17770/reimagining-the-eucharist)
* And, while still Cardinal Ratzinger, Benedict XVI [wrote on eucharistic fasting](https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/03/19/joseph-ratzinger-on-fasting-from-the-eucharist/)

 **A strange land**It is clear that we will be living in this ‘strange land’ of quasi-exile from our normal patterns of church life and life more generally for some time to come.  We are also increasingly aware that people in our own families, households and communities are personally affected – and some, very sadly, have died. Many among us are in some of the ‘essential’ roles in society and facing considerable pressures in those roles and places.  I am, therefore, hugely grateful for all the efforts that are being made to serve those around us, not least to those working with Bishop Simon to guide and strengthen our community outreach at this time. In days such as these, our commitment to the ministry of prayer with and for our neighbours (in the fullest sense) is paramount.  Even if there is nothing else we are able to do, we can pray. And my prayer for all of us is that, in these strange and discomforting times and especially in these coming days, we will walk with our Lord in new ways, standing again at the foot of his Cross and meeting him afresh in the garden of early Easter Day, being fed by him on the lakeside shore. With my prayers and good wishes for God’s blessing in this season. |

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| **The Rt Revd James Langstaff**Lord Bishop of Rochester and Bishop to HM Prisons  |

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