



*The Anglican Bishop of Auckland*

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## **A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND**

Tēnā koutou katoa

Five weeks of Level 4 isolation is a very long haul for people living within the Auckland boundaries, and I thank God for the perseverance of people as we work together to overcome the Delta variant outbreak. I also thank God for the perseverance of the people of our worshipping communities around the Diocese as we work hard to stay connected during this time. We rejoice that in some parts of the Diocese people are now in Level 2 and can plan to gather together in small groups again.

Whatever Alert Level we are in, the work to maintain our common life is challenging and unceasing. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to clergy, ministry teams, lay leaders, and all who support them as they undertake this ministry for us. Because of their work we have been able to maintain corporate worship, offer care to one another, and still proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

From the Neligan House team, we have offered our best advice to the Diocese as a whole about how to apply the health guidelines so that church life can continue as best as we are able, especially as we look towards gathering physically once again.

For me, all of this has demonstrated our being a Diocesan Church at its best. I have witnessed wonderful levels of collaboration and support as people have encouraged one another, shared ideas and advice, and held together over this past month. The efforts made to keep people connected have been hugely valued and have highlighted the joy we find in the relationships we share within our worshipping communities.

As we look towards lowering alert levels again, a lot of care is being taken about how we will manage church life and especially gathering physically together. Our approach is a cautious one, seeking to start simply and to rejoice in just being together, and then building on what we are able to do as we gain confidence around safe practice and the management of the virus in the wider community.

Not everyone will immediately feel able to return to worship in a church building and you should feel no pressure to do so. A lot of best practice advice has been provided to local church leadership as we prepare to welcome people back and I will not tire you here with all those details! But one of the things I do want to comment on is the Eucharist.

I know that many people will be looking forward to celebrating the sacrament together again, and it is one of the areas where we are wanting to take good care because it involves closer contact. So please be patient as that is worked out carefully in your local church. It may take a little time to work towards that being feasible in your place.

I have been asked about Communion being offered in one kind only, that is the giving of just the bread to people. There were varying practices about this through the centuries prior to the Reformation. For different reasons at times the cup was not offered, and it was understood that the benefit of the sacrament was received through the taking of the bread or the cup. This is a doctrine known as concomitance and it dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

It has unquestionably been Anglican practice that both the bread and the common cup have been offered to people. Article 30 of the 39 Articles is clear that this should be the case, a prescription made in response to Catholic theology of the time that denied the cup to lay people. Nevertheless, as noted above, an ancient Christian theological tradition is that the benefit of the sacrament is received through either of the elements. This has been borne out in our own practice in situations where people have chosen to only take the bread at Communion, for instance: people who are sick; those who do not drink alcohol; and young children. We would not want to say that they have not fully participated in Holy Communion.

As we prepare to celebrate Communion again, only the bread will be distributed. This is a health decision and is not the *denying* of the cup to people. It is based in an ancient Christian theological tradition, and in different situations is borne out in our own practice aside from these times. The cup will be restored as soon as it is deemed safe to do so. For those who have been wondering about this issue, I hope that is of some help.

A favourite parable of many people is that of the Good Samaritan. I like it too and the best part of it for me is the way that Jesus finishes it with a revised question. He is originally asked “Who is my neighbour?” but at the end of the parable Jesus is asking his hearers “Which of these was a neighbour?” Jesus has reframed the question to focus not on where our obligations might lie, but on what it means to act with neighbourly love towards all people.

This is such a time for us to be thinking about what it means to be a neighbour in the way that we show care and respect and inclusion within the wider community and likewise within the worshipping community. As we consider what that question means for us, let’s also hear the final words of Jesus in the parable: “Go and do likewise.”

With my prayers for you all

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**Bishop**