

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Venerable Meurig Williams
Archdeacon of France & Monaco
Commissary & Chaplain to the Bishop in Europe



12 March 2020

Dear Friends

France & Monaco Archdeaconry Synod 29th April to 2 May 2020

After consultation with the Archdeaconry Standing Committee, I have reluctantly concluded that our forthcoming Synodical meeting in St Jacut de la Mer will be postponed, due to the risks posed by the current rate at which the Covid 19 virus is mutating. I am very sorry we will not be meeting this year, but the circumstances are exceptional and my over-riding concern is the potential risk to the health of Synod members. I believe this is in line with President Macron's broadcast last night.

My reading of the situation, in the light of information from the French health ministry is that, by the time of the Synod, France is likely to have moved to Stage 3 of the containment strategy. This means that substantial gatherings of the size of the Synod may be legally proscribed. Added to this is my concern that some delegates will be travelling from areas where the spread of the virus is escalating and the risk of infecting others is real. I am also aware that large numbers of people would need to travel by public transport and this could potentially expose people to the risk of infection, regardless of whether any timetable restrictions are operative by that time.

Given the overall demographic profile of the membership of the Synod, a good proportion of us would be especially at risk ourselves, or else risk becoming carriers of the disease into a vulnerable peer group after the Synod had concluded. Given the nature of the accommodation at St. Jacut, with large numbers of people living, worshipping and eating at close proximity to one another in a residential setting over three days, I believe it would be simply irresponsible to proceed on the basis of the current information and advice available to us.

I am aware that there is Synodical business to be transacted (which might include elections) and I will be consulting with the Standing Committee about the most appropriate way to facilitate this in the coming weeks.

There are substantial resources on the Diocesan website providing advice and information for churches and individuals relating to the management and containment of the virus.

David Bean, our Archdeaconry Treasurer, will be in touch separately with chaplaincy treasurers regarding the Archdeaconry 'Quota'. But do be assured that payments already made for board and lodging at this year's Synod will be refunded.

It is significant that many of us are facing different degrees of restriction during this season of Lent, when we are invited to discover how we can live with greater simplicity, with a deeper awareness of God's purposes and a wider awareness of the needs of others. In such situations, I am reminded of the words of Francis Xavier: 'Where God has planted you, there you should seek to flourish.'

I look forward to seeing you at next year's synod to be held in Lyon, April 14-16.

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In the meantime, this comes with my best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for you and your chaplaincies at a demanding and uncertain time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry', written in a cursive style.

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