

To Bishop Alan, the Priests and Deacons and your families, and anyone else who is reading this,



Easter time greetings from me Fr Gerald Gostling flying the Brentwood flag in the Sister Diocese of Dundee, and joined in this greeting by Bishop Graham Rose and the priests of the Diocese.

All of you I am sure wear more than one 'hat'! For these few words I wear my CARITAS hat.

Aware that each person, family, community, parish, Diocese... has their own story to tell and be listened to I am pleased to respond to the offer to share a little from our Sister Diocese of Dundee.

LOCKDOWN and life with no alcohol or cigarettes! We have been on 'lockdown' since midnight of Thursday 26th March and this phase will remain in place until at least the end of April. The seriousness of the virus and the affect of lockdown on people's lives has, like everywhere else, gradually become evident. The rules are more or less like your own in the UK. However an agonising deprivation for many is that all sales of alcohol and cigarettes have been banned and strictly no drinking of alcohol in public (if you had some stored away). You need to work or live in a Township with related informal settlements such I do to understand why this ban has been put in place, and to experience the culture of the Shebeens or Taverns which you find on nearly every corner in the Locations. Such a ban then has to be Nationwide. It was also argued that drinking a lot of alcohol can make you less able to fight off the virus if you become infected. With the help of the Military who have been deployed this ban and other rules have been strictly observed, and the criminals have crawled into their holes. It is essential that communities are not only safe but feel safe.

COMMUNITY SCREENING and TESTING started last week that is for the rural areas, the informal Settlements, the homeless, and certain Townships. As this continues we'll begin to see the real numbers in relation to the spread of this corona virus in the country. 19 of our carers and other members of our own Projects volunteered to be trained to help with the Department of Health and take part in this scheme, and at the same time identify individuals, families, child headed households, sick, elderly and so on who may be in particular need of assistance. Every household without exception is being visited and all members screened. For an example 20 plus members of the Multi Purpose Ekuthuleni Project in Leslie/Lebohang have been trained and started their visiting this week. I take my hat off to all of them.

NO ONE TO GO HUNGRY: The Department of Social Development, the Disaster Management Team (supposed to be set up in each Municipality area), the Department of Health, cooperating together and with groups and organisations INCLUDING CARITAS and the local communities, are working together to form Teams who will visit every household, with no exceptions, in the poorer areas to know the numbers living in a household at the moment and give them a number to ring, or a neighbour to ring on their behalf, if they are in need of food. The aim is that within a day or so food parcels will be delivered to their door. In many areas in our Diocese they have already achieved this, and so far the scheme is working well. It is a lot of work and organising but the communities are responding in a remarkable and caring way. There are SO many who have literally no money and no food because of the lockdown and their living conditioning extremely poor, in particular the shack dwellers - but now nobody should go hungry or be lonely.

CARITAS DUNDEE: Love in Action - *Izenzo Zotando*: As young and still growing up as "CARITAS" is in the Diocese we have been classified as an essential service and so I have been able to get a travel and work Permit for our Coordinator, and we have put out the offer in the Diocese to help other key

workers and carers to get one if needed as we are encouraging everyone to be inventive in the way they care so that no one gets neglected; to continue feeding schemes for children who are missing their one meal a day at school, food parcels, the soup kitchens etc. The weekend before lockdown I was able to arrange some workshops for the projects who care for orphans and vulnerable children and youth (little ones grow up very quickly!!) on hygiene, the rules of lockdown, keeping occupied and awareness that children need a lot of love, have time to play, what to do in the event of sickness etc; and then we arranged for the shopping of basic foods, because for example in one of our Project groups we have 63 children to keep an eye on and provide food and some continuing education. Being allowed to continue work it means I am not so locked down as most – I thank God for this privilege and trust in His protection.

MASS and PRAYER and COMMUNICATION: like yourselves a number of parishes who have the expertise in the community have set up live streaming in the church, mainly via face book as this is the cheapest and easiest - the high fliers in other parts of the country, and praise God for them, can be accessed on the web. The Jesuits have provided a huge amount of help by live streaming Holy Week and Easter and providing Mass at 9am each Sunday, with a good Jesuitical sermon! Access to wifi, having airtime and data is a difficulty in the poorer areas. We try to help with data and it is worth every cent to see a group or family unit on their knees huddled around a cell phone sharing in and praying during a live Mass or exposition from the parish church. There will I am sure be massive rejoicing when everyone can again assemble to greet each other and to pray together at Mass.

I celebrate Mass by myself each morning including Sunday at 5.30am to be in solidarity with the prayer and Mass that is being celebrated around the world; and then also 9am on Sunday, and via whatsAp or ZOOM give a blessing to some of our groups. PALM SUNDAY and HOLY WEEK Bishop Graham and I celebrated together as we are both “locked down” at the same place, so of course we do see each other nearly every day!! In fact Bishop Graham and myself met today (24th) to discuss how we may best respond *as a Diocese* with CARITAS to this situation. Watch this space!

WAR ROOM: this is a place, set apart from the Municipality where people may go for example to discuss and sort out matters with the local Ward Councillor, usually a grievance or some issue such as we experience at the moment. Then the hope from ‘war’ to a peaceful resolution!

GOSPEL of the LOCKDOWN: I have as part of the Caritas communication to the Diocese invited Priests and Sisters and Project leaders and anyone else to share their stories of how they have managed and what has been the local experience in this strange, and for so many people difficult time, that is to share the living Gospel of real life. I hope that the Coordinator and myself will collate the material to produce a Newsletter so that this time is both shared, miracles grace identified, and documented for history.

DENIS HURLEY CENTRE and Raymond Perrier’s “Long Good Friday” reflection. I visited the Denis Hurley Centre in Durban a few weeks ago to see Raymond. He is a Brentwood man whose parents still live in Chelmsford whom I have known since his teenage days. He was selected to be the first Director of the Denis Hurley Centre in Durban. Previously he was Director of the Jesuit Institute here in South Africa. I think you will find his sharing quite moving. The DHC has become quite a leader in the care and outreach and ecumenism in the City of Durban.

God bless you all, and thank you. Our Lady of Walsingham pray for us

Uxolo lweNkosi malube nani njalo

Fr Gerald G 24th April 2020: Dundee Diocese, South Africa