

'live hopefully, love generously and pray earnestly'

Dear all,

Most of you will be aware by now that the Government has advised that we all increase social distancing measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

In light of guidance, the Archbishops have advised that public worship and midweek meetings are suspended until further notice.

So from here on, until the threat of the virus is reduced:

- **all Sunday services held in our Shelswell Churches are now suspended.**
- any activities where we gather together in the church buildings or elsewhere are also cancelled for the time being. This will include the Little Lambs Toddler Group, Youth Church, PCC meetings, the APCM, soup lunches, other meetings...

However the Archbishops make the important point that we are not shutting up shop. Rather we are needing to be **a different kind of church rooted in prayer and serving others.**

With that in mind:

1. Prayer

I would encourage you to pray daily. We will be leaving some copies of a booklet 'Praying during the Pandemic' in each church, which you are welcome to take and which you may find useful. Please let me know if you would like one put through your letter box. The Church of England website also has some online resources.

I am hoping that the Ministry Team can continue to say morning prayer together on a Monday morning using Skype or a similar facility. In addition myself and Yvonne will be visiting each of our churches in turn to say morning and evening prayer. This will not be public worship that everyone can attend, but an offering of prayer and praise that we make on your behalf. During that time, we will pray for the congregation of that church and that village, and where possible we will ring the church bell as a sign that we are doing this.

2. Sunday Worship

I hope that during this difficult period we can maintain an awareness of the community that exists between us. Whilst we cannot worship in the same place, we can worship together.

On Sundays at 10.00 am, I will be celebrate the Eucharist. Whilst you are not able to be physically present with me, I will be doing this on behalf of all of us. I am finding out about live streaming this, so that it appears on the internet. This will enable those who would like to join with me.

For those who don't want to do that, I would encourage you to join with us by praying at the same time. You might like to use the format for 'spiritual communion' which is attached to this email.

3. Service to others

This is a time when we can shine out the love of Christ into the world around us.

I know that many of you have offered to be part of the network of community support in our different villages, offering help with fetching shopping and medication to those who are self isolating, and I thank you for this.

Many others of you are needing to protect yourselves by avoiding social contact and staying at home. You too have a key role to play in supporting others through prayer, through phone contact, letters and emails.

And of course, we all have a role to play in following the advice of the government about hand washing, social distancing, not buying more than we need, and so on.

4. National Day of Prayer and Action

The Presidents of Churches Together in England are calling us to join this Sunday, Mothering Sunday, in a **National Day of Prayer and Action**. At such a time as this, when so many are fearful and there is great uncertainty, we are reminded of our dependence on our loving Heavenly Father and the future that he holds. We are asked to pray especially for those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in our Health Service. And at **7pm, light a candle in the windows of your home** as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished.

5. Keeping in touch

During the coming weeks, the ministry team will do their best to keep in touch with you through occasional phone calls or emails. If you have particular prayer needs, do let us know, and please do feel free to contact us.

The challenges of the coming months will be profound, but we know that God is God of both the cross and the empty tomb. So we can stand firm in the knowledge that he is with us during these difficult times, and will bring us to a better place. So in some words from my favourite psalm, '*Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul, and why are you so disquieted within me? O put your trust in God; for I will yet give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.*' (from Psalm 42)

With every blessing,

Alice

19.3.2020

Loving God,
We pray for all those who are suffering because of the coronavirus, may they know your healing power.
When we are afraid for ourselves and our loved ones, give us your strength and courage.
When we feel alone and isolated, reassure us with a sense of your presence.
Give wisdom to those in authority and may our community work together for the good of all.
We give thanks for those who care for others and ask you to bless them in all they do.
We ask this in the name of Jesus, healer and physician.
Amen

With thanks to the Diocese of Bath and Wells for this prayer.

