

Dear all,

The current pandemic with COVID-19 is an extraordinary scenario and requires us all to take precautions and behave differently. We all have a duty of care to each other and need to try and protect the vulnerable members in or congregation and community, this includes all those over the age of 65/70 (vague and not specific age range, bear in mind a recent death in the UK was in a 59 year old) and those of any age with underlying health issues (cancer, asthma, diabetes, heart disease.....). As you will have heard in the news, we have now been advised to avoid all non-essential contact and the over 70s to self-isolate from this weekend. And the Church of England has just announced that all public worship be suspended.

Please heed the advice from the NHS, if you are unwell isolate yourself. This is to protect others and slow the spread of the virus. The symptoms are not specific, like a flu and need not be severe – the NHS website gives all the details. The virus is contagious, can have severe consequences, and so a just get on with it attitude is not appropriate.

We need to consider how we continue with events that are already planned. Given the updated advice, this is now an easier task as we have been instructed to avoid non-essential contact. With this in mind We (Pete and the Wardens) have taken the decision to cancel:

- All regular meetings, including things like TOGS, PCC, lent study.
- Church weekend is cancelled.
- Easter celebrations including Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services are cancelled.
- Sunday services are cancelled until further notice

We are concerned that the Café exposes volunteers to the infection, again with the recent government advice the café will close from 17th of March.

Advice will continue to be updated via the Church of England, NHS etc. Please bear in mind the advice will not cover every scenario and so we need to be sensible and I would suggest caution. We understand that the death rate in vulnerable groups is high (much higher than flu), we would rather that any precautions we took were on the more cautious end of the scale than regret not doing enough in 6 months time.

Pete met with Estelle to discuss how we care for our congregation both pastorally and practically. We are considering starting up a 'Buddy' system where people who are still able to move around link up with those who are in isolation. As plans are developed over the coming week we will let you know. If you would like to help with this or would appreciate being part of it please speak to Sas. Ministerially we are exploring creative ways of people receiving ministry, devotions via Facebook, Website etc. Details will sent out as to how you can access this.

This is also an opportunity to be proactive within our own neighbourhoods. Think of ways in which we can help the more vulnerable who are living close by. We have seen on the TV many heartwarming stories of people who are going that extra mile for their neighbours and really demonstrating the love of God.

These are challenging times but also times when we can be creative in how we continue in fellowship and support of one another.

'...For I am convinced that nothing.... will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' Rom 8:36-39

Best wishes

Pete, Derek and Steve