



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Wednesday, 18 March, 2020

Many of you will have heard that, in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have directed that public worship is suspended until further notice. This is in line with the national and international response to the virus. I think it will help to quote briefly from their letter of 17 March:

‘Public worship will have to stop for a season. Our usual pattern of Sunday services and other mid-week gatherings must be put on hold. But this does not mean that the Church of England has shut up shop. Far from it.’

What will this look like and how will we respond in the Merton Priory Parish and churches of Christ Church, Holy Trinity and St John the Divine; how will the “shop” remain open? For it must, so that we can continue as a community of support, friendship and hope and for this I invite your help.

There are four things I want to say today:

1. This Sunday, 22 March (Mothering Sunday) the usual public services are naturally suspended, but the clergy will be present at ChristChurch at 11.15 am; at St John the Divine at 9.30am; at Holy Trinity at 9.00am and 10.00am and 7.00pm. We will be using material prepared by the National Church and in collaboration with Churches Together in England, who have called for this to be a National Day of Prayer and Action.

For these services, it is expected people will not attend, but we will provide liturgical material through our digital communications, as well as printing hard copies to be left near the doors of our churches.

One action, however, all are urged to join in with is the lighting of a candle in the window of your home at 7pm.

2. The Archbishops and our own Bishop of Southwark have encouraged church buildings to be open for prayer wherever possible, so from Monday 23 March our own weekday (Monday to Saturday) pattern will look like this:

8.00-9.00am St John the Divine

1.00-2.00pm Holy Trinity

7.00-8.00pm ChristChurch

The Bishop of Southwark has particularly suggested we can use these times to pause in whatever we are doing and say the Lord’s Prayer, praying for all affected by the coronavirus and our nation. You can do this at home, out and about or in our three churches at these times.

If you would like to help with ensuring our buildings are open for prayer, please do get in touch.

3. One vocation of the Church is to look out for the vulnerable, so we have begun plans to keep in touch with those who are self-isolating or housebound and to offer pastoral and practical support. If you are in the categories of:
over-70
under-70, but with underlying health conditions
or a pregnant woman
(or know someone who is in one of these categories)
then do please let us know if help is needed;
equally, if you are fit and well and might be able to offer practical or telephone support to these people we would love to hear from you.

4. We are starting to think how we can all continue to be connected to the life of worship and prayer of our churches, so will be producing digital resources and hard copies of prayer, thoughts for the day, possibly streaming services, signposting to national resources and more besides. If you can help with producing such liturgical material or have particular technical expertise or any ideas do please also get in touch.

Through e-mail, websites, social media, notices and telephone we aim to keep you all in touch over this period. There will be further regular communications, not least about our patterns on following Sundays.

These are unprecedented and worrying times. The Bishop of Southwark writes:

‘This crisis is our opportunity to live out our faith by acts of love and kindness to others. So please make sure that you offer the appropriate safe help to those who may need to self-isolate or who will be especially lonely at this time. Make sure that people know that you are praying for them and care for them.’

We can always pray and to that end, in conclusion, can I offer this prayer (verses from Psalm 3):

You, Lord, are a shield about me;
you are my glory, and the lifter up of my head.
When I cry aloud to the Lord,
he will answer me from his holy hill;
I lie down and sleep and rise again,
because the Lord sustains me.
Salvation belongs to the Lord:
may your blessing be upon your people.
Amen.

Yours in Christ,

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On behalf of the Merton Priory Coronavirus Task Group
(Alison Judge, Belemo Alagoa, Richard Blades, Kerry Porritt)