



FROM THE VICAR

Dear brothers and sisters,

We continue to find ourselves in uncertain and unsettling times. On behalf of the ministry team at church, I wanted to send a letter to check in and also to inform you where we are at.

As ever, we are following the mandates set out by national Church of England guidelines. **As of this Sunday, clergy have been informed that they can 'live-stream' services from within their church buildings.** This is currently only for the incumbent (ie the Vicar).

There has been a lot in the national press recently about the appropriateness – or not – of a single priest being in church when their congregation and community cannot be with them. I share some of those sentiments, and have always strongly held to the view that we are the church, rather than the building. However I also see the building as a sacred space, so important to us all and to the wider parish. As such, **after much prayer and pondering, it feels right at this time that I return to the church to offer the Eucharist on your behalf every Wednesday and Sunday at 10am.**

For myself, moving back into church after worshipping at home will feel a strange shift, and I imagine some of you will feel the same. Do join us for coffee on Sunday at 11.30am perhaps where we can touch base on that. I will of course miss you physically being present, but know that you are with me spiritually. We will also start incorporating other church members via pre-recorded readings, sermons and intercessions.

It is also very important to note as well that a return to church for us all is not going to be quick, nor are there currently any plans in place for when that might happen. **Our first and top priority is to protect each and every person who comes through our doors.** As such, we will act in accordance with legal and church guidelines as and when they come out, but even then, for us as a church, things will not return to normal for a long time.

I completely recognise how sad that is to hear, and indeed, is very sad to type: but know that I am praying for each of you and myself and the ministry team are here for you and will help in any way we can (in compliance with social distancing measures and healthy and safety). I have also been very

moved with how well we have 'held together' as a church: worshipping and meeting virtually is not ideal but for my part, it does feel as if the Spirit is at work.

Denis asked in his sermon last week: 'how are you finding lockdown?' I ask again: 'how are you finding lockdown?' I don't think there has been a bigger strain on our mental health certainly in my lifetime. Please don't feel as if you have to carry the burden alone: mental health is, sadly, still something many of us struggle to talk about – but there are people to listen.

In the coming days I will circulate some national material to support mental health. In the meantime, whilst I am always available at the end of the phone, I know that some of you don't like to call for fear of disturbing me (but please do!!) As such, **I will be setting aside every Sunday evening between 7pm and 8pm as a vestry and vigil hour.** Though I pray for you all regularly, this hour will be a time for me to intentionally pray for you and I will be sat by the phone: if there is anything you wish to call about or simply want to hear a human voice, then please do call. As I say, please always feel free to call at other times, but I know having a set time might be helpful for some of you.

In the meantime, the ministry team and myself are here and are praying for you. Do check in with us or the care group leaders if you are in need. Above all remember that God is with us. St. Paul famously wrote, (to which we might want to add 'neither coronavirus):

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

James