

Pastoral Letter | 24th March 2020

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:5

Dear

By now, I hope you will have heard that as a result of the ongoing countrywide response to tackle coronavirus and slow it's spread, on Tuesday 17th March the Circuit Leadership Team took the difficult decision that we needed to **suspend all church activity until further notice**.

Over the past week, working with various other people in our churches, we have been working to establish a new pattern for how we will be church community together over the duration of this period of social distancing and restriction. I write this letter to briefly set out what we have put in place, and how we hope to be community together in the weeks to come, **watching over one another in love**.

Adapting our Pastoral Network

In an period where we cannot meet with one another physically, phone and email are two incredibly valuable technologies we can, and will utilise. I've been working to set up an email network so that I can send e-mails easily to a large number of people, as a means of sharing news, worship material and signposting people to online resources. If you have an email address and would like to be added, please let me know.

But of course, many of our church communities are not online – about half in fact. Therefore in the last week we have adapted our existing pastoral system with the aim that people are grouped with a **community connector**. In many cases, though not all, these community connectors are already pastoral visitors. The aim has been that all community connectors have internet and email and can therefore service as a connection point between me and other church leaders, and the wider church congregation.

I have asked the community connectors to maintain regular contact with their groups (initially 2-3 times a week) as a means of maintaining pastoral & spiritual care, as well as communicating with you all. I hope they have all made contact with you by now. You are of course also welcome to contact me and other members of our church community – as we all seek to be church together in different ways, watching over one another in love.

Worship Resources

In seeking to be church together while we can't gather together, we are indebted to the many church leaders across the country who have produced many resources. I have set up a page on my blog (link above) which includes lots of worship resources, both online and in hard copy, radio and TV. If you don't have online access, please ask your community connector if you'd like pointers, or give me a call.

I have also been putting together some resources for worship at home and within this pack you will find:

- service resources for Sunday 29th March and Sunday 5th April,
- a daily prayer card,
- Walking through lent: a bible reading and devotional leaflet for lent

I have prepared these with those who do not have internet access in mind (based on some resources supplied by the connexion), and I hope you find them useful. Please do feed back on them. My intention is that every 2-3 weeks I will post further resources for the next 2-3 weeks, and fellow supernumerary ministers and local preachers in our churches are going to be contributing to these moving forwards.

Safeguarding – Keeping yourself safe

With thanks to Pam North, Safeguarding Officer at Felpham, for drafting these for us all.

The impact of Covid-19 is being felt by us all, it is bringing out the best in most people but sadly there are those (a small number) who wish to take advantage of the present situation. Below are some pointers to ensure you safeguard your own security and health. They are not meant to be patronising but are just reminders to help you stay safe and well. Most of the information comes from either the Methodist Church or the banks.

- Please follow all the advice given by the government and medical officers on social distancing and isolation.
- Do not allow strangers in your home, even if they claim to be part of a community support team. Check with the scheme first (not using the phone number supplied by your visitor). **If in doubt, say no.**
- Do not accept an offering of help from someone claiming to be from the church – unless you know them well. Check first with a church friend/leader or Rev Dan.

Money

- Do not pay for shopping in advance.
- Pay for deliveries by:
 - Telephone banking – this can be arranged by phoning the number on the back of your bank card or look for a contact number on a previous written communication from your bank. (Don't be afraid to use the old and helpless tactic – in my experience it is a way to get more 'patient' help!)
 - Cheque (if you don't have Covid 19)
 - Cash as a last resort.

Phone Calls

- We have all become used to false and scam telephone calls. Some criminals are using Covid-19 as an opportunity to defraud people, (including by phone, text and email etc). This includes offering medical products, fake guidance or a safe haven for money. **Please remain vigilant, if it seems too good to be true – it probably is.**
- Do call on friends, family and neighbours if you need help.
- Do call on friends and acquaintances at church, many of us are over 70 but collectively we know many sources of help.
- Do call friends you know from church to have chat we all need social contact whether we are by ourselves, a married couple or a family.
- Don't be frightened to tell a well-meaning caller if it is an inconvenient time to talk and respect other people's time constraints.

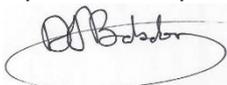
Need Support? – please ask

If you find yourself in a position where you need some support (shopping, a prescription picking up, or just generally want a chat with someone) please contact your community connector, pastoral visitor, anyone on the church's leadership team or myself and we will do all we can to help you during this challenging period.

I have no doubt that this is an anxious time for you all, in one way or another. I share that anxiety. I would love to offer the magic cure, the answer to all our problems, but I can't. What I can offer, is assurance that I believe God is bigger than these dark and anxious times - that God, who came to live with us in Jesus is a light for our lives that the darkness can never, ever overcome.

I pray you know and experience the strength of God, who is hope and life, the love of Christ which is unconditional and un-ending, and the presence of the Spirit who is with us, always.

In peace & hope,



Rev Dan Balsdon