

Dear Friends,

We are writing to you in the light of the new National lockdown, announced by the Prime Minister yesterday.

Quite apart from the troubling coronavirus statistics, with the highly contagious new strain, there is a particular drama about this announcement coming on the first working day following the Christmas break, let alone on the eve of a new School term.

And today is the eve of Epiphany - which we celebrated in Church on 3rd January - a high point in the Christian year, associated with letting the light of the new-born Christ shine out. How challenging then to be facing a radically changed environment, in which we are unable to do many of the things we normally associate with witnessing to Jesus Christ in a New Year. It is therefore important that we encourage one another in our Christian faith, to 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power' (Ephesians 6.10). John Gladwin, writing in the Church Times about the post-pandemic church, also helpfully suggests that our 'agenda is not how we shore up the institution as it is: it is about how we affirm and liberate the life and hope of the whole baptized community, in the service of the whole human community.' Whatever the restrictions we are now living under, my prayer is that all of us, in the exercise of our gifts, everyday demands and responsibilities, are empowered to serve those around us and witness to our faith, however challenging the present may be. And in order to do this we must also remember to look after ourselves, to know when to rest and 'be', trusting in the abundant love God has for each one of us.

In the first place, then, our strong prayers are with everyone, as we digest the news of the latest lock-down, adjust our daily routines, and particularly as those in work adapt working practices, and parents deal with the unenviable challenge of balancing work with home-schooling children. We also pray for all young people having to deal with online learning, missing being with friends, and especially for our students, unable to return to university this term, and ordinands with their college life disrupted once more. And we pray for our key-workers, both teachers and teaching assistants and NHS doctors, nurses and healthcare staff, and all who are feeling vulnerable or living with long-term health conditions. May God equip, surround and sustain all of you with his unfailing love, as we head into mid-winter.

You will be aware that, this time, communal worship is permitted. Our honest opinion, however, is that this sends out mixed messages, when all schools are closed, and there is an expectation to 'stay at home except for exceptional reasons'. We believe that the public health risks in Cambridgeshire are serious. We have a duty to protect everyone, and keep as safe as we can. **James has therefore decided to cancel all of our public worship services until further notice, subject to the approval of the PCC.** This is a great pity, and we appreciate the impact this will have on members of our regular congregations who were still attending Communion. This cancellation excludes special emergency services, such as funerals.

We would now like to set out some of our plans for the duration of the lock-down, and in the light of the official measures and our own discernment of what is appropriate locally. These plans have been worked through by our Covid-safety group, as well as having been referred to the PCC and Ministry Team. They come under nine headings:-

1. Gathered worship cancelled (see above).
2. **Church open for private prayer.** St John's is going to be regularly open for private prayer, and the space will be monitored, with clergy often present if support is needed. Following a funeral this coming Thursday in Church, as from Sunday 10th January, St John's will be open the following times each week: Monday to Thursday from 12-1pm and Sunday from 2-4pm.

We will also keep the sacrament reserved, and provide resources for prayer, which can be used and taken away.

3. **Our main weekly act of worship will resume - 'Church at Home'**, with a pre-recorded service being available on our website, usually by Saturday afternoon, and to be followed at any point, although some may wish to watch it at 10am on Sunday morning.
4. **There will also continue to be lots of online Zoom services** for people to join, including Morning Prayer at 9am on Monday to Thursdays, Compline at 9pm on Wednesdays, Sunday Morning Coffee and Conversation, Evensong (with a reflection) at 6pm on Sundays, and our full range of Home Groups and courses, as well as Youth Group activities.
5. **Resources for families** will continue to be available weekly on our website and we hope that our Church at Home services will include an All Age Introduction or activity each week. Thanks to some funding from the Church Schools Trust, we will also be providing some more Faith at Home activities for families, which we will be preparing to distribute later this month.
6. **This time we also hope to live-stream some special services**, either from James and Chris' homes or in Church, and this may include a weekly service at 10am on Wednesday, as well as some reflections during Lent.
7. **Pastoral support from the clergy and pastoral team** will be available by phone or on zoom, as well as a centralised support being offered more widely to local residents, and members of the congregation (as before) sharing in the wider congregational telephone links scheme, by invitation.
8. **The Queen Edith's Forum 'Happy to Help Scheme'**, which we originally helped to set-up, and the local Food-Hub at St James' Church will continue, and remain a critical avenue of practical support for many people, including those unable to get to the shops, or experiencing loss of work income.
9. **In the context of a new lockdown James will be resuming his work at Addenbrooke's Hospital** as a Locum Chaplain, for around one day per week. This feels a really important and worthwhile way of joining the health service effort, and supporting both staff and patients in a small way.
10. **Finally, we will be providing practical, theological and spiritual resources, via St John's e-news, and our website**, as well as Parish Voice. Please watch this space, and keep a regular eye on all that is being offered via our interactive website. All are also welcome to join our online groups and Zoom services, including those new to St John's.

Please don't hesitate to contact us, if you or someone close to you is in need of support in any way. Please let us know if you have insights about how best we can all respond to this latest stage in the pandemic, support one another and our local community. And, lastly, be assured of our prayers and solidarity. There is a vaccine, there is light at the end of the tunnel, and through this time we believe God is especially with us, and St John's may still go from strength to strength, in God's service in love.

There will be a further St John's e-news, later this week, with information about this Sunday's online 'Church at Home', and links for all our other upcoming services and activities. And if you wish to join us for Morning Prayer, during Monday to Thursday at 9am, the Zoom link is below:

With our prayers and sincere best wishes,

James + Chris

Revd James Shakespeare, tel. 01223 241815, email jshakespeare@btinternet.com
Revd Chris Campbell, tel. 07383 512636, email chris@revcc.uk