

To the church family,

On Tuesday 17 March the Church of England decided that Sunday services ought to be cancelled because of coronavirus. We've decided to stop the rest of our meetings as well because of the government's guidelines about social distancing.

So what will St Mary's be doing?

1. Sundays

Every weekend we'll make a St Mary's service available through our Facebook page and YouTube channel. Our website will link to both of these webpages. It'll be made up of videos recorded by St Mary's leaders on their phones in their homes. It'll be similar to what we'd usually do at church, with readings from the Bible, songs, prayers and a sermon.

We'll record it a day or two in advance, and make it available for us all on Sunday. Perhaps we could all watch it together at 10.30am like usual. For church members who don't have access to a smart phone or the internet, we'll deliver a printed copy of the sermon. Becky our children's worker will distribute resources to parents to help you keep talking to your children about Jesus.

2. Home groups

Our mid-week home groups will still meet to look at the Bible, pray and encourage each other, but using our phones and not face-to-face. Leaders will be in touch with group members about how to do this early next week.

3. Staying in touch and practical help

This will be a difficult period for our country, with many of us self-isolating for a lengthy time. One of the great blessings of being a Christian is that we're part of a church family. Let's be eager to stay in touch and to care for each other. Some of you have family close by. That's great, and the first place we ought to look for practical support (1 Timothy 5:4). But if you don't, be assured St Mary's will support you, whether it's doing some shopping for you, calling for a chat or something else (1 Timothy 5:16). We'll aim to be in touch with each of you at least once a week.

4. Reaching out

The apostle Paul says, "as we have opportunity, *let us do good to all people*, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Think about non-Christian neighbours and friends you have. Many will need the practical and emotional care I've spoken about. Some may be more open to talking about the hope and security we have in Christ. Let's pray for opportunities to live and speak so as to serve others and honour God.

⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7).*

With love in Christ,

Andy Thomas

Minister

Thursday 19 March