

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

I write to update you with regard to our service patterns following my letter to you on New Years Eve and the subsequent announcement of the third national lockdown.

After the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday night it became clear that unlike the first lockdown in March, under this lockdown provision has been made for public worship and private prayer to take place in churches and other buildings under strict Covid compliant restrictions.

I am grateful to the PCC who met at very short notice last night in order to discuss whether we should continue our present practise of meeting online only or whether we should resume physical gathering in Sundays and/or for private prayer during the week.

Our discussion acknowledged the opportunity to provide spiritual relief by gathering physically together, to speak of hope in a time of crisis and to take the opportunity of being able to offer a place of gathering at a time when there are very few such opportunities. Celebrating communion remains an act of holy defiance at a time such as this as is the offering of prayer - with both being reminders of the importance of the incarnation which we have celebrated at Christmas.

We also acknowledged the risk arising from the new strain of Coronavirus which is 50-70% more transmissible than the original COVID strain and also the stress under which our hospitals and surgeries are operating. Additionally there is our duty of care to our staff and volunteers who would need to be in place should we open for private or Sunday prayer.

Having discussed these matters we decided unanimously to maintain the current closure of our building until February. The PCC will meet again at the end of the month to consider when we can return to meeting physically.

After our discussion last night I wrote to Bishop Paul to seek his approval and to grant the necessary dispensation under Canon law. He has replied today granting the dispensation until 15th February.

In the meantime we will continue to worship together online both on a daily basis during the week at 8am and 9pm and also on Sundays with services at 11am and 6.30pm.

As was the case during the first lockdown in March we will continue to focus on our life together through the provision of worship, fellowship and pastoral care. I will be writing separately to small group leaders regarding pastoral care in the coming days and we will be continue with our series of online social and prayer events. Please do read the weekly notice sheet for details.

This letter comes to you with prayers and blessings on this day of the Epiphany. I end with the Collect prayer for today and also a prayer for all of those affected by coronavirus.

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,

and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love.
In Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

With every blessing to you all

Arun