

COVID-19 Update – 25th March 2020

Dear All,

I wrote last week to outline what we, the Church, are required to do in light of regulations issued by the government and by our Archbishops with regard to the continued spread of Covid-19.

You'll appreciate that things have changed quickly over the past few days so I wanted to write again, both to ensure that everyone is clear about the current situation and as to how we can continue to express and share our faith, albeit in different ways.

I realise that there is a lot to read here, so you may wish to come back to it.

First, may I stress what the Prime Minister has already made abundantly clear - that if we are to limit the spread of the virus then we **must** all stay at home as much as possible. The statistics prove that reduced contact with other people greatly reduces the spread of Covid-19, so please stay indoors and only leave home for essential shopping, medical needs and exercise once a day.

We need to be wise, we need to work together and we need to heed the advice of those in authority.

Church services and activities:

In response to the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday evening, the Archbishops have subsequently issued a letter, part of which reads thus:

Our church buildings must now be closed not only for public worship, but for private prayer as well and this includes the priest or lay person offering prayer in church on their own.

Sadly, this means that the doors of the church will now be closed for **all** services, activities and groups, until further notice.

Alternative forms of worship:

Given that we cannot worship at St Mark's for the time being, I'm reminded of the fact that the Greek word for church in the New Testament - *ekklesia* - always refers to a body of people and never to a building.

Friends, we the people, *are* the church and just because we can't congregate in our building, it doesn't of course mean that we can't worship. We just need to consider alternative ways of doing so. I trust that as we do, not only will we stay close to God, but that our faith will also be refreshed and reinvigorated as we experiment with new and creative ways of meeting with Him.

A number of **national online resources** including weekly streamed services and daily audio, as well as additional worship provision on the BBC are there to help us, and more are on their way. Please do have a look at them here:

(<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online>)

Some of you may have heard of ***Thy Kingdom Come (TKC)***, The Archbishops' prayer initiative. TKC has produced resources to help people worship together at home.

The first is a multi-session bible study entitled ***Simply Jesus*** by the theologian NT Wright. Usually, it retails at £150, but it is being offered **entirely free of charge** until **Friday, 27th March**. Details can be found here: [Simply Jesus - TKC gift](#)

The second TKC resource is five simple ideas for families to weave prayer and bible readings throughout these days of home schooling. It's called ***Growing in faith together***.

1. **Keep a regular routine of prayer.** Good times to pray together are those times you do something regularly, eating together, going to bed or washing your hands! Or light a candle and pray the same family prayer at the same time every day.
2. **Read a bible story** at bedtime or watch one online with children during the day.
3. With the ongoing situation, it can be difficult adjusting to not seeing family and friends in person. **However, you can still pray for them together daily.** Write them a letter or send them a picture saying that you are thinking and praying for them.
4. **Choose one of the follow family fun prayer ideas** - [Bright prayer ideas for families at home!](#)
5. **Listen to a podcast together.** For example, you can click [here](#) to listen to their Family Prayer Adventure podcasts.

For those of you who have signed up to ***Bible in a Year***, I am halfway through an excellent book which may help sustain and encourage you on your journey. It's called ***Before you open your bible*** by Matt Smethurst. It talks about the all-important attitudes of mind and 'postures of the heart' we need to adopt if the Bible is going to come alive for us and nourish us. You can order a copy online for under £3.

Finally, thank you for your positive comments about the **video message** that was posted on our Facebook page last week. I shall be doing the same at the end of this week and would appreciate your prayers that God's living and eternal word would reach as wide an audience as possible and make a deep and lasting impact for the good. You don't even have to be a Facebook member to access it. Our church Facebook page can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/stmarksforestgate>

Pastoral contact:

300 '**Help cards**' have been produced, inviting requests of support and assistance in the parish. As we now can't deliver them door-to-door, they have instead been placed in the two corner shops on Godwin Road in addition to a poster displaying the same information.

God willing, they will enable us both to be a visible presence in our community and to serve local people at a time of need. Please do pray that this initiative will bear fruit. Thank you.

Thank you to those of you who have offered to run basic errands for those in need. I now have a team of about 12 volunteers. If you are happy to join with us, please do let me know.

Yesterday, I joined the ***Godwin WhatsApp group*** to keep in touch with developments in the parish as well as the Facebook group ***Newham Covid-19 Community Support*** which has the latest updates from across the borough. Both may help inform how we can best respond pastorally to those in our communities.

I am trying to **telephone everyone on the Electoral Roll** just to make sure that you are OK. Pastoral care is important if we are to keep morale high and retain our focus, namely serving

God and one another, so please do let me know if you or anyone you know (regardless of religious affiliation) needs help - spiritual, practical or otherwise. I've included my and the churchwardens' details here in case you need to get in touch:

Rev'd Ben King, Vicar

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Food bank:

You may have seen on the news that because of increased financial uncertainty, demand for food banks is rising. I am keen that we continue to play our part by resourcing the neediest and most vulnerable in our society and by ensuring that those who are hungry do not go without.

Woodgrange Baptist Church is our local distribution point and it has asked for the following items:

- 1 litre long-life milk
- 500g plain flour
- Tinned tomatoes
- Tinned tuna
- Washing-up liquid
- 500g packets of rice
- Tinned vegetables
- Toilet rolls

As items can no longer be dropped off at church, I have placed a clearly-signed box at the front of the Vicarage (41A Tylney Road) for people to deposit their items. These will then be delivered to Woodgrange Baptist Church.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.

A final word:

Friends, as I said in my previous update, although these are difficult and uncertain times, this is also a wonderful opportunity for us to express our Christian faith in practical and loving ways. As the Archbishops wrote in their most recent letter:

It is also imperative that as the Church of Jesus Christ, called to offer hope and light in the darkness of this world's ills, we maintain a praying presence for our community, though from today onwards this must happen from our hearts and from our homes.

So, please continue to stay close to Jesus and to pray for one another, to pray for all those in our front-line services as well as for the needy, sick and vulnerable.

Please also continue to pray that our great God will use this time for His glory and that as a result, many people will renew their trust in Him in the UK and worldwide.

Thank you and God bless,

Ben