**Message from Rev’d Bob Kenway – Team Rector**

**Coronavirus COVID – 19**

Following the item in last week’s parish notices the Coronavirus/Covid-19 continues to spread throughout the country and around the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has now declared it to be a pandemic (a pandemic is declared when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations).

The British Government has stated during the past week that in response to the outbreak of Covid-19 we have moved from a ‘containment’ to a ‘delay’ phase in response to its transmission. The current plan is to try to delay the spread of the virus as much as possible and to relieve pressure on hospitals and the NHS as a whole especially over the next few months. Our Prime Minister has forewarned us that *“many more families will lose loved ones before their time”* – as we have witnessed elsewhere in the world especially in China and Italy. With this in mind we need to take reasonable precautions to try and reduce the spread of the virus especially among the elderly and those with compromised health (this is always a difficult judgement call). As Covid-19 is a new virus much is still unknown, even among scientists whose expertise and judgement we rely upon. We will also be aware in our news reports that different governments are taking different steps at different times and we probably won’t know for some time which strategy will have been the most successful.

The Church of England is continually updating its advice which can be found on the following website [www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches)

We are continuing with our pattern Sunday Services for the time being but this may be subject to change in the near future (we will keep you informed). We need to organise the services as safely as possible according to current Church of England guidelines as follows:

* 1. If you have a high temperature or a new, continuous cough **please stay at home**
  2. **Wash your hands thoroughly** with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser when entering a church and especially before receiving Communion. (St Mary’s have the dispenser but not the sanitiser as yet! However, we now have paper towels and therefore should not be using our regular towels at all).

3. Please **don’t shake people’s hands** or otherwise embrace them (elbow taps are acceptable if you wish – but not compulsory!). Don’t sit too close together in church – remember we’re Anglicans! We will continue to share the peace in the BSL way (See youtube video clip <https://youtu.be/snaMc0oRUmE> )

4. At each service we will have a **retiring collection**. We will not send a plate/bag around the congregation during the offertory. (Maybe this is an opportunity to use the contactless card reader at St Mary’s!)

5. Communion will now be only offered in **one kind** ie only the bread. We will not ‘intinct’ with wine for the time being. This sacrament will be administered **whilst standing** **so we will not use the Communion rail.** Any blessing will not involve physical contact.

6. We will not serve refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits) after the service – but there will always be a smile!

We need to keep surfaces as clean as possible in church. If in advance of the service you can help to wipe surfaces with a cleaning agent (using gloves – we have disposable gloves) this will be helpful. Whilst clergy etc will continue to wear robes in church (which will be washed regularly) we will not be wearing vestments for the time being.

The clergy have met and after careful and prayerful consideration have agreed further actions:

1. Church House will now be closed from Monday 16th March. The toilet facilities will still be available on Sundays.
2. Weekly social gatherings (SMUFs, Lent lunches, CAMEO, Cuppa and Company, the Wednesday Club, Choir Practice, Handbells, Meditation, Lent Breakfast, MU Prayer & Fellowship) will be suspended for the time being). Other groups will also not be meeting.
3. It will still be possible to phone Church House for information or to leave messages but please do not visit unless this is absolutely necessary.
4. Access to the Calne Food Bank will be limited and times advertised.

Whilst we realise how disappointing this will be for those that attend, we feel that for the moment this is the most appropriate way to respond in the current circumstances. This will not be for ever and we will keep the situation under review.

There is much talk of ‘social distancing’ and ‘self-isolation’ which are odd and uncomfortable words and don’t sit well with what it means to be “the Body of Christ”. Various people will have taken the decision to do this for a range of reasons which we must respect. Our local residential care homes have now taken the decision to restrict access to the public. This raises the question of how we care for each other under these circumstances.

For some of us our computers will come into their own – we can use emails or social media to keep in touch. Some of us are not online or do not possess mobiles but there is such a thing as an old-fashioned telephone. Please do keep in touch with each other. As the late Bob Hoskins used to say in the BT advert from the 1990s *“it’s good to talk*” (BT followed this up with another advert where the catch phrase was *“it’s good to listen*”!).

Over the next week or so the ministry team will look at ways in which we can keep in regular touch with each other and make sure people are coping. If you need shopping etc please do let the clergy and other ministers know and we will arrange for help.

Please do continue to prayer for those suffering from this virus and for their families. Pray also for the bereaved. Ask for wisdom for government and pray for protection for those who work in our NHS.

I would like to commend to you psalm 27:

**Psalm 27 vs 1-2,7-9**

The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
   whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
   of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me  
   to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
   they shall stumble and fall.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,  
   be gracious to me and answer me!   
‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face!’  
   Your face, Lord, do I seek.

  Do not hide your face from me.