

18 March 2020

FROM the RECTOR...

As many of you will already be aware, all Church Services and midweek parish activities have been suspended until further notice in view of the government guidelines about restricting social contact. The directive from Church House was quite clear about the need to close and left no local discretion.

However, I am well aware of the importance of us maintaining contact and hopefully, from next week, we will be able to stream a short message offering hope and encouragement during these difficult and testing days. Meantime, our Youth Pastor, Frank Dillon, is already setting up things to operate an on-line youth ministry with group chats and to provide support to our young people. This virtual ministry will become even more important now the schools are closing and key exams are being postponed. The young people will become isolated from each other and we want to help them: socially and emotionally as well as spiritually.

Meantime, with the advice from government about the need for those over 70 or with underlying medical complications to remain at home, isolation is already an issue for many of our parishioners. We in the Ministry Team are concerned to ensure that all our most vulnerable members have adequate supplies of food and prescriptions etc. Accordingly, my colleague, the Rev Jonathan Brown has started contacting our house-bound parishioners to ascertain any practical needs they may have and to offer pastoral re-assurance. We plan to continue to roll out this programme of making pastoral contact by telephone over forthcoming days.

However, as the restrictions imposed by the government could last for several weeks, I am also keen to involve various parishioners in telephone visiting. The plan is that we buddy-up parishioners with those more vulnerable members who are confined to home and unable to socialize or receive visitors. It is envisaged that those who agree to act as buddy to these home-confined parishioners would undertake to phone them for a chat twice per week.

Or it may be that there are those parishioners able to undertake some shopping (or collect prescriptions) for those confined to their home.

I have been thrilled by the number of parishioners who have already contacted the office and offered to help in some way. Many thanks to you who have done so. If you haven't yet been in contact but would like to help out – either for telephone visiting or with shopping - then please Andrea in the office by emailing admin@hillsboroughparish.org.uk or telephoning 028 928 688839.

The situation facing our country is extremely challenging and the way forward is very uncertain. And with such uncertainty, there naturally arises in these difficult circumstances, anxiety and fear. Fear (be it about family, business or children's exams) is quite natural. However, we must be careful not to be taken prisoner by fear and thus allow anxiety about 'what might be' to crush us.

Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian who was a Holocaust survivor, wisely said: 'Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength – carrying two days at once... Worrying doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.' So let us therefore live each day at a time. Taking sensible precautions but also making the best of each day.

Furthermore, let us, as a Christian people look prayerfully to the Lord for mercy and deliverance. In the place of fear, let us actively pray for renewed faith and seek a fresh experience of His presence and peace.

Meantime, with every blessing to you and your loved ones

Bryan