

THE VICARAGE
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Dearest Brothers & Sisters,

I'm writing to let you know, in case you didn't pick it up from the national news media, that the Church of England has suspended all public worship. I write this letter with a very heavy heart, although recognising the rightness of what we are being asked to do.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have asked us to keep our churches open for private prayer and for the clergy to continue to say Morning and Evening Prayer and to celebrate the Eucharist each day on behalf of the people. These things continue at LSM although I am not permitted to distribute Holy Communion to anyone other than myself. I am not allowed to 'encourage or invite people' to these services. They continue at the usual times and should you be present in the building at the time you will not be asked to leave. Every other pew is taped off and I ask that if you are visiting the church you do not sit more than one person per pew (unless you live with that person) to avoid infection. We can fit only around 20 people in church at any one time so if too many people are present I'm afraid I will have to ask them to leave. These non-public services take place at the following times: *Morning Prayer* Monday to Friday at 8.20am; *Evening Prayer* Every day at 6pm; *Mass* Mon 12.30pm, Tue 7.45am, Wed 10am, Thu 7.45am, Fri 12.30pm, Sat 10am, Sun 10.30am. Please join with me in prayer at those times wherever you are. Also, let me re-iterate the government advice: if you are aged 70 or over or have a serious health problem it is very important indeed that you self-isolate.

This is going to make Lent, Holy Week and Easter a very different thing, and our Christian worship is going to have to change for a time. If you have access to the internet you'll already be able to find a lot of digital acts of worship and live-streamed and recorded services. Do check the CofE website. I hope in the near future to be able to broadcast in some way the daily worship from LSM. Please keep this project in your prayers.

In the meantime and in addition to all this you'll find enclosed with this letter an order of service for Sunday worship for the next three Sundays. I suggest that we use it, if we can, at the same time – 10.30am – on Sunday so that we can have a real sense of being united in prayer together. You'll see that the usual Communion part is replaced with an Act of Spiritual Communion. This is an ancient practice of the Church for use when we are not able to receive Holy Communion physically. The Church of England clearly teaches that all the graces received in Holy Communion are received in Spiritual Communion (if we are unable to receive any other way and make proper prayer and preparation). Not being able to make our physical Communion will be a grievous loss, but a proper act of Spiritual Communion is a powerful thing. I pray you find it helpful.

Finally, can I ask those of you who are younger and in good health to volunteer in your local parishes, to keep in touch with elderly and vulnerable neighbours and to offer whatever help you can? I know, of course, that you will already be doing this. This is an opportunity to serve Christ and to wash the feet of others, even if we cannot have the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday this year.

Above all things, know that you remain daily in my prayers and remembered at the altar at L.S.M. during this very difficult time. I will write to you again – my plan is to email weekly those on email and post a weekly letter to those who are not – and I hope we can all keep in touch. Keep safe, keep well and keep the Faith!

With my love & prayers, I am,
yours in the Lord,
Fr Robert