

Dear Friends

We live in difficult and anxious times, so I just wanted to write to reassure you and to outline the steps that we are taking to stem the onward march of Covid19. As many of you will know by now, the Archbishops have asked us to suspend church services for the time being. Churches are to be open if possible and I rejoice that our church is open as a community place of prayer and clergy and ministers are allowed to say prayers on behalf of the people and to explore ways in which these can be shared with the people. That will be something staff meeting will discuss tomorrow evening. Bishop Jonathan wrote yesterday, before we were asked to suspend services: "At a time of fear and anxiety, it is all the more important that we convey and demonstrate the message of peace and hope which is at the heart of our faith. Our reliance is on God, and we should continue to meet to offer God our praise and prayer. " These are words which I would endorse wholeheartedly.

Many of our normal activities need to be suspended. As a result of this advice Lent Lunches at the vicarage will very sadly not continue. Churches Together in Selsdon and Addington has decided that Lent Groups should also cease to meet, although my mind is working on something like a WhatsApp group or Facetime! From this afternoon Open4Every1 and Singing4Every1 will be suspended until further notice. Choir practice will no longer take place on a Thursday evening. The Bellringers will not be ringing – my goodness, though, when the restrictions are over I hope that they ring the bells for a long time! The Mothers' Union will not be meeting and Toddler Group will not take place for the foreseeable future. I have said that Wednesday morning walks can continue as long as they do not then go into a café for coffee afterwards. Our hall lets are also affected. Badminton has already made the decision not to continue for the moment as has the Thursday Market and Wednesday evening Karate, Tuesday and Thursday Line Dancers and I imagine the Norwood Wind Ensemble will do likewise.

I make these statements with a heavy heart as the opportunities for people to gather together are important and can be life lines for those who are elderly or lonely. As I have often said we are made to be people in relationship. But it does give us the opportunity to think differently and to see what we can do to alleviate isolation. As Christians we are called to care for our neighbour, to care for the alien and the orphan and the widow. As a staff team we shall be drawing up a list of those who are vulnerable and who may be isolated and putting in place systems for contacting them by telephone and ensuring that shopping is done for them and medication collected where necessary. We may also look at how we can increase our giving to the Foodbank to make up for the general decrease in giving at this time. My fervent hope is that this situation will result in a more caring society as we are each compelled to think about our neighbours in the broadest sense of the word.

This comes with my prayers and my love.

Debbie