

18th March, 2020

Dear all,

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6,7

Firstly, thank you for all your prayers and good wishes while I was ill with the 'flu last week. I am on the mend, trying to ease back into things slowly, and in isolation until the 23rd March – so my apologies that this letter is overdue.

We are living in unprecedented times with nothing since the war to compare it too. There is much fear around; for the health of those who are ill and vulnerable, the well-being of those who are isolating, for financial viability of households, businesses and the economy, and the capacity of our national health system and those who staff it and care for others. No generation or part of society is left untouched.

Yet already we are seeing amazing kindness and love being shown. Communities like ours are pulling together to make sure that the vulnerable are cared for, no-one is lonely, and people have food and medication, even though supermarket shelves are empty. Not long ago we looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan and considered what it meant to love your neighbour – and now we are being asked to do exactly that!

If you haven't already got in touch with your neighbours might I make a suggestion? Draw a 9 square grid on a piece of paper and write your household names in the middle. Then fill in the grid with the 8 houses in closest proximity to you, in front, to the side and behind. If you have contact details for them fill them in (email or phone number), then get in contact with them and offer whatever help you can - you might need to pop a note through some doors. Even if you are self-isolating you could ring round regularly and prevent yourself and others from getting lonely.

In John's first letter he talks about God's love and how it is made visible when we love each other: '*No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us*'. Later he says '*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...*' Knowledge of God's love motivates, sustains and is shown through us.

As the church we have a unique and privileged responsibility to pray for our world, our communities and each other. To hold them in prayer before God so that his perfect love might be known, fear dispelled, protection and healing found. Whether you are still out and about, working from home or isolating we can all pray.

The Parish of St John's Hartley Wintney

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Below are some details about services, activities and support:

Church services:

Following the Church of England guidance services in all three benefice churches are suspended until we are given different advice.

St John's will be open from 9-1 am Monday to Friday (from 23rd) for private prayer. Ring the centre door bell and someone will let you in.

All Saints will be open every day in daylight hours for private prayer.

If you would like to pray in **St Mary's** please contact Andrew Wigram 01252 843181 to make arrangements.

Matt and I will send out a video reflection every week, and we are working out the possibility of live streaming a service. If you find the technology challenging, please do let us know so that we can help you to stay connected.

Depending on your preferences you might like to tune in to Radio 4 Sunday service at 8.10 am or join in with HTB services on this link <https://www.htb.org/sundayonline>.

If you are concerned about arrangements for weddings, baptisms or funerals please contact me or Julie in the office directly.

Care and support:

Wonderful care systems are already in place in all three villages: Anne Chisnall is heading up a support group in Dogmersfield, the coffee morning group is organising itself to offer support to Winchfield and the Parish Council in Hartley Wintney.

If you are ill or self isolating, anxious, need help, or can offer help, please let us know. We will try and connect you with someone who can help and Matt and I will be more than happy to talk with you on the phone or visit if that is possible. Please use the pastoral@stjohnshw.org.uk email address which will be monitored regularly.

Mental health:

For some being isolated or the fear of illness will have a negative effect on their mental health. Whether this is you or not please look after your mental health. The charity 'Mind' has some good advice here <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse23ee3>. As the weather gets warmer and being surrounded by beautiful countryside getting outdoors will help too.

Other church activities:

Sadly small groups, life groups, and other social church activities like Bumps and Babies and Circuits at St Johns have also been suspended. The coffee shop will stay open until Friday 20th at noon. Over the coming weeks we will be investigating online ways of 'meeting' up and let you know the outcome.

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Prayer:

The Archbishops in their letter to clergy this week asked us to encourage others to join in a day of prayer and action **this Sunday**, remembering especially those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in our Health Service. As one action, they are calling on everyone to **place a lighted candle in their window at 7.00 p.m.** as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished. Will you join with me in this?

From the 23rd March I will say morning and midday prayer in St John's church at 9 and 12.30. If you would like to email me your prayer requests I will be happy to pray for you. We will also be using this resource from 24-7 prayer https://www.24-7prayer.com/downloads/coronavirus_prayer_print_version.pdf

The Church of England have some prayers you might like to use at home on their website <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

And don't forget saying the Lord's Prayer as you wash your hands will not only help you to keep to the 20 second hygiene guidance but also help you pray!

I am sorry this is a very long letter and the circumstances I am writing it in. I can't remember not going to church on Sunday and will miss the warmth of our gathered worshipping communities as I am sure you will.

Please do look after yourselves and reach out where you safely can in love to your neighbours, and if I can pray especially for you or you would appreciate a phone call please let me know.

With love and prayers



Angie Smith | Priest-in-Charge & ADDO

St John's, Hartley Wintney with Elvetham, St Mary's Winchfield & All Saints, Dogmersfield.

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