

**Canon Stephen Grey
Team Vicar
Area Dean of Winwick**

**St Peter's Parish Church
Newton le Willows
St Helen's**

Wednesday 17th March 2020

Dear Friends,

We live in challenging and troubling times which will test us all. Please pray for each other over the next months. In response to the situation the Archbishop of Canterbury has decreed that all church services be suspended until further notice. It is absolutely paramount that we follow the advice of the Archbishop and indeed the government at this time and avoid unnecessary contact with others. This will of course have a significant effect on our service, witness and worship in the communities in which we are based.

However, we should see this as not the end of being a church but an opportunity to be a new church. To facilitate this I have put together a few points listed below which will help to maintain links with each other as well as to provide a sense of continuity and purpose for ourselves and for the community which we serve. Please do contact me with any ideas or thoughts you might have that will help the situation.

Remember always we follow the light that no darkness can ever extinguish and that God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ will sustain us through this testing time.

Being the Church at this time of infection, illness and isolation.

- Morning and Evening Prayer are available on a Church of England app. If you have not got access to apps etc I will be able to provide single personal copies you just need to let me know.
- It would be great if we set a time - say 9am for Morning Prayer and 5pm for Evening Prayer - when we can join together in saying prayers at the same time.
- I will also send out other aids to worship and prayer as required and requested.
- Please let me know the names of anyone you feel would like us to pray for them. Equally situations that you believe need our prayers are most welcome.
- I will produce a prayer and service sheet each Sunday that again will be sent by email
- Booked weddings will be either postponed or take place with minimal presence ie Vicar, couple, witnesses and close families if they are able to be present. No new bookings will be taken.
- Baptisms will be postponed or take place with just parents, family and Vicar. No new bookings will be taken.
- Funerals will obviously continue to take place but within, I suspect, a very different context. Please let me have the names of those who have died and their families so that we can pray for them.

- I hope to keep the church open each day with the help of volunteers who will provide guidance and security. The times of opening will, to start with, be 9-30am - 11am in the morning and 5.30pm - 6.30pm in the evening. Measures announced by the government will be adhered to throughout. Suitable music will be played to provide a suitable environment for prayer. I will also work to provide prayer focus points such as Icons and devotional art work and pictures. Please contact me if you wish to help.
- If you know of someone who would appreciate a phone call from me please let me know as soon as possible. Visits are of course possible but limited and governed by the medical needs of parishioners.
- I am setting up a 'Buddy Service' that will offer help with advice, up to date news, shopping and errands indeed any practical help we can offer not only to members of our church family but those in our communities. Please let me know the names and phone numbers of those on their own who you feel might appreciate help in this way. Also, if you are able to offer to help in with this work please do contact me.
- Please consider donating to our Food Bank' as the pressures on families who use the service will only grow stronger. The Church will be open between 9-30am and 10.30am and 4-30pm and 5.30pm each day to receive donations.
- A number of people have asked how they can continue contributing financially to St Peter's if they are not attending services. In view of this can I commend to you the 'Parish Giving Scheme'. This scheme allows you to pay a contribution directly from your bank account. This is for both taxpayers and non taxpayers. If you are a taxpayer it will also add a gift aid donation to your giving. I have forms so just let me know if you need one. You can increase or decrease your giving at will and also cancel whenever you wish. Full details are to be found on <https://www.parishgivingscheme.org.uk/>.
- For up to date information about the virus please use the Church of England website <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Lord Jesus Christ,
 you taught us to love our neighbour,
 and to care for those in need
 as if we were caring for you.
 In this time of anxiety, give us strength
 to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick,
 and to assure the isolated
 of our love, and your love,
 for your name's sake.
 Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Stephen