

Dear All

It can't have escaped your notice that the advice from the Church of England is that all public worship is suspended for until further notice.

This is their statement:

**Churches should be open where possible but with no public worship services taking place.** Prayers can be said by clergy and ministers on behalf of everyone and churches should consider ways of sharing this with the wider community.

So this presents us with a huge challenge. One of the great things about this Benefice is that we have always gathered together for worship – this will no longer be possible. Many of you will be self-isolating (and as a result feeling vulnerable) and I am very aware that this means your spiritual health may also suffer. I will do all I can to help us get through this.

In a letter to all clergy and churchwardens the Archbishops wrote that the C of E will look very different in the days ahead. The Archbishop of York could not have imagined what his last few months in office will now look like. Perhaps he knew something we didn't because before Lent he sent all clergy a book: 'Friends in Christ, paths to a new understanding of Church'. I'm sorry to say it's been in my bag for a while but I think I might have to read it now!

On to the practicalities though. The one thing we can all do is to pray not just for ourselves but for others. In fact this is probably more urgent than ever.

- 1) Given that Aldbrough is always open on a Wednesday morning this will continue although not with a public act of worship (communion). Instead it will be an opportunity for anyone to pop in for a few minutes between 10.00 and 12.00 to light a candle and to say some prayers. I will be producing some resources for this and I will be available (God willing) for the whole of those two hours if you need a chat – social distancing rules observed of course.
- 2) The same will be true on Sundays. This Sunday being Mothering Sunday there will be flowers to give out, so I'm suggesting that if you're able please do come to Mappleton sometime between 10.00 and 12.00 to collect these and spend some time in prayer.
- 3) I am meeting with some of the churchwardens tomorrow (Thursday) and will update you further.
- 4) We, as clergy, are encouraged to offer different ways of enabling people to worship. As you know I haven't embraced social media but may well have to and this will be a huge game change for me. I've even signed up to be part of an online discussion (today) to see how this might work for us! This will be fine, hopefully, for those who have access to the internet but not everyone does and we will need to find ways of keeping everyone in the loop.
- 5) I am considering some kind of communion by extension, in other words by telephone, but the logistics have to be worked out. I have to celebrate communion anyway so to consecrate extra wafers isn't a problem.
- 6) Church leaders have called for a day of prayer and action on Sunday – we are asked to put a lighted candle in our windows at 7.00pm as a sign of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished.
- 7) Please in the meantime visit the C of E website as this has some very useful information <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.

Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may find comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.