



18th March 2020

Dear Friends,

We wanted to take the chance to bring you up to date with the situation around the Coronavirus and our response to it. We have been looking at all the advice coming from the government, the Baptist Union and other sources. We are sure you have been following it all too.

In the light of all that advice, and in conjunction with the other local churches, we have decided that we have to cancel all our services, meetings and other gatherings with immediate effect. All activities on the church premises including those with external groups have been cancelled. This will last until the guidance comes to say that we are free to meet safely again.

At a time like this it is particularly important to remember that church is not a place we go to, rather it is who we are. We easily say the words that the church is not a building but the people. At a time like this we really must take hold of that truth. We'd like to highlight four 'W' areas of church life that it is really important to continue.

Welcome

At RBC we are very good at welcoming people as they come through the door, but welcome is so much more than that. It is about the relationships that we build up and the love that we share. As we move to social distancing and, for some, self-isolation, it is vital to maintain those relationships. We may not be able to gather together, but it would be great to make use of telephones, Skype, Facetime and other technological ways of keeping in touch. For many people, especially those who are on their own, keeping that human contact is vital for our wellbeing and mental health. It may even be possible to meet with one or two others for a walk as long as we maintain a suitable physical distance.

During this time, we will try to keep in touch with you by phone, but please feel free to contact anyone on the leadership (numbers below) if you have a need or if you'd just like a chat.

If you need help with shopping, then please do let us know. I know many are able to get to the shops or to do their shopping online, but for those who can't, please don't feel embarrassed about asking for help. Obviously, the shops are currently subject to a certain amount of panic buying and there are restrictions on what is available so we may all need to have a bit more flexibility than usual. We hope and pray that the shops (and the shoppers) will return to normal quickly.

Worship & Word

Again, we know that worship is about so much more than singing together. In the most important sense, worship includes everything that we do as we seek to live for the glory of God. However, it is also good to set aside times with God. It can be helpful to do that daily and weekly.

We know that many of you will have a daily devotional routine of prayer and Bible reading. It is great to keep that going. If you're not currently doing that then, during this time when we'll have so much more time on our (very clean) hands, now would be a great time to start. A number of local



ministers are seeking to put together a daily reflection which we can send around by email from Monday. Dave will be contributing to this, but other ministers will be writing things too. These ministers are still working out the details of how this will work, but, if you'd like to receive it then please email Dave on davidsunman@btinternet.com to be added to the distribution list. There is also something special about withdrawing to a solitary place to pray without all the usual distractions. That was significant for Jesus and it may well be that it will be significant for us to during this time.

In terms of our weekly gatherings, these have obviously had to stop for the time being. What we are hoping to do is to post a short video talk and prayer on our Facebook page each week and to distribute the text of that along with some questions for reflection and links to song recordings on YouTube and similar websites. We would want to encourage as many of us as possible to watch or read at 10:30 on a Sunday morning when we would normally be together and then those on Facebook can interact through the comments section. We're still sorting out the technology to enable this to happen but are confident that we can do this. If you don't have a Facebook account, you may wish to get one during this time to help stay connected. If not, it should still be possible to view it online by visiting <https://www.facebook.com/ramridgebaptist/>, though you might not be able to comment.

Witness

A key part of being church is that we share our faith with others. While we are not able to invite them to events at the moment, we are still a witness in our dealings with our neighbours. It may well be that the sense of community can increase during this time as we chat over garden fences (while maintaining a respectful distance).

Many people, including many of us, are frightened at the moment. We have never experienced anything quite like this and the advice seems to be changing so much that we find ourselves uncertain of many things. Plans are being cancelled, employment is at risk, finances are vulnerable and the fear of illness and even death have escalated. While we share in much of that uncertainty, (and it is reasonable to have enough fear to encourage us to take reasonable precautions), we also know the one who holds the future and has promised a time coming when God himself will be with us. We have the assurance that when Christ returns, he will take away all sorrow, crying and pain. (Rev 21:4)

This time and this virus will pass, but our God and Father is eternal. He knew this was coming and he knows what will happen. We can remain confident in him and even share that confidence with others for whom there may seem to be no hope at the moment.

As we adjust to this new but temporary reality, we may well develop other ideas and ways of being church. Please do suggest anything you might find helpful.

Please be assured of our continued love and prayers.

Yours in Christ

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