

A note from the Rector ... hands and hearts

Dear All,

The situation with coronavirus is becoming increasingly serious. In particular, my thoughts are with those who are in the higher risk groups. It looks as though we will soon be moving from the government's 'Contain' phase to the 'Delay' phase. As we do so, many in our church community and in our villages are likely to need to self-isolate, some of whom may be on their own. Accordingly this Friday I am having a meeting with the Chair of the Melford Parish Council and representatives of other village organisations, to discuss how we can most effectively support those most at risk, as well as starting to consider some longer-term issues. I've also had a discussion with the chair of Shimpling Parish Council. Following is a brief update on our approach to church-related activities (this will be updated as appropriate).

Church Services

As you know we have been taking measures over recent weeks to minimise the risk of infection, including hand sanitiser, avoiding handshakes, and being very careful at communion. The Bishop has now instructed us to only serve the bread at communion (so for now we will no longer need chalice bearers). We will continue to worship, however ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to stay away from church please, even if it means causing last minute problems! I have started to investigate how to record or live-stream services just in case.

Lent Lunches (& Similar)

This is an important community event however we recognise that there are a number of risk factors with the current format. Therefore we will continue to meet on Fridays between 12.00pm and 1.00pm for tea and coffee only. This will make it truly a Lent lunch for any who are fasting! I have not had an opportunity to discuss things with those running Coffee and Cake or Alpheton Coffee Pot, however I imagine that we will need to consider something similar. Sanitiser will be available on entry.

Connect

Whereas many (but not all) of those attending are likely to be in the lower risk range, we respect and understand however that some of our lovely (and more mature) volunteers may not be able to attend. We plan to continue with Connect; we will continue to serve tea and coffee to parents (carefully). There will however be no shared food and we will ask parents to bring drink and food for their children. We have started wiping down the toys deemed most at risk after the session. If meeting at St Catherine's becomes unfeasible we are considering meeting at the Country Park to enable us to continue meeting but in a less confined space.

Messy Church

(29th March, 4pm at Melford School) We hope to continue as planned but are in the process of reviewing the arrangements for food. We will pay close attention to advice over the coming days.

Smaller Groups

If people are meeting, we discourage sharing food (e.g. biscuits) from the same plate or bowl.

General

Please do wash hands regularly and don't attend events if you have cold or flu like symptoms. We are also trying to provide sanitiser for people entering every church event. There was a very interesting piece of research on how a virus might spread in the UK and I get the impression this research is helping to inform Government policy – see 'Contagion' on the BBC iplayer. This illustrates how effective hand washing can be at limiting the spread of the virus.

Reflection

I have been struck by the relative calm in the church community about the situation, which I hope reflects our faith more than our ignorance! However there will be many people living in fear out there, so we have an opportunity to show how our faith helps us in difficult times. As we focus on washing our hands, let us not forget to allow God to wash our hearts to encourage us to focus on looking outwards and upwards to God and neighbour.

With prayer

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew". The signature is stylized with long, sweeping horizontal strokes extending from the end of the name.

Rev'd Matthew Lawson

Rector of Alpheton, Long Melford, and Shimpling

10th March 2020