

In the light of advice from the government, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have announced that, from now on,

ALL PUBLIC WORSHIP WILL BE SUSPENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

This means the Sunday services, all the Lent activities, Holy Week & Easter services, as well as parish meetings*.

I'm sure this will come as a major shock to most of us (this is the first time I've experienced anything like this in 30 years of ministry), but the challenge is how we respond.

We will continue to ensure that St Mary's church is open between about 8.30am and 5pm each day. We've been asked to remove books and any shared printed materials. However the opportunity to sit quietly, to light a candle and say a prayer is there. We will also make sure that notice boards are used to convey information, ideas and suggestions for prayer and worship.

The Church has always been about people, rather than buildings. The Church is the visible presence of the body of Christ in the world. So the Church will continue to exist: but how we engage with our corporate life is changing - how we worship, pray and serve our community will change.

This will not be the first time patterns have had to change. The people of Israel left a settled life in Egypt and became nomads for 40 years before settling in the Promised Land; when in Exile the Israelites had to learn that God wasn't limited to a particular piece of land; when the Early Church was persecuted patterns of prayer and worship were very different to those we know today.

Today - 17 March - we celebrate St Patrick. His life was tumultuous, dangerous and challenging: kidnapped from his native Cornwall at 16 years old and taken as a slave to Ireland, he eventually returned, trained as a priest then went back to Ireland as a bishop to spread the Good News throughout the land, gently bringing men and women to a knowledge of Christ. He didn't have hymn books, kneelers, or often a church building... no PCC, organ or weekly Notice Sheet - and look at the legacy in Ireland!

In the 1300s the Black Death was rampaging across Europe. The words of Mother Julian of Norwich were: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

We are still the Pilgrim People of God - perhaps we need the challenge of change to help us realise our calling.

Please make use of the open church building: please get in touch with the clergy if you are worried or anxious. Phone and e mail are still good ways we can keep in touch.

I'm sure there will be more updates and information to pass on to you, but for now: stay safe; please pray - for those affected by Coronavirus, for those worried and for those who have difficult decisions to make; please remember that God loves you.

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* Baptisms (after Lent); weddings and funerals can all still take place, but we are advised that these should go ahead with as few people as possible involved.