



30th April 2020

Dear SBC family and friends

As Elders we wanted to communicate to you in these strange times to encourage you, reassure you and let you know what we are doing as a church in response to Coronavirus.

We have been working hard to make sure church is still happening, as has been said many times the church is the people not the building, so the fact that we are not allowed in the building does change things but does not stop things.

On Monday March 16th, the Prime Minister told people not to meet in pubs and restaurants, cinemas, theatres and the like. It became clear over the following day that church buildings would be off limits too. The Elders met online on Tuesday March 17th to make the decision to not meet in the building. We also set up our own SBC Cobra team (original I know). This team consists of Jason, (Elder link), Jo Dunn (Elders' admin. assistant), Sally Trigg (Over 60's Church Worker) and Alison Legge (Health and Safety lead).

Initially, we met daily to think through the implication of the situation and to think of ways forward, feeding back to the Elders. We wanted to think through the question "How do we still do church?" If we were going into a period of not being able to meet as we normally would, the SBC Cobra team felt ideas to support social interaction were important. We wanted to think through how we could still meet using the technology available to us.

We set up a Life Group care system with two aims: one, to see if people needed anything that they could not get themselves and two, to make sure we could keep in touch with each other regularly, to encourage each other. We added people, who were not currently in one, to the Life Groups as an associate so that we didn't miss anyone out.

The Life Group leaders were asked to organise this through their groups and have done an excellent job. They have also figured out how to use the technology so Life Groups can still meet. This is vital to all of us in these times, please do meet with your group as often as you can even if you are not an original member.

One of the most encouraging things for us has been how people have overcome their fear of technology and been able to engage online through tablets, smartphones, computers, etc. It has shown how important fellowship is to us and has been a real blessing.

We have also been recording sermons and uploading these to YouTube. Things have progressed over the weeks and, as well as the sermon, we now have songs (thank you Rob), different readers and people talking to the children.

On Sunday afternoons, the prayer times have been really well attended, thanks to all those who have zoomed in!

A regular newsletter has been provided by email and for members not on emails this has been delivered by mail along with a brief summary of the morning sermon that week.



You will have seen in the newsletter that Prime Time and Brain and Soul Boosting are continuing in some form. Illuminate and GEM are also meeting.

The Elders are meeting every week, splitting our time between praying, discussing a book we are reading called 'Ready Steady Grow' and talking about issues we face. The SBC Cobra team now meets weekly.

For obvious reasons, we have had to postpone the AGM and other church members' meetings. The preaching plan has also changed from what we originally put together. We are looking to be responsive to the situation and fit the ministry to the perceived need. This is we believe helpful at this time but a little different to the usual approach of planning preaching topics some weeks out.

We want to thank you for the way you have responded at this time, it has been encouraging to see the number of views on YouTube, those attending the Sunday afternoon prayer meetings and the Life Groups.

It is also fantastic to report that God is working through the difficulties. In all the above activity we are pleased to mention that members of the church have stepped up to take on new roles and ensure tasks get done. The headline act is our entry onto YouTube. Sermons have been viewed by many more people than usually attend SBC. This is true across the world. So, His word is being heard by more people than ever before. In addition, the "virtual" attendance at the prayer gathering on Sunday and Life Groups is larger than before lockdown. Our prayer "that God would strengthen our fellowship through these difficulties" seems to be answered in a tangible and obvious way.

We also want to reassure you that we will continue to think through our response to the lockdown and keep thinking about how we do church. We will also explore ideas about the re-entry process as things start to get back to normal, whenever that is. One of the things we are still planning on doing is the Week of Prayer, starting on May 24th and we will be in contact with details nearer the time.

Please remember to pray for the situation we face at this time, there are things we need that cannot be taken for granted. A vaccine seems particularly important and it is not a given that one will be found. Let us pray that God leads and guides. Science is great in many ways and we thank God that we as humans can figure things out as we live in an ordered universe. But it is His universe, He leads and guides and provides breakthroughs. He has done it in the past and will continue to do so, if we ask Him. Let us not put our faith in Science but in the God behind Science, He is the creator God who loves and cares for us.

This time is certainly not the 'normal' that we are used to – but let's ask God to teach us things about himself and ourselves that we could never have learnt in other situations. Although we may get more used to this way of living over time we expect only to have this time for a short while. We are designed to need each other, to interact with each other, to support each other, to hug each other, to see each other, to lend a hand, to shake hands, to pump fists or whatever. Although we can still do some of those things in isolation, let us petition our great God to quicken the day we can get back to normal and do all of them together as a church family.

In Christ

The Elders of Stapleford Baptist Church