

20th March 2020

*Dear friends,*

We're writing again to everyone for whom we have contact details to update you on what is happening at Earley St Peter's Church. Thank you to all those who have been in touch with encouragement, support, and offers of help in the past few days. We want particularly to answer some of the questions we know people have, and to share ways we can stay in touch, support each other, and sustain our faith.

To help with minimising the risk of transmitting the infection, and reducing the strain on hard-working but hard-pressed health services, the following measures are now in place.

- Public worship is now suspended. This means that, on a practical note, the church building will be locked and alarmed almost all the time. Should it become possible to open the church up for personal visits and prayer we will say. Meanwhile, every day one of the clergy will go in to check the building and to say prayers for and on behalf of us all.
- Our Church Hall will be locked and all regular bookings and groups have been cancelled.
- There will be regular essential security and maintenance checks on Church and Hall.
- Mary Frank our Parish Administrator ([admin@earleystpeters.org.uk](mailto:admin@earleystpeters.org.uk)) and Judith Bowler our Hall Manager ([hall@earleystpeters.org.uk](mailto:hall@earleystpeters.org.uk)) may sometimes be in the Parish Office, but if you need to contact them, please don't visit the Office. Email them or phone 0118 966 8575. These will be checked at least daily, and Mary and Judith can pick up and respond to messages from home.
- We will be in touch with couples planning weddings, which for the moment can proceed but only be attended by the legal minimum of people in church (the minister, the couple, and two witnesses). Those who, understandably, would prefer to postpone will be offered a range of options.
- For those who, tragically, have to organise a funeral, we will continue to offer prayer, support, and care. A range of options will be discussed, including a funeral at the crematorium or cemetery attended by immediate family only with a fuller Memorial Service in church at a later date.

We know this feels sad, frustrating, even heart-breaking. It is a wrench to be deprived of meeting together regularly and worshipping in our building. But we believe it is the right response to a major public health emergency and a proper reflection of the care we owe to all in our society, especially the most vulnerable. So we want now to explain what we all **can** do as we adjust to the changed reality of our lives in coming weeks.

- For many of us, however vaguely or firmly, Christian faith is a source of meaning and strength. We can still nurture and sustain that faith even without regular public meeting. There are simple ways you can pray and read the Bible away from church on our website [www.earleystpeters.org.uk](http://www.earleystpeters.org.uk). Paper copies can be sent to those who are not online; please contact the Parish Office if you or someone you know would

like this. Keep checking the website, our Facebook page [www.Facebook.com/EarleySaintPeters](http://www.Facebook.com/EarleySaintPeters), and our new YouTube channel (!) [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_nhE9mUlWp9Bn8oqNEQ10Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_nhE9mUlWp9Bn8oqNEQ10Q). We'll be video recording weekly sermons, regular short 'Thoughts for the Day', some longer talks, and a lot more in Holy Week and Easter. You do *not* need to sign up to Facebook or YouTube to watch these! Using these resources will not only help each of us in our own spiritual life, it will also mean we are still praying together, even if we're physically not in the same place, and we'll know we're not facing these trials alone.

- We can still care for each another even though we cannot meet in person. We can all do this ourselves by committing to phone, email, or drop a card to those we already know, who attend the same groups or activities as we do, or friends and neighbours and colleagues. We are establishing a more formal system so that a member of our Pastoral Team will telephone everyone on our Parish Register a week or so to stay in touch. If you don't get a call and would like one, or get one and would prefer not to, please let the Parish Office know.
- We're working with our Church School to support its children, families, and staff.
- We're talking with local councillors and residents' associations about community support for the vulnerable. In Wokingham Borough, to volunteer your time call 0118 077 0749 or see [www.volunteerwokinghamborough.org.uk](http://www.volunteerwokinghamborough.org.uk), and contact Citizens' Advice 0330 330 1189 or [admin@citizensadvicewokingham.org.uk](mailto:admin@citizensadvicewokingham.org.uk) if you or someone you know needs support or practical help (this is not an alternative to NHS or social services). Information about Reading Borough to follows.
- To stay in touch we will be sending out a weekly email with updates, resources, and links to our weekly sermons and other videos. The first will be sent out on Monday 23rd March. If you don't receive it and would like to please let us know. Where possible we can arrange paper copies for those who are not online; please contact the Parish Office if you or someone you know would like this.

As we said last time, for those of us who pray, we could ask God particularly to give guidance and peace to those who are ill, lonely, or anxious; those in government who must make difficult decisions; those whose work or livelihoods are at risk; and all those in healthcare, science, emergency services, schools, food production and supply as well as other vital services.

For many people, whether they are regular churchgoers or not, Earley St Peter's Church has a place in their family story, in their spiritual journeys, in their hearts. Together we can make sure Earley St Peter's is still at the heart of the community – a place of comfort, meeting, meaning, and faith – even when we cannot be physically present in the beautiful and well-cared for building which we so love. You can help make that hope real by your interest, care for others, and prayer. Please do contact us via the Parish Office phone number or our emails if you have questions, concerns, or ideas. Know that you are much in our prayers, as we work out together what it means to be human beings and to be a church in these troubled times. Building closer relationships, stronger communities, and deeper Christian faith will not only see us through our present trials but also help us share a better future.

*with prayers and best wishes,  
Hannah Phillips*