

Dear All,

Greetings. We hope that this finds you all coping with these strange times. There is a general air of rushing around, as everyone tries to reorganise life for the situation we now find ourselves in. It seems important to listen to the Jesus who stood in the midst of perplexed and terrified disciples and said: 'peace be with you'. As we chatted on the phone with one another earlier today, sharing both the frustrations of domestic matters like the difficulty of shopping, and church matters, like the difficulty of getting technology that promises so much to actually deliver it, we noted that we are in this for the long haul. We don't need all in one go to get everything ship-shape and sorted for a few months of very different ways of working. We can afford to take moments to pause, and can afford to recognise that if some things don't function as we like this week, then there is next week to attend to them.

At the same time, we recognise that for some of you, this may be the beginning of a period not marked by freneticism (be that physical, or the freneticism of the most extraordinary number of emails!), but that it may feel like it will stretch boringly on interminably. Various folk in the church are working hard to try and find ways we can keep in touch with one another. There is the new Facebook Group for those online that you'll find at https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=downing%20place%20urc%20members&epa=SEARCH_BOX Hopefully your Elder or pastoral visitor has been in touch, if not they will be very soon. It will be good to know who particularly is going to value contact by phone in the weeks to come. We hope that we, too, will be able to engage in some good phone conversations with many of you in the weeks to come.

We have been busy, with the Officers and with Ann and Elaine, trying to ensure that things are in as good order as they can be for the moment. For the foreseeable future, the Church building will be closed. All hirers of the premises are no longer meeting, and we are no longer taking bookings for the time being. Elaine will be working from the Office, and Ann will be working from home apart from on Tuesdays when she will be at the office for Elaine's day off. All groups connected with the Church have ceased to meet, and of course, we will not be meeting together for worship on Sundays. The Elders will not be able to meet in person, and will further business by email as we explore potential options for meeting virtually.

That worship cannot take place in the sanctuary does not mean that worship cannot take place. John Calvin used to speak of the world as the 'theatre of God's glory', and we will worship in whichever corner of that glorious world we find ourselves. We do not cease to be the Church because at the moment we are scattered, and not gathered. We do not cease to be the body of Christ, and the People of God for the sake of the world just because we cannot corporately be together. With this in mind, with this letter comes some material that you may wish to use in your personal devotions this weekend. It is the sermon, and elements of the service that Maureen Kendall would have led us in this coming Sunday. We are emailing this to those on email, and posting it to those who are not. We thank Maureen for preparing this for us, and making it available.

We are also hoping that we will have some kind of short video act of worship for you on Sunday. We are trying to lay slightly better prepared plans for future weeks, but this week we will be doing something very simple with the filming potential of a phone camera. If this works (and we're not going to make rash promises...), it will be posted on the Downing Place Facebook page, and also on our new YouTube channel. This you can find at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7GQuqsJi5A2PFacVyp4YOg?view_as=subscriber In time, we hope every week a 30 minute act of worship will be posted here for us to share in together on a Sunday morning. This will be recorded earlier, and posted online. We will let you know by email once it has been posted. We have explored trying to stream worship live from the Church building, but we don't have a sufficient internet signal in the sanctuary for this to work.

Also this Sunday, 22nd, we invite you to join the ecumenical prayer day arranged by Churches Together in England, particularly placing a candle in a street facing window at 7pm. Details can be found at <https://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/Article.aspx?ID=569010>

We look forward to being in touch in varying ways in the weeks to come, and pray that you do find moments in which you experience the peace of Christ.

Yours in Christ,

John and Nigel