

## Letter/update from the Associate Minister

Dear Friends,

As we begin this new year, it is a blow to find ourselves in a 3rd national lockdown. It is however, a reminder of how serious COVID-19 is, and our duty as Christian citizens to behave responsibly and to do what we can to keep people safe. For this reason some will think it appropriate to suspend all church services; others will think it appropriate to keep going, with the necessary precautions. The Bishop of Chester released some guidance earlier in the week, and in it, he outlined four broad options for parishes to adopt over the coming weeks. One of the options is to continue with public worship, whilst taking the highest level of COVID precautions. In this parish, we will follow this advice from the Bishop and we will continue to run as many services as we can safely run.

Sadly, this means we will discontinue the 1100 for the time being but we will review this decision at the end of February. In the meantime, we will continue to hold three Sunday services and the mid-week, Wednesday communion. To run as many as four services each week may seem counterintuitive, but the more services we run, the fewer people we will have at each, and the safer we will all be. I understand if you feel unable to come church right now, but I do want to give those for whom church is a lifeline the opportunity to come if they wish. We will review this on a weekly basis and if the situation changes, or it is clear there is not enough demand, we will reduce the service pattern. Please be assured that we have robust COVID protocols: Sunday School has moved online; everyone needs to wear a face mask or visor (unless exempt); there are hand sanitiser pumps on the way in; seats are allocated so those who want to attend must book; the track and trace Q-Code is on display for those with smartphones to check in; social distancing must be observed; and there is strictly no congregating inside or outside the building once the service is over. Additionally, after each service we will use a fogging machine to spray disinfectant over all the surfaces, so that the building is safe for the next service.

One way to feel connected and stay connected is to join us online for our prayer meetings and the Hub. We had planned to run two Hub courses this term, but this will be reduced to one. The topic we will be considering is prayer. If you feel praying is not something you are good at, then do join us each Thursday evening.

Our situation is less than ideal, and the current restrictions and protocols may feel draconian. But we must remember that this is for our safety; it is also a healthy reminder that we are not defined, as a church, by what we do. The many and various activities that we have been accustomed to running, were at one time an expression of our identity, but they are not, and never were, the centre of our corporate life as a church. Our desire to be active springs from an identity rooted in Jesus, and when all the stuff we do is stripped away, the good news is that we still have Him. As our circumstances change, we will find new ways of expressing who we are. They will bubble up naturally and organically. I am confident that the Lord will lead us through this time, and I pray that we would not be afraid to let go of what we have done in the past, and look forward to new

and exciting ways of expressing our identity in Jesus in the future. Even our services themselves are only an expression of our identity, which we must hold lightly, knowing that even more important than anything we do, is who we are in Jesus. So do not be afraid: whatever the future holds, the Lord holds us as we venture into the future.

With love in Jesus,

Chris Murphy