

Dear Church,

Following the Government & Church of England advice on COVID-19, we are stopping our midweek groups, building hires and Sunday services. Please keep an eye on social media as we release details throughout the week about how we can continue to be the church in a different way.

These measures express the challenge of the moment and reflect the need for caution. Despite this, we also believe that God has good that he will bring out of this situation and we will organise ourselves expectant of this.

The challenge of Coronavirus provokes key questions for us as a Church:

1. How do we continue to celebrate Jesus?
2. How do we encourage each other?
3. How do we love Widnes?

We don't have all the answers yet but we do know that there is an opportunity for the Church to rise up and serve. Can you imagine coming through this and people giving a testimony about how God has met their needs through his Church, whether those needs are practical or pastoral. This is a time where for many people the things that provide security are being shaken and we have a chance to gently point to the rock, the cornerstone, the one who is our firm foundation.

1. How do we continue to celebrate Jesus?

Instead of gathering together on Sundays we will be releasing resources to help you do "Church at home". We'll be continuing our Eat This Book series with a video message, thoughts for discussion, we'll be posting a virtual worship set and giving you resources for your kids too. This will be made available through our website and social media channels primarily but if you need to receive this in alternative ways please get in touch.

The Church of England is also releasing daily prayers. Links to these are on our website.

2. How do we encourage each other?

If you are in a Connect Group then please stay in contact with each other; your Connect Group leader will help orchestrate this.

We will also be stimulating prayer and support groups where people are enabled to stay in touch with others. Initially this will happen through our connect group leaders

and in your existing friendships, so please be on the front foot calling those you know might be forgotten.

We are putting together a list of anyone who is self-isolating so we can try and provide appropriate support. Please let us know if you are in this situation by calling 0151 558 1301 or through your Connect Group leader.

It is important that we practise good self-care during this time so please do keep practising Sabbath and taking time to rest and be restored. See our website for more info about this.

3. How do we love Widnes?

Widnes already has some outstanding provisions for people so please model ongoing generosity to the Foodbank. This week we will offer “take away” at Long Loaf and hopefully will do so in the future.

We have set up a phone number (0151 558 1301) that anyone who has specific practical or pastoral needs can phone for support. It may be a request for shopping, a specific prayer need or a pastoral care situation. We will seek to do all we can to resource this, including signposting onto a more appropriate person.

The main way to access updates will be by visiting our website (www.transformwidnes.church), here you will find the most up to date information and links to resources.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have written to all churches, an excerpt is copied below.

“It has always been the historic vocation of the Church of England to be the church for everyone. William Temple, one of the great Archbishops of Canterbury and York of the last century, is often quoted as saying that we are the one organisation which exists for the benefit of its ‘non-members’.

This is a defining moment for the Church of England. Are we truly a church for all, or just a church for ourselves. We urge you sisters and brothers to become a different sort of church in these coming months: hopeful and rooted in the offering of prayer and praise and overflowing in service to the world.”

Yours in Christ,

Greg Sharples