



St Michael and All Angels, Sandhurst

Diocese of Oxford (Church of England)

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*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1 NRSV)
I kept my faith, even when I said,
'I am greatly afflicted' (Psalm 116:10 NRSV)*

20th March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I wanted to write to you with some words of encouragement and practical information that will help us all keep strong in body mind and spirit in this current testing situation.

I am sure that each of us has felt the effects of the current Corona virus crisis in different ways. Some with health issues have particular reasons to be concerned. Others have lost income, or even jobs as businesses have gone into temporary or permanent shut-down. We all face uncertainty about the supplies of food and household goods in the shops, and about what further measures of enforced social distancing may be imposed by the government.

Like you, I have felt quite stressed in the past few days, and listening to successive news bulletins has not reduced my anxiety levels! A couple of doses a day is sufficient, I think!

But as Christians we have a source of hope and of strength which many around us lack: a God who is greater than any virus or any crisis, and who is at our side constantly, with vast sources of grace and strength that we can rely on if we turn to him. St Paul in his struggles heard God tell him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9), and found it to be true.

So what does the current situation mean for us as a church community? As the Archbishops have told us, we are going to have to find new ways of being the Church as we face these troubled times together:

- ✓ We are no longer able to hold services of worship or social gatherings; but we can still pray at home, and share with others in worship, prayer and Bible study through services on TV, radio or the internet.
- ✓ We are no longer able to meet together, but we can still keep in touch with each other by phone, Skype, or social media. It is all the more important that we do so, to avoid feeling isolated and alone.
- ✓ We have a great opportunity to show God's love in the world by looking out for the needs of others in the community around us. A phone call to someone who is isolated could bring enormous encouragement. Those of us who are able to get out can do shopping for neighbours who can't. We can give to the Foodbank through an online donation (see below).

Please turn over

Worship and prayer:

There are several ways we can join with others in worship and prayer this Sunday, and during the week:

- ✓ **BBC1** is going to be showing **Sunday Worship at 11.45 am** this Sunday morning.
- ✓ **Oxford Diocese** has a page on **live-stream worship** and radio programmes, <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/#toggle-id-5-closed>, including a service from Christ Church Cathedral with Bishop Steven.
- ✓ Join the national **Light a Candle event at 7 pm on Sunday:**
https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/569010/Home/News/Latest_news/Light_a_candle.aspx
- ✓ Our **St Michael's Prayer webpage** <http://www.stmichaels-sandhurst.org.uk/prayer.html> has help on prayer and links to other useful sites.
- ✓ For **prayer in Families**, we will be sharing fun resources at <http://www.stmichaels-sandhurst.org.uk/families.html>. Please check from time to time to see any new posts.
- ✓ **The Church of England website** has links to various resources you can use at home. Visit <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches> and click on Digital Resources near the top of the page.
- ✓ We are keeping the **Church building open** during the daytime for personal prayer. There are books there you can borrow – and hand gel!

Readings for this Sunday

The theme we were going to use this Sunday at St Michael's is *Saying thank you*, and the readings chosen (which are different from the Lectionary) are: **Psalm 116; Luke 17:11-19.**

A **service sheet you can use at home** will be posted on the church website <http://www.stmichaels-sandhurst.org.uk> by Sunday morning. If you can't access this and need to receive a printed copy, or receive an e-mail, please let me know.

Practical help

We don't want people suffering in silence at home. If you need someone to get some **shopping** for you, please contact Steph Martin, who will be co-ordinating volunteers, via the Parish Office.

The **Crowthorne Foodbank** is there to help people who don't have the funds to buy enough food, and Angela Harper our Family Worker has vouchers.

If you are able, please **donate to the Foodbank by making a gift of money online**, so they can buy the goods that are needed.

If you know of someone who is part of our church community, or who lives in Sandhurst or Owlsmoor, and who is suffering financial hardship and needs a one-off cash injection to fix a problem such as a washing machine breakdown, the church **Hardship Fund** can help. Please contact me or a Churchwarden in complete confidence.

Please remember that John White, Jane Kraft and I are here to support you, as well as the Churchwardens, Angela Harper, Mike Gower and Steph Martin (Pastoral Co-ordinator). We will pray for you, and ask you also to pray for us.

With every blessing,

John

Rev John Castle *Rector*