

ST. PAULINUS CHURCH

THE RECTORY

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Ministry in lockdown

11/05/2020

Dear Friends

I hope you are all keeping well in these difficult times

I'm sure I can speak for all of us when I say that these last few weeks have been incredibly difficult without meeting together as a Church community

For many of us, the Church building is an important part of our lives, a place where we meet on a Sunday and within the week as well, a place where we worship, a place where we see friends, a place where we pray. As we all know, the Church isn't the building, but the people, and not being able to see each other has been hard for us all including myself

Having said that, not being able to access the building has been extremely difficult. I know I speak for many when I say that having the Church shut, and not opening for private prayer has been a great sadness.

Since lockdown, the response from various Churches regarding worship has been mixed. A lot of Churches have invested in online worship, and have streamed services from member's houses. There is currently a lot of excitement about this, with many churches seeing this as a "fresh expression of Church" and considering how online streaming can become a permanent fixture of their Churches worship

There are, as with everything new, pros and cons to this, and if I'm honest I do rather sit on the fence. For instance, should we be encouraged to "stick our faces in yet another screen" and encourage our young people to do so, or is it serving a real purpose in a time of need? Reaching people who previously might have never gone to Church? My conclusion is that ministry and worship should adapt, and

should not be feared, but we should be mindful that many do not have access to the internet, and its important they should not feel forgotten. However, one of the strengths of St Paulinus is the ability to offer both traditional and contemporary worship. Indeed, Ros Cooper and her family, and Richard and Carol having been offering an online service on a Sunday afternoon which has been fantastic (if you would like to participate, contact the office for the link. You need to have “zoom” downloaded on your phone, PC, or tablet) so I do think that there is a conversation to be had here about how we may offer this facility in the future, as a permeant feature of our worship

While we are not able to meet each other, a lot has been going on. Our wonderful Curate Amanda has put together a buddy scheme and grouped people together in order that we can all keep in touch. Both myself and Amanda have been ringing people around the Parish, and it's been lovely to talk to so many of you. If you are reading this and have not been contacted, or indeed if you are not a member of the Church but would like to speak to myself or Amanda, then please do get in touch. We very much appreciate how debilitating isolation can be, and we are here to help!

Whilst on the subject of our Curate, please do pray for Amanda and Stuart, as this has been a tough first year for both of them. At the beginning of her curacy she had to commute from Bromley, and now she has missed a fair bit of her training, including her first Easter here! However, Amanda being Amanda, she is going beyond her “call of duty” and has adapted very well, and put in place some good incentives for the Church

Yesterday we were informed by the Prime Minister that places of worship while remain closed until the beginning of July *at the earliest* which means it is almost certain that we won't be back in Church together till the middle of Summer, possibly even late July/August. Again, there has been much debate about this, especially on social media, about the Churches being closed when they are needed the most. My own view is that the Bishops have taking these steps after much prayer and reflection and with everyone's best interest at heart. It is very difficult I know, but the Christian faith is built around death and resurrection, we wait till once again we can gather together to worship, in fact, I have already been in discussion with relevant members of the Church about how that first Sunday might look

I am now as the incumbent able to enter Church to pray the daily office. I am also permitted to stream services from the Church as well. I am currently the only person allowed into the building, but members of my household can enter as well

I have given much thought to the possibility of recording the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on behalf of the parish, so that people can watch this on the Churches website. However, I am uneasy about this practise. Communion, for me, means not just the distribution of the consecrated elements, but to be able to partake of that within the “communion of people” Consequently, the next time mass is celebrated at St Paulinus will be when *everyone* can partake of it together. I don’t want church members to be spectators, I want them to be participants!

That doesn’t mean that other devotional reflections or short services could be offered instead, and I am currently in the process of thinking this through

It is worth summarising here what the Church is offering in these troubles times

- Online worship every Sunday at 3.00pm
- A buddy system organised by Amanda, please do contact her if you wish to be involved
- Both myself and Amanda ringing people on a regular basis to try to talk with as many of you as possible
- A reflection on the Gospel reading for the Sunday, from a member of the ministry team
- Kelly is still “running the office” from home, in case you need to contact her

In addition to the points above I am putting together a prayer list to be used daily for morning and evening prayer. If you would like any names added to that list, could you please e mail them to me at rector@stpaulinus.co.uk

In addition to this I am considering introducing two “online activities.” One would be a weekly Bible study led by myself, with everyone receiving the text in advance and contributing to the discussion. Secondly, I was thinking of having an “online social” where we just logged on, poured ourselves a drink and had a general chat, perhaps we could have a quiz as well, something like that?

If you would like to be part of the online Bible study, the please send me an e mail titled “Bible Study” to me at rector@stpaulinus.co.uk

If you would like to be part of the online social then please send me an e mail titled “social” to me at rector@stpaulinus.co.uk

At the moment you are just registering your interest. Regarding the Bible study If I have sufficient interest, I will look at firming up a day

and time soon. Regarding the social providing I receive sufficient interest I will fix that up for the sometime within the next few weeks

Let's hope and pray that come July our Church will be open and once more we can gather together. In the meantime, please do take good care of yourselves, and please do feel free to call myself or Amanda should you wish

With my very best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr Paul Prentice'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'P'.

Fr Paul Prentice Rector