

VICTORIA BAPTIST CHURCH



Dear friends and church members,

Having met with the Core Leadership Team last night, it is with regret that I must inform you that with immediate effect Sunday Services, all church meetings and midweek activities must cease.

Please bear with me as I set out the background and reasons for these decisions. Much of the information will be familiar to you, but I would like everyone to be clear on our reasons for this unprecedented course of action.

Yesterday evening, the Prime Minister said, **“Now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel.”**

Our nation (and other nations) face a significant challenge. Our success in facing that challenge depends upon every person behaving responsibly toward their neighbours – the more we do so – the more lives will be saved. The less we do so, the more vulnerable people will die.

That said, there is good news and much to be grateful for. All the evidence suggests that children do not suffer the worst (and most dangerous) effects of Covid-19. That is something every one of us should be thankful for. Secondly, though it is probable that very many people will be infected, 95% of those infected will either have no symptoms, mild symptoms or a level of sickness that will not require hospital treatment.

However, 5% of people will require hospitalisation and this is the group of people we are **ALL** being called upon to help. They are mostly the elderly and those with underlying serious health conditions. Of that group it is expected that, with the medical care that it usually available, 4 out of 5 will recover.

The problem our nation faces is that the NHS is not able to cope with 5% of the population (or a significant portion of the population) all arriving at its door in a four-week period. If that happens many of those people will not receive the care they otherwise might. The goal, therefore, is to lengthen the four-week period to a four-month period or longer. Every day the period can be extended, the lives of vulnerable people will be saved.

The goal then, is to slow the spread of the disease. This is where we all have a part to play. The most effective way to slow the spread of the disease, after regular hand-washing, is **social-distancing**. Because the virus spreads through touching surfaces that have the virus on and small droplets exhaled / or coughed out, minimising these things slows down the spread of the virus.

Additionally, because it is possible (even likely) that we, or our children, have no symptoms but may still be spreading the virus to others (to whom it may do significant harm) we must all limit as far as possible our non-essential social contact.

This is the reason we have decided to stop all church activities with immediate effect.

I must stress that we are not doing this to protect ourselves, we are doing it to delay the spread of the virus and improve the life chances of the 5% of infected people who are going to require hospitalisation.

Every social meeting increases the likelihood that the disease will spread rapidly, and those requiring medical care will not receive the care they otherwise might. Every act of social-distancing slows the spread of the disease and increases the chances of those people receiving the care they need.

That is why we have decided to take the unprecedented action of stopping all activities that require people to gather together. In doing so we are in line with the advice being given by the Baptist Union.

We will very shortly be implementing a church-wide pastoral system, in which we will ask people to make regular contact with their home group members and others within the church. If you can help, please let us know. We currently have details of all church members but if you are aware of non-members attending our activities that might become socially isolated please inform us. We would rather be told the same name five times than miss anyone.

We will be providing cards that you can collect from church and give to your neighbours if you are able to support them. These should be available from this Thursday (19th). This crisis presents a genuine opportunity for us to show the love of Christ in action and I encourage you to be active in doing so.

We will also arrange to either stream services, or make them available via YouTube by Sunday morning. These can be accessed directly by searching on YouTube for Victoria Baptist Church, or via the website. An email will be sent with a link to these. We intend to include more than a sermon but also other things we'd usually have on a Sunday. This coming Sunday we'll be considering the question, "Why does God

allow Coronavirus?”, which I hope might encourage and help you as you seek to be witnesses through this period.

We will consider other ways to support one another and our neighbours in the coming weeks and months.

Finally, if anyone is thinking “This all sounds like an over-reaction and doesn’t demonstrate much faith”, I would simply stress again that people’s lives are at stake. Some we may know, many we will not but, under God, they are all our neighbours. Galatians 5:14 says, *“The entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”*

The actions we are taking, though unprecedented, are an expression of that love. Continuing to meet will undermine rather than enhance the honour of Jesus Christ.

The Bible gives us a clear command to obey the ruling authorities in all things under God (Romans 13:1-6). We believe that the steps they are taking are for the good of the nation and should enjoy the support of every Christian and every church.

For the time being, it appears to be the will of God that the strength of the church will be seen, not in the quality of its services but in the love and faith of its people. I encourage you to hold firm to that faith and express that love.

As Erik said in his latest family ministries email, “Worry is not our friend and panic is not our way... In times of crisis, the world needs steady people who are strengthened by God’s grace and selfless by God’s power.”

Covid-19 presents our nation with a serious challenge and our church with an opportunity. We can be grateful that it is not a threat to our children and to many of us who are not among the most vulnerable. The challenge for **all of us**, young and old, is to make sacrifices for the sake of those who are. I wholeheartedly urge you to join us as we seek to do so.

With deepest love to you all.

Your servant in Christ,



Chris Short
Senior Minister
On behalf of the Core Leadership Team