

18th March 2020

Dear friends,

I'm sure you'll agree these are quite unprecedented times we are living through. Following Monday's announcement by the Prime Minister, we are all having to think very deeply about how we live our lives and how we support one another.

As a leadership team, we believe that the most responsible thing to do given the current circumstances is to close down our Sunday worship until Easter, when we will review. Meantime, given the wonderful technology, we are going to be livestreaming our two services (10.00am and 6.30pm). I know many people use this facility already in our church and we feel this is the best way to proceed. I suspect there will be quite a few other people as well logging in from other churches where this facility is not available. Just a reminder that the livestream address is:

<https://guildfordbaptist.streameventlive.com/>

It is also our intention to livestream our church meetings. Given the speed with which everything has happened this week, and also the need to think through the logistics of church participation, we have decided to postpone this Thursday's church meeting (19th March) and to livestream on Thursday 16th April with pretty much the same agenda.

In discussion as a staff team, we feel it is really important that we keep our office open during this time. Some of our staff are working from home, but we feel with the right social distancing, we can make the office work, thus providing an important contact point for our community. Please don't all ring at once, on the other hand, you might find it reassuring to talk to someone at the office, so please don't hesitate to ring or email.

One of the things we are blessed with at Millmead is a really wonderful pastorate community, and I am already seeing lots of ideas being generated among our leaders. It may well be that even pastorates will not be able to meet in any significant number during this period of time, but I am very confident that we will find ways to connect with each other. Let's be particularly mindful of those who don't have all the technology that some of us enjoy; even if we can't visit, we can always pick up a telephone. If you have concern about anyone, particularly those not connected within our pastorates, please do share your concern. We have a really great Pastoral Care Team, who have been sharing the pastoral work with myself and Karen for a good long while, so again, don't hesitate to get in touch. We also have a Family Pastoral Care Team, you can contact Lydia Birmingham or Suzi Bragger for details of this.

I am sure you will have worked out that most, but not all, of our programmes have been shut down, certainly our children's and youth programmes have pretty much closed until the foreseeable future. But again, there are lots of ways for us to engage and I know that Chris and Lydia and their teams are already considering some very creative ways to continue their ministries, and I look forward to seeing what is going to come out of this time, not only for them but for all of us as a church. Just

because we can't meet, doesn't mean we can't reach out to each other. Let us remember particularly our over 70s who are having to withdraw for the time being, and please also remember those who are having to self-isolate. It appears that London is particularly affected at the moment, so please do take care and act responsibly.

Be assured you are all very much in our thoughts and prayers. There is a lot of fear around at the moment, not helped by some of the ways in which all of this is being reported. It is a serious time to be sure, but we are not without hope. We believe along with many Christians that times of uncertainty can also be times of great opportunity. It may well be that many of our dreams of a different world will be realised through this crisis. So let us keep prayerful, hopeful and faithful. We have a God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

I am intending to use this media to communicate fairly regularly, so signing off for now.

The peace of the Lord,

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