

My dear friends

I am writing, above all, to assure you of my prayers and my support during these most challenging of times. As a country and as a community we are facing with the coronavirus epidemic a situation that none of us can have known before. This Sunday is Mothering Sunday, but it will be one quite unlike any other. I will be praying especially for those who because of self-isolation will be unable to spend the day and celebrate with parents or grandparents, children or grandchildren. We will all, I am sure, be thinking of how precious those times together as family can be. I shall be praying as well for all for whom COVID-19 has brought very real anxieties and fears for their health and livelihood. May God keep us all safe and well during this time.

The origins of Mothering Sunday lie in the tradition of workers being given a day off to return to their home parishes, to see their families, and to worship in their 'mother church'. For the first time ever, the latter part of that will not be possible this year. This week, the Church of England advised the suspension of all public church services until further notice, as part of our efforts together to stem the spread of the virus. Here in the Kingsbury and Baxterley Group of Parishes we will of course be following that advice. In addition, we shall be following the advice to postpone all non-essential meetings and social gatherings; this will include our Lent groups, PCC meetings and Annual Parochial Church Meetings. Alternative arrangements will be made and announced in due course when the situation is clearer. For now, our priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of all, as far as we are able.

In making the announcement about the suspension of public services, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York were very clear that this does not mean that the Church is "closed for business". Far from it! Our work, worship and witness continue, with greater intensity but in radically different ways. In particular, our life and pattern of prayer continues, and we will be embracing new ways of enabling that to happen. Although we cannot gather in church as we are used to, prayer and worship will continue to be offered in the five churches of our group by my colleague Revd Carole and myself. Each Sunday, Holy Communion will be celebrated at 11am in either Kingsbury or Merevale Church. Morning and Evening Prayer will be said during the week on each day, usually at 9.30am and 4.30pm, in a pattern that will include all five churches. Although I cannot say, as I usually would, "All Welcome", I hope you will take strength and assurance from knowing that prayers are being made on a regular basis for everyone in these villages and communities. I also hope that, wherever you are, you may find ways of joining your prayers to ours. For those of you who use smartphones, I recommend the Church of England's 'Daily Prayer' App, which is easy to download.

Churches Together in England have also called for this Sunday to be kept as a National Day of Prayer and Action, and have suggested putting a candle in your window at 7pm. Please only do that if it is safe to do so! But pray, anyway.

Although our opportunities to meet in person will be very much more limited in these coming weeks, the importance of staying connected is greater than ever before. Like many people, I shall be spending a lot more of my time on the phone than ever before, and I do urge you to give me a ring on 01827 874252 at any time. Phone me if there is anything I might be able to do to help; but also phone me if you just feel you want to talk. I also ask you to let me know of any prayer requests for yourself or someone you know. More than ever, do not hesitate by thinking "But the Vicar's too busy". I can honestly now say that I'm not! My diary is emptier than it's ever been, as meetings have been cancelled left, right and centre. Instead, my time is going to be spent primarily in prayer and in caring in what ever way I can for the people of this area – which for a parish priest is how it should be!

So be assured of my love and prayers, and keep in touch.

With every blessing

Revd John

Revd Dr John White

Priest in Charge of Kingsbury, Baxterley with Hurley and Wood End and Merevale with Bentley

The Vicarage, Church Lane, Kingsbury, Tamworth B78 2LR  
01827 874252