

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we are all aware, our society and our church are being deeply impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As members of the wider community, and as the body of Christ called to exercise love for our neighbours, we are committed to participating in our community in wise, faithful and responsible ways. We have our part to play – both in slowing and limiting the spread of the disease, and in helping everyone to learn new ways of continuing to connect with God, connect with people, and connect with community, in a time of emotional, physical and financial stress. Fortunately, we have extraordinary resources to face troubled times – in God, in one another, and in the excellent guidance given by Synod and Presbytery, health authorities and government.

At our meeting of March 16, Church Council appointed a Coronavirus Response Team (Rev. Claire and Sharynne and David) to decide and manage our church's response to the virus. Over the last 48 hours, we have been able to develop what we think is a positive and hopeful *first* plan of response – at least to things as they stand today. The Synod and Presbytery have advised us strongly to *stop all face-to-face meetings and gatherings* – and we have had to make some painful decisions about this. But we have also focused on ensuring that we can continue to connect people with God, connect people with people, and connect people with community.

The important ingredients of the plan, for everyone to note, are:

- (a) We will be *holding services this Sunday* (subject to strict infection protocols) for those who wish to gather, in order to offer pastoral support and equipping with resources for the immediate future. (Please bring a hat, as morning tea – again with strict protocols – will be in the open Courtyard.)
- (b) From then on, we will be *stopping all gatherings for worship* until further notice – but providing a range of resources for maintaining pastoral care, social connection, worship/devotion (including Easter services) and welfare activity. In addition to the **Response Team** (planning, information and resources), we have a **Pastoral Response Group** (Rev. David Wrightson and Ellie) to co-ordinate pastoral contact and care, and a **Welfare Response Group** (Julie and Sharynne) to co-ordinate practical helps. **Information packs** will be available on Sunday – and then from the Website and by email – or by mail or delivery if necessary. No-one will be left isolated or left behind if we can help it – and if we all work together to connect with and look after each other.
- (c) All *social/study/activity groups* are being asked to suspend 'in-person' meetings/gatherings – and to maintain contact and activity in other ways (with lots of help from us).

Please make sure that we have your best up-to-date contact details (especially email, if possible). If you would like help with getting on-line – or setting up and using 'virtual' meeting tools – let us know.

We have opened a dedicated **email address** – BUConnect@gmail.com – for all questions, suggestions, offers or requests for help (etc) at this time. Our **website** will also be a central hub for information about what's going on – and to access weekly resources for worship and devotions. Our **weekly Newsletter** will be emailed as usual for prayers, prayer requests, devotionals and updates: please get on Ruth's mailing list, if you aren't already on it.

'Physical distance – social connection' is our rallying cry for the moment. I warmly encourage each of us to take responsibility for 'being a neighbour' at this time: using the phone, post, internet and other resources to reach out to one another; to ask 'how are you going?'; to share bible readings, prayers and prayer requests; to generally *BE CHURCH* – be the presence of Christ – to each other, and others. This is our calling, our strength and our comfort. Again: *no-one will be left isolated or left behind if we can help it – and if we all work together to connect with and look after each other.*

And please remember: we are a people of hope! The God who has never failed us yet will surely not fail us now. Our strength is in Christ, and in each other, as we walk this journey together.

God bless you. God bless us all.

Claire

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