

Dear friends,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to you today to inform you that, following government and denominational advice, the church buildings will be closing with immediate effect, and we will not be holding a service this coming Sunday. We would have liked to tell everyone face-to-face but sadly this is not possible. All of the church groups and other users have already withdrawn their activities or have been informed of the suspension of church use until further notice.

On Monday evening, Alison and I met with Martha, David (via face time) and representatives from other churches in the Cardiff and Penarth pastorate to look for a way forward to continue our worship and fellowship over the coming weeks and, most likely, months when we will not be able to worship together in our buildings.

We are hoping that there will be on-line resources available, recordings of services, ways of worshipping together whilst not *actually* being in the same space as one another. These things will take a little bit of time to work out, but as soon as we have things organised, we will make sure they are available to everyone, including those who don't easily have access to the internet etc.

A few things that we can start to do:

1. The BBC has said that 'Songs of Praise' will be broadcast at 1.15pm every Sunday. We could all watch this and know that others are worshipping 'with us' at the same time.
2. The URC Daily Devotions is a great resource, available as a daily email but also as a 'podcast' at <https://devotions.urchurch.org.uk> If you would like to receive the emails then please click on the link and go to the top of the page to sign up. However if you don't have internet access but would like this, then please let your buddy group deacon(s) know and they will pass this on to me, so I can arrange for either a paper copy or CD of the podcasts to be sent to you on a weekly basis (this is the theory anyway!). One of the folk at Beulah is organising this for us centrally. Could you please let your deacon know ASAP if you would like either?
3. Some of the buddy groups have set up Whatsapp groups to keep in touch – it has more of a community feel than a phone call (which is also very important of course) as everyone in the group can be part of a conversation. It does require you to have a mobile phone of course, and the know-how of using it. If you DON'T have a phone and would like to be involved with this, then please let your buddy group deacon know as we would like to be able to get some recycled phones put to good use in this way. (Similarly if you have any old but perfectly functional mobile phones at home that you don't need then please keep them to one side as we may call upon you to donate them!)
4. Also, church leaders in Britain and Ireland have urged Christians to take part in a National Day of Prayer and Action about the coronavirus on Sunday 22 March. The call, states: "Whether you are continuing to worship as congregations or not, we have the great privilege and freedom to be able to call upon God, wherever we are, individually and corporately, for healing in our nation."

People are asked to light a candle in their window at 7 p.m. on Sunday "as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ".

Maybe this is something you would like to do.

5. At our meeting with the Pastorate churches, we discussed matching up people in need of help and support with those who are willing to offer the help, across the pastorate. We are thinking particularly of those over 70 and those with health difficulties needing help such as shopping, collecting a prescription or going to the post office etc. Please can you contact Alison on 029 2022 1380 if you either need the help or if you are willing to provide it.

There are plans to hopefully organise some form of worship for Holy Week/Easter Sunday so as soon as this is planned we will pass on the information.

With every blessing,

Fiona, on behalf of the deacons of Canton Uniting Church

Message from Martha:

Dear friends,

Church is closed due to Coronavirus

With real sadness the Elders and I have decided that we should close the church premises in response to today's Government briefing about the Coronavirus outbreak.

All of the groups that hire our premises are being notified about this. All of our own groups and activities are suspended from now on until further notice.

We do not have control over homegroups who meet in homes rather than on the church premises, but we do urge you to make a decision that best protects the health and wellbeing of every person in your group, as well as their families who would also be affected by your choices.

What happens about worship, pastoral care etc?

We will not be meeting at church on Sunday for worship. I hope to sort out something online that will be helpful, but that's a task for the coming days.

We have not had chance, yet, to address any of the other practicalities ...we will be looking at ways to be church in these unusual times. And when we have more information we will let you know.

But for now the best thing to say is simply this:

Keep in touch with one another, and keep praying for one another.

Remember, this is temporary

Nobody knows when churches will be able to resume gathering to worship. But a worldwide virus outbreak does not mean that Jesus has fallen off his throne! He remains King and we are a people of hope who constantly look forward to the day when he will bring sorrow and sickness to an end and make all things new.

In the meantime we are called to live our daily lives in a way that demonstrates that he really is our Lord and our Saviour. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

'For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35-39 (NIVUK)

Revd. Martha McInnes