

Message to parishioners in St Weonards Benefice re: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Elizabeth and I have been putting our old hats on – as nurse and doctor - to work out what best to do about the looming virus problem. While it is important not to be overly pessimistic, it is obvious that this illness poses a serious risk to health, and particularly to that of us Oldies. And the greatest risk is that some of us may develop a mild case which does not endanger ourselves, but may be passed on to someone else who is elderly or in frail health, to whom it could be fatal. The other important task we have is to slow down the spread of the infection so that our health service is not overwhelmed.

While we can do little about the other six days of the week, Elizabeth and I have agreed that we will take various precautions at our Sunday services: these will include asking our congregations to spread out in the church, so that no one is too close to each other: avoiding handshaking at the Peace (last Sunday we all just turned around, made eye contact with someone, smiled and waved - it was lovely!): the clergy will take hot water, soap and towel so that we can wash our hands thoroughly before preparing the elements: taking Communion in 'one kind', i.e. taking bread only: staying in your seats to be served with the bread, rather than crowding at the altar rail. This is consistent with the latest [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance for churches](#) from the Church of England.

Hopefully that will be enough to see us through this difficult period, but if the epidemic progresses and we get to the stage of schools having to be closed, and people advised not to attend crowded events, then we feel that services would have to be suspended temporarily. If this should happen, (and of course it is possible that this stage has been reached by the time you read this), then we will circulate a short 'DIY' service which people might enjoy at home, accompanied by a short reflection for each Sunday: easy enough to do for people who have access to the internet.

But the most important thing we can do, and which EVERYONE can help with, is to combat the loneliness and social isolation which could affect us all, by phoning neighbours for a chat, writing letters and emails, sending photos and exchanging news with each other. Perhaps we will all make new friends!

Keep well—and keep washing hands!

Revd Dr Frances Phillips

11 March 2020

