

## **MINISTRY DURING A TIME OF COMPULSORY SOCIAL DISTANCING AND ISOLATION DUE TO CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19)**

In light of the latest government measures here are some helpful suggestions for exercising ministry in our parishes. This is an amalgamation of much of the good practice already happening across the diocese.

When disaster strikes and tragedy hits, the church can usually be found exercising ministry at the heart of a situation, bringing people together, organising special services and events, and offering practical and pastoral support in many and varied ways. Therefore, the situation in which we currently find ourselves is highly unusual and requires us to respond in ways that are counter intuitive for the church and her ministry of outreach to those in need.

As we know, ministry is the responsibility of all the baptised and we can each do our bit to shed something of God's light, love and hope into the darkness, anxieties and fears of the communities and people in which we find ourselves and among whom we minister.

### **ONLINE RESOURCES, SOCIAL MEDIA & APPS**

The internet is increasingly our most effective means of offering ministry to the world during this time of compulsory isolation and social distancing. It enables us to communicate with others directly without posing a risk to their physical health and wellbeing. I would strongly encourage parishes to engage with some form of digital communication if they can, even in its most basic forms, because something is definitely better than nothing at the present time. Below are some suggestions of how you and your parishes could exercise a digital ministry.

While public worship is suspended, worship of and prayer to Almighty God, can and should always continue. Many parishes are being creative and imaginative in using different mediums to enable corporate worship and prayer to continue and for private prayer to be facilitated. Parishes are also utilising social media to continue with Lenten study and social gatherings. Here are some suggestions you may wish to explore with your parish:

- Clergy and other worship leaders may wish to live stream or record acts of worship (the Eucharist, as well as Morning, Evening and Night Prayer) using social media platforms (eg. Facebook, YouTube) and apps like Zoom. (If you do not live within close proximity to a church, where possible this should be done from home in light of the new government guidelines restricting public movement.)
- Parish prayer / study / discussion / social groups can meet together virtually either by simply messaging, or voice conversation, or live video, using apps and facilities like Zoom, WhatsApp, FaceTime and Messenger.
- Simple orders for daily prayer and leaflets of useful prayers for the sick, the anxious and the lonely can be posted on Facebook pages and circulated by email.
- People can be encouraged to pray using apps and websites such as Daily Prayer (Church of England Common Worship), Pray as you Go (daily podcasts), the Church in Wales Orders for Morning and Evening Prayer on the Church in Wales website.
- Inspirational videos can be created and circulated featuring prayers and sermons / homilies / reflections using apps like KineMaster and iMovie.
- Enable people to offer prayer intentions on social media or be submitted by email, which can be offered during designated times of prayer digitally or privately.

- There are also plenty of Sunday School and children's ministry resources available online. The following websites may be helpful:

<https://ministry-to-children.com/sunday-school-lessons/>

<https://www.sundayschoolsources.com/>

<https://engageworship.org/engage-at-home-daily-family-prayer-and-worship-activities>

- Recommend spiritual reading and bible study can be offered using online resources, as well as digital and audio books.

- Some websites and social media platforms (eg. YouTube) offer Lenten devotions, such as virtual stations of the cross. Virtual Stations of the Cross resources could potentially be posted on parish Facebook pages and twitter feeds every Friday for example.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are lacking in confidence with any of the above, help is at hand in the form of Matt Batten (Diocesan Director of Communications), who is always willing to help and advice!

### **OFFLINE MINISTRY ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES**

There will be many who are not online and who will not be reached through digital ministry, particularly some of the most vulnerable. Here are some suggestions of ways in which prayer, worship and study can be facilitated in other ways offline:

- Phone calls and text messages are going to be most crucial for those who are not online, particularly those who fall into the more vulnerable age range.

- Produce a leaflet/booklet of recommended prayers and bible passages and post through letter boxes.

- Encourage people to pray the Lord's Prayer (or other familiar prayers and devotions) at a certain time every day and possibly to light a candle in their homes.

- Lists of recommended/suggested reading can be created, especially perhaps some helpful spiritual titles for Lent.

- There are lots of prayerful devotions people can do in isolation, such as the Jesus prayer and knotted prayer rope, the daily examen and the rosary.

### **PRACTICAL SUPPORT**

Churches are usually hugely effective in providing ministry through practical support to those in need and this can continue in different ways. For example:

- Churches should be mindful of the most vulnerable in the local community and be attentive to their needs in recommended ways. Communities may be mobilised with a desire to help and the church can and should be involved with local initiatives.

- Providing and circulating contact details for assistance if anyone should need help.

- Collecting prescriptions or shopping for the most vulnerable and delivering them to front doors, whilst maintaining a safe distance, is one means of basic practical support.

- Continuing to support Foodbanks is going to be increasingly important. Try and keep a drop off/collection point available somewhere for goods.

These are just some of the ways in which we can be the church and offer effective ministry at a time of restricted movement and social distancing. May God bless all your efforts at this challenging time.