

COVID-19

The Church continues to be alive and active but our buildings must close in London

As we gather to pray for our nation at 7pm this evening, we have been aware how the Church of England in London has responded to the suspension of public worship, and for a season to finding a new way of living, worshipping and serving our communities. Sadly, London is ahead of the rest of the country in seeing a steep rise in the number of those falling sick with COVID-19. We have all heard the strong calls from the Mayor and the Prime Minister not to leave home unless it is essential, and not to use public transport unless we have to. If our attempts to distance ourselves physically from one another and prevent the spread of infection are not effective, more people will die.

In light of this, the time has come, **in London, not only for us to suspend public worship, but for us to close our church buildings entirely**. In doing this we demonstrate how important physical distancing is in saving lives. Do place notices on the doors and also on your website explaining how people can join with the church in worship and prayer with an emergency telephone number so that contact can be made if required. We are aware that, although we make the decision in London first, it may be required across the country.

Clergy who live adjacent to their churches may still go into the building and pray and even celebrate the Eucharist. You might ring the bell to tell the faithful that prayer is happening and do live stream as much as possible; but the doors should now be left closed even for private prayers. Others should continue their pattern of prayer in their homes. Current guidance remains for baptism, weddings and funeral although this may change in coming days.

Our most profound desire is to come together with our neighbours. Christ taught us to come together as His Body to celebrate the sacraments. In all the history of Christendom in these islands, we have not before taken such a step. Partly, this is our modern understanding of how disease is communicated, which in the times of former plagues had not developed. But it is also born of the teaching of Our Lord that the two great commandments are love of God and love of neighbour. The very love of neighbour that leads us to want to come together requires us to sacrifice congregating for a season.

Even though our buildings will be closed, the Church continues to be alive and active. Please continue to commend tools for worship, bible study and devotion at home which have been put online, continue to live stream the worship you are able to within the guidance, enable people with biblical reflection, spiritual communion, and personal devotion. Where you can meet virtually for prayer and Bible study, do so. Finally, pray for us, as we do for you, in these difficult days.

The action is being replicated for London Boroughs in the Dioceses of London, Southwark, Chelmsford and Rochester and with support from the Archbishop of Canterbury

+ Sarah Bishop of London
+ Christopher Bishop of Southwark
+ James Bishop of Rochester
+ Stephen Bishop of Chelmsford