

## All Saints' Church

Cottenham with Rampton



### Pastoral Letter #1

17<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Church Family,

As I prayed at All Saints', Cottenham this morning, I realised that in its 800 year history the Church will have supported the community of Cottenham through many difficult situations similar to the one facing our village today. The same will be true of Rampton.

But most of us living today have no experience of a pandemic. A virus is something you can't touch, see, or even know where it is. It may be spread by those who don't even know they are infected. As we know, it is very serious for some; very mild for many.

Nevertheless, the effect of the virus could drive us apart. To some extent it must do. The government announced last night that everybody in the UK is being asked to stop non-essential contact with other people and avoid all unnecessary travel. And those in high-risk groups will be asked to stay at home for 12 weeks; this affects pregnant women, people over 70 and those with underlying health conditions. We are told that this is the only way to control the spread of Covid-19 and ensure the NHS can cope with the increased demand on services.

Today the Church of England responded to the government advice by **suspending all public worship until further notice**. This is with immediate effect. In addition to worship, no small groups, Lent lunches, services in care homes, Fellowship Tea, Little Saints, nor any meetings will be taking place for the foreseeable future. Both churches in Cottenham and Rampton will remain open for private prayer and I will be in All Saints' Church, Cottenham, saying prayers on behalf of the people of both villages at 9am and 5pm each day. On occasion, I will pray in Rampton. If you are in church and others join you, please follow the government's advice on social distancing.

Far from the Church being closed though, we will face the challenge by becoming a radically *different* kind of church, rooted in prayer and serving others. In addition to our daily prayer, our archbishops have joined with other church leaders in calling for a day of prayer and action this Sunday (Mothering Sunday), particularly remembering those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in health or emergency services. It would be lovely if, as a church family, we were all able to **pray at home at 10.30am this Sunday**, the time when most of us would normally gather to worship. Please check the Church of England website for resources nearer the time.

In the coming days and weeks, the national Church will be providing a range of resources to enable us to continue our walk with God at this difficult time. I will make you aware of these as they become available, and will ensure that those without access to a computer also have something they can use. There is much already available including #LiveLent daily

reflections, prayer for the day (audio and text), and many Lent resources which several of you have already taken away. Ely Cathedral is planning to livestream its Sunday morning Eucharist so keep an eye on the Cathedral website for further details. I will also place sermons that I would have preached on the All Saints' Cottenham website.

There are understandable worries about the risk of isolation for those needing to stay at home for a long period. Whilst we won't be able to see one another for a while, we can still communicate by telephone, email and social media. If you are on Facebook and haven't already 'liked' the Church Facebook page, can I strongly encourage you to do so as this will be a key method of communication going forward. I will also produce regular pastoral letters which will be available to you on the website, Facebook, email and by post.

In our wish to provide effective pastoral care, using the Church Directory, I or a member of the Church Leadership Team will contact you in the next week to ask if you are ok, and whether there is anything we can do to support you through this difficult time. Church members not affected by needing to remain at home are happy to shop and carry out errands for people, taking care to follow the government advice about social contact. Through prayer, phone contact and practical support, we can still care for one another lovingly. If you need to contact me, please do not hesitate to do so. My telephone number is 583651 and email - [rector@allsaintscottenham.org.uk](mailto:rector@allsaintscottenham.org.uk)

If you are one of those needing to stay at home for the next 12 weeks, you may feel that there is little you can do to help anyone else. However, you can also use the telephone and email to offer support to others. And there is something that everyone can do regardless of age or condition - you can pray! Pray for yourself, for those you love, for friends and neighbours, for those working in the NHS, for businesses affected, and for our national leaders.

Three thousand years ago a young King, of shepherd background, called David, wrote a song. It was a hit at his time and has remained so ever since. That is quite a success, even the greatest of our stars of today would feel that three thousand years at the top was quite an achievement. It's the Shepherd song The Lord's my Shepherd.

We sing it on Sundays, at weddings and at funerals. It starts with hope but speaks of darkness as well as life. The singer begins with joy: God, the divine Shepherd-King, leads his people to nourishment and safety but in the song the scene quickly darkens. The path along which he goes becomes a valley of the shadow of death. But the shepherd's 'rod' and 'staff', implements that prod and guide the sheep, provides the comfort that comes from divine guidance.

Find Psalm 23 and read it aloud. The Shepherd's song is about real life, not an idealised picture. It speaks of suffering and facing enemies. And whether we are confident and brave, or doubt-filled and fearful, we know that God is the source of love and hope.

We have a stronghold and refuge, we do not depend on ourselves alone, for God keeps us so that as the Shepherd song ends "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life".

I will be thinking and praying for all of you by name over the next few weeks. Let's still be Church together, rooted in prayer and serving one another well.

With love and best wishes,

Lynda

Rector of All Saints', Cottenham with Rampton