*“Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you walk through the waters, I will be with you…. When the fear of loneliness is looming, then remember that I am at your side…. Remember, you are precious in my eyes.”* (Based on Isaiah 43:1-4)

Following advice from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, all services at St Stephen’s church have now been suspended until further notice. This comes after the Government announced unprecedented peacetime measures to try to control the spread of Coronavirus, with restrictions on public gatherings, transport and working.

For the same reasons, Open Church sessions on Thursday and Saturday are also suspended until further notice, as too is Little Stars on Thursday afternoons, and Saturday Parish Office.

The Coronavirus pandemic is having a profound effect on all our lives, with many people – whether in isolation or not - feeling very unsettled and vulnerable. At times such as these, it is more important than ever that we hear God’s message of comfort and hope to each of us, and continue to live out our vocation as Christ’s body to be salt and light in the world. And it should also be a source of comfort to know that we remain deeply committed to one another’s welfare: we have not ceased to be Church simply because we cannot meet together!

These are some of the ways in which we at St Stephen’s can in the times ahead continue to be nourished spiritually, care for one another, and be a support to our communities:

* Visit our website www.st-stephens-church-worcester.org.uk where you will find some simple service outlines you can use by yourself at home, together with prayers, short sermons, and links to Church of England resources available online. We will add to what is available in the weeks ahead, and will explore the possibility of streamed services, especially for Holy Week – so watch this space! If you are able to pray at normal service times, you will know that others are joining you at the same time.
* As encouraged by the Archbishops, St Stephen’s will be open as a place of individual prayer for the community (observing social distancing recommendations) daily from 9-10.30am and 5-6.30pm.
* Anniversaries of the deaths of loved ones will continue to be remembered in church during the daily prayer times, including by the lighting of a candle.
* The Archbishops have urged congregations to be at the forefront of providing practical care and support for the poorest and the most vulnerable in our communities during the crisis, including contributing to food banks (please note that at this time, donations of money to the Worcester Foodbank may be preferable to donations of food). St Stephen’s is also supporting other local initiatives to provide neighbourly support.
* Do please continue to support one another by telephone/email/social media. To the extent you are able, please do all you can to reach out to and support those outside your usual friendship circles.
* Because of data protection regulations, we retain only a minimum of personal information. Clergy have been told not to make home visits other than in exceptional circumstances, so if you would like to be included in our regular email updates (which will include some of the services, prayers etc to be included on our website), please either email me at the address below, or text me your email address.

Finally, do please feel very free to call or email me if you would like your name or the name of a friend or loved one to be remembered during our daily prayer in church, or if you would simply value a chat. I hope too that you find the enclosed prayer cards helpful.

During these very difficult times, I pray that the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Andy

19th March 2020

*On behalf of the PCC of Barbourne St Stephen’s*

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