

Dear all

We are writing to assure you of our prayers at this unsettled time as we face so many challenges resulting from the spread of the Coronavirus (Covid 19).

In the last 24 hours we have begun to face even more significant changes to our lives as we take new precautions to fight the spread of infection, and rally to support essential services and protect the most vulnerable members of our communities. You will all be considering the impact these changes will have on your work, your health, your ministry and your relationships with friends and family members. We are praying for you; please pray for us and for the church leaders who share responsibility for the care of your community.

In the light of the most recent advice from our government, we know that these new measures will also have a huge effect on the life of churches across the diocese and the whole country. We are working hard to ensure the continuity of our mission and ministry across the diocese throughout this time, and we are expecting further guidance from the National Church in the coming hours. We will update you again today by email once that has been received.

A contingency planning group of the senior staff met this morning, and the Diocesan offices already have effective continuity plans to ensure the best possible provision of support in key areas of our church's life. Clergy and ministry teams in parishes and other sectors have been working tirelessly on local contingency plans. In all this, we continue to receive reliable national advice, prepared in consultation with Public Health England, and communicated as quickly as possible to churches. We will keep our website and social media channels updated in the coming days, endeavouring to address as many as we can of the questions we know you are asking.

The Archbishops' are calling us to a national day of prayer this coming Sunday, focusing especially on the needs of our world and our country. This will be an opportunity to pray earnestly for the government and its advisers, for medical staff and other key workers, for the sick and the bereaved, and for those who are fearful and lonely. As we adjust to new conditions of life over the coming weeks, we pray for wisdom to know how to respond to these needs in practical ways. Churches can be places of hope and we are delighted to hear of the many ways in which you are responding with positive action, from offering help with shopping and providing telephone contact to those who are isolated to finding creative ways to help people engage with worship. Do keep finding ways to reach out to your communities as you share the light of Jesus with those around you. Thank you for all you do, and especially for all that goes unnoticed and unmentioned.

Finally, take care of yourselves! Make the most of the support networks you have and don't be afraid to ask for help. And, above all, hold fast to the Lord who is with us in every situation, as Psalm 46 reminds us:

'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble'.

With our prayers and best wishes

The Right Reverend Tim Dakin
Bishop of Winchester

The Rt Revd David Williams
Bishop of Basingstoke

The Rt Revd Debbie Sellin
Bishop of Southampton

