

## Letter from the Vicar

Saturday 7 November

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Following the Prime Minister's announcement last Saturday evening I had hoped to write to you earlier in the week outlining (with guidance from our bishops) what the effects of Lockdown 2.0 will have on our common life. Sadly, that guidance only arrived late last night! For the whole week I have been working with the bare minimum of information that, during this Lockdown **Public Worship will be suspended but church buildings can remain open for a) private prayer, b) the purposes of recording or streaming worship, and c) funerals.** So what does this mean for us? Regrettably, despite our efforts to make attending Public Worship as safe as possible, we will not be able to meet together for services until 2 December. All worship material will be recorded in advance (like in previous months) and will be available on our website. Orders of Service will also continue to be available on the website and via the weekly Newsletter email. St John's will continue to be open every day for private prayer and I hope that, if your daily exercise happens to take you near St John's you might feel inclined to pop-in and offer your prayers. We will also record our services in advance of Sunday so as to ensure that they are available for 10.00am on Sunday morning for all of us to be able to join/watch/worship at the same time.

Indeed, this week has involved quite a lot of filming. Not only have we already recorded tomorrow's service for Remembrance Sunday but we have also recorded a special Advent Sunday service, just ahead of lockdown, so that the choir could be part of it as, prior to receiving the guidance, it was debatable whether choirs could be in attendance for recording during this current lockdown. The guidance now seems to imply they can so I hope we might be able to record more services with them.

Yesterday, with the assistance of Carole who was preaching, Noel James who laid our wreath, and Sir Mike Penning MP who laid a wreath on behalf of the town and the Royal British Legion, and with musical assistance from Katherine and Keith – who incidentally continues to be a technical powerhouse – we were able to record our service for Remembrance Sunday. Although we are observing the national Act of Remembrance virtually this year, the content remains the same and I hope you will be able to join in honouring the sacrifice made by so many, in former years, in the service of our country.

During the week you may have received an email from me inviting you to write to our MP to try and lift the ban on Public Worship. I know some of you wrote to Sir Mike, and others to me. On balance, like all of you, I want everyone to be safe and well and if closing places of worship, among other things, is the only way to achieve this then we must support it. But that does not stop me (and possibly you) from being frustrated by the ban. No evidence, as far as I have seen, indicates that churches and places of worship are spreaders of the virus other than they naturally involve gathering people together. There would have been ways round limiting numbers (like the excellent ticketing system we used last Sunday afternoon for the very moving Annual Memorial Service) but that is not an option. We have taken every necessary step to make all our churches Covid safe and will continue to do so when we are able to re-open in the future.

To add all this confusion and uncertainty our news coverage has been consumed with the US Presidential election. As I write, I hope that the era of Fake News is coming to an end and that confidence in national institutions and government can be rebuilt – both in America but also here at home.

Change is on the cards internationally – and change (albeit different) has come to our parish. Last week we gave Ruth a warm send-off as her time as a licenced parochial minister came to an end. Included with this letter is a letter from Ruth expressing her thanks for her gifts and some pictures. Ruth was a fabulous colleague. I know she was much loved and respected here and I will be inviting her to assist whenever she is available.

On a personal note my week was also thrown into confusion when I received a phone call from my mother telling me my father had fallen out of the front door, banged his head on the car (denting it) as he fell, and was carted off to hospital in an ambulance. The confusion arose as it was impossible to get hold of any one who was treating him in the hospital, and my father doesn't have a mobile phone! Eventually, we learned that he broke a bone in his neck which doesn't appear to need surgery to fix, so he was fitted with an additional 'dog collar' to go with his clerical dog collar and sent home. Much to my relief he seems to be his normal self but this has given me new insight into how families are feeling when loved ones are taken into hospital.

I trust you are all well and keeping safe. As always, I leave you with my prayers for each of you; keep safe; and remain secure in the knowledge of our God who loves us, cares for us, and enfolds us in his arms.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line that extends to the right.

The Reverend Michael Macey

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