



Important news: Coronavirus and church.

Breathe!

The Lord knew this virus pandemic would happen and has already made provisions. Paul the Apostle writes: *"He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him, we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us."* (2 Corinthians 1:10)

We have entered, as they say, unprecedented times when the whole country is expected to practise social distancing or self-isolation. As your pastors, Emma and I have the responsibility of care for you, as well as for the community.

On Monday afternoon, this week, Boris Johnson announced that we are now entering the fast growth period of the virus and need to take strong action immediately in order to slow the peak of the virus.

What does this mean for our church?

Part of the guidance from the Government is that people should abstain from gathering in pubs, theatres and cinemas and any other group setting. A question was later raised in Parliament to Matt Hancock, the Health Minister, who was asked if this also covered religious gatherings. His answer was 'yes'.

We have, therefore, taken the difficult, but necessary decision to protect you, and others around you, to suspend our public Sunday gatherings and groups from the end of this week.

It remains our first concern to ensure that no-one who is self-isolating, and unable to be with others, feels cut off from fellowship and detached from the body of Christ. So may we ask you, if you are aware of anyone in church or on the fringe of church and who lives near you, could you begin to explore ways to keep in touch with each other? Thank you.

So, what about Sundays?

From this Sunday, 22nd March, we are planning to upload a pre-recorded Sunday message, which you will be able to access through our church website at 10.30am on the talks page.

We know there will be some disappointment around this weekend as it is Mother's Day and already so much effort has gone into this service, but the good news is, we will still have a special treat for you, so make sure you watch all the message!

Moving forward, we are working hard to offer a live-streamed service on following Sunday mornings at 10.30am. We plan to use YouTube, as it will mean a number of you will be able to watch it on your larger TV screens.

We are keeping to this time because we want to retain a sense of community and it is one of the practical ways where we can remain present with each other.

If you are serving on a team, your coordinator will be in touch with you shortly to explain how you may continue to serve.

Meanwhile, John Forth will be working with the Planet Vineyard Team to find ways to keep our children and young people connected. This, again, will be through the gift of digital communication and will happen on Sunday mornings. More details to follow shortly.

We will be staying in touch with you through our usual channels: website, social media, email and text. If you know anyone who is not online or doesn't have a phone or is unsure how to use technology, this is one immediate way you can bless someone, by giving them a quick lesson.

Our aim is to continue to operate Storehouse and to keep the church office open. We want to keep things as normal as we can. But please keep giving your food donations if you are able, alongside your regular gifts and offerings to God. Each gift really does make an impact for the Kingdom.

Meantime, if you, yourself, are worried, concerned, upset, please don't suffer alone! Each of us is here for each other. We will help you get connected to a small group. God - Immanuel - is with us.

Lastly, we'd love you to take this ancient prayer of St Francis of Assisi and find a quiet space to speak it out loud to God today.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life." Amen.

See you online this Sunday. We are very much praying for you.

Much love from us both,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew & Emma". The script is cursive and fluid.

Pastors Andrew and Emma Stewart-Darling

stourvalleyvineyard.org

