



11th March 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are writing to both thank you all for holding in your prayers those affected so far by the coronavirus, and to inform you of the actions we are taking here in the parish.

Please be assured that we take the health of all who visit us seriously and are following all the advice given to us by both the government and the Church of England. All who are welcoming, presiding or serving in our Parish will continue to carefully wash hands before and during the service. In addition, for the time being, as of today both the physical sharing of the peace (with a handshake/hug) and the administration of the chalice is suspended. Be assured that in receiving the bread alone you are still participating fully in the Eucharist. If in doubt about this, please speak to a member of the clergy.

Please also consider how your response to the virus reflects your Christian witness. We encourage you to show the love of Christ to all those who are unwell, and we wish no one to feel unwelcome or unloved because they may have a cough or cold. If you know of anyone who you think may be feeling vulnerable or isolated at this time, please do help reduce any sense of loneliness by giving them a call to see how they are or if they need anything.

Remember, Jesus himself risked contact with those who were considered unclean. In the early Church, Christians cared for and demonstrated the love of God to plague victims. In England in the 19th century, it was the church that provided care in cholera epidemics. Today, Christians in Wuhan, China (and many other places) are risking their lives to care for their neighbours. Part of that demonstration of love is doing what we can to protect the weakest members of our community by taking all necessary precautions, while ensuring that the decisions we make do not risk unduly excluding or ignoring anyone.

Finally, there will be some amongst us who have a cold, a cough, flu or something else which has nothing to do with the coronavirus. It may be through their own fear, others are wary of you. Please do not get alarmed. Instead, let us all pray for each other in our worries and vulnerabilities. There are also many Asian members of our community and country who are

currently frightened of repercussions or being stigmatised – as followers of the heavenly Lord and Father who created all, we must not encourage thoughts or actions which lead to fear and separation.

For more useful information please see the following:

Church of England advice – regularly updated

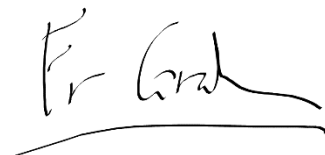
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

The Bishop of St Albans (former Bishop of Shrewsbury) has also written this Moral Response

<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/coronavirus/>

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen

with love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr Graham', with a horizontal line underneath.

Fr Graham and the Clergy and Wardens of Berkswich