﻿Dear Friends,

As you may have heard this evening, the government has just announced the closure of all church buildings, with immediate effect. This means that neither St. James or St. Peters will be open for personal prayer, or for baptism or weddings, until these restrictions are lifted. There was talk of potentially relaxing the restrictions in 3 weeks, but there is no guarantee of this.

This is very sad news, but as God's church it is not our building, or even our meetings, which define us. It is Jesus, and that we are his followers together, trusting him and sharing his love. We will discover new and richer things about what it means to be God's church in these coming weeks and months. But it will be an immense challenge.

We need to bring this all before the Lord. The church in China was forced underground and banned from public meeting in 1949, when missionaries went back in decades later they expected to find no church at all, but instead the Holy Spirit had been at work and millions had come to Christ. Many of the new subscribers to our church Youtube channel are people who are not yet members of our church. Several people have been in touch with us to ask if we can help the housebound and vulnerable. This is both a moment of crisis, and a moment of opportunity. We have a God who is great enough and whose love is deep enough to bear us all through this.

So please could you

1. Pray for each other, and encourage each other. Cell leaders  - please make sure all your members know about this, ideally by a phone call, as leaders it is our role to set the tone and to encourage people to put their faith in God, not to live out of a place of fear and anxiety.

2. Pray for Ruth and myself as we look at the best use of social media, youtube, email, and printed resources, to resource everyone in prayer and worship.

3. Seek God, and ask him if these strange times are an opportunity to express our discipleship in new ways. I'll be doing a webcast soon on the spiritual discipline of solitude, and the rich Christian tradition of how time alone, with God, can be spiritually enriching.

4. If you would be willing to shop or deliver things for people who are self-isolating, please let myself or Ruth know. I have dealt with 2 families today, one including a 99 year old, who have reached out to the church for help.

5. Please follow the government advice, don't make any trips out which aren't absolutely necessary, and please do ring/text/message anyone who you think 'I wonder how they are doing' - it might be a nudge from the Holy Spirit, and just what that person needs at that time.

We will continue with the live stream of Sunday worship, and do subscribe to our Youtube channel to get alerts of any new webcasts https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2oameSsM0zLcT\_HMm-OfDA/

Please do get in touch with myself or Ruth if you have any particular concerns. This will be a whole new way of being church for most of us, but we have always said 'the church is the people, not the building'.  I am convinced that God will use this to His glory, and to shape us to be more like Christ.

"If I go down to the depths, you are there also" (Ps 139)

yours in Christ

David and Ruth

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Rev David Keen
3 Poplar Drive
Yeovil BA21 3UL
01935 422286