Dear Church member,

***“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love”*** 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

These words of Paul’s to the early church in Corinth seem to contain particular wisdom for Christians today, as we learn how to respond to the covid-19 crisis.

Paul urges us to “be on our guard”, sound advice for each of us as we modify our lives in light of this new virus. Although ‘self-isolating’ may seem counter intuitive to many of us, we all need to do everything we can to support the most vulnerable in our communities by not only protecting ourselves wherever possible from contracting the virus, but also ensuring we don’t become transmitters of this disease. Let us all do everything possible to *be on our guard* for the sake of those who are feeling most vulnerable.

Secondly, we are asked to “stand firm in the faith”. There has never been a time in recent history where we have not been able to gather together to worship. So, let us all make a commitment to *stand firm in our faith* at this time. May we use this period to dedicate ourselves in a very special way to praying for our communities, nation and world. May we continue to find our own patterns of worship, whether that’s joining in acts of worship via the radio, listening to podcasts or participating in private acts of reflection. And may we continue to intentionally connect with each other to encourage each other in our faith. Housegroups may still choose to ‘meet’ via video conferencing, prayer groups may be facilitated through messaging applications, or we may simply phone each other regularly and commit to praying for one another. May we all stand *firm in the faith* despite our inability to meet together.

Thirdly, Paul asks us to “be courageous; be strong”. Many of us will be feeling fearful and vulnerable. We may have particular health or financial concerns. We are reminded of the faith we have in Jesus Christ. God is our “firm foundation” and “ever-present help in trouble”. We are reminded to “cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for you”. In the face of national panic, may our response as Christians be defined by faith, hope and the peace of Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, we are asked to “do everything in love”. In a time of national crisis we must choose the way of love more than at any other time. Of course, we may need to be creative in terms of how we express this love in the context of social distancing. There will be many in our communities and families who need comfort, encouragement, practical support or financial help. May we be characterised by our acts of love during this challenging and troubling time.

As your vicar of xxxxxx I will be doing everything I can to support the local congregation and community of xxxxx during this crisis. But in order to keep doing this, St xxxx’s needs your continued support at this time. Covid-19 has raised some very particular financial challenges for our church. I am so grateful for the energy and generosity you have given to St XXXX in the past, and I urge you to continue to serve the church with the same enthusiasm now, in particular by helping us to address this significant financial challenge.

**Why has St xxxx’s income been so affected by covid-19?**

As you are an important member of the church, I would like to take this opportunity to explain why the virus has had this impact.

* Many of you have generously supported our church for years through plate and envelope giving. As we cease meeting for gathered worship you are no longer able to give in these ways. This represents a significant loss of income for our church.
* We are no longer able to hire out our rooms.
* Key church fundraisers are no longer able to go ahead.
* We expect to lose valuable income from ‘occasional offices’: our weddings, christenings and funerals.

Taken together, this all represents a significant loss of income for the church of St xxxxx.

**Why do we still need the same amount of income now church has ‘closed’?**

Sadly, although our normal patterns of worship have stopped, our costs have not. We are still required to pay fixed costs such as buildings insurance, and Parish Offer continues to be as relevant as ever, as clergy like me continue to work and need housing. Although it may not feel like it now, we are also mindful of the fact that eventually this storm will pass, and we need a financially viable church in our community that is able to continue to be a worshipping presence once again.

The financial challenges being faced by our church here in xxxx are unfortunately replicated in every parish across the county. The diocese is doing all they can to support churches during this turbulent time, but they are very reliant on Parish Offer, their main source of income. A material drop in this income source across the county will impact the diocese’ ability to pay for ministry during the crisis, and once this crisis has ended.

It is also worth noting that although our routine church activities have stopped, and the building is out of bounds, the church is certainly not ‘closed’. It is very much alive and seeking to be at the frontline of responding to this crisis.

A key priority for me at this time is to ensure that the congregation of St xxxx still feels connected to the worshipping life of the church. Each week I am preparing and delivering service sheets that people can use in the privacy of their own homes. I am also recording weekly short sermons which people can access via our church website and live streaming morning prayer at 8.30am each day via Facebook. Finally, I am committing myself to intercession at this troubling time, praying for each of you in my congregation, and of course for our community here of xxxx.

The pastoral needs of the parish are probably the greatest I have ever known them. I am busy making regular pastoral phone calls to many of you and facilitating others to join this ministry of pastoral support to ensure everyone gets the vital connection, comfort and encouragement they need at this difficult time.

Finally, you will appreciate there are a huge amount of logistics to think about at this time. St XXXX is having to constantly adapt to the fast-changing advice coming from our leaders in the government and the Church of England. For example, our approach to PCC meetings, APCMs, weddings and funerals have all had to change overnight. I am working hard to respond to these changes.

I share this with you because I want to make it clear that our church still needs your financial support, even as we cease gathering for worship together, in order to be at the forefront of responding to this crisis now, and, to be in a strong position to continue being a worshipping presence in this community once this is all over.

**How can you help at this time?**

Covid-19 has had huge economic consequences for many individuals and businesses up and down the country. It is also having a very serious impact on the financial sustainability of St XXX. I encourage you to prayerfully consider if you can help us rise to this challenge using any of the methods below:

1. If you usually give by envelop or via cash in the collection, please consider setting up a regular gift by standing order. This can be stopped at any time, for example, if you wish to resume giving by cash or envelope once communal worship is resumed.

For the purposes or setting up a regular gift via your online banking, the church’s bank details are:

Account Name: xxxxx

Account number: xxxxx

Sort code: xxxx

Please put your name in the payment reference so we know the gift is from you. This is particularly important if we have a signed gift aid mandate from you.

Alternatively, you can fill in the standing order mandate enclosed and return it direct to your bank by post, or to St XXXX’s treasurer, xxxxx, at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

1. Make a one-off gift via your online banking

If you don’t wish to set up a regular gift, you may wish to make a one-off gift instead. For example, you may choose to make a donation for the value of your usual weekly giving over the course of 12 weeks. Or you may already give by standing order, but feel able to make an additional one off donation to support St XXXX through this time. Any gift you make, however large or small, will be greatly appreciated.

Again, use the bank details listed above and please use your name as the reference for gift aid purposes.

1. Send a cheque payable to xxxx

Again, this could cover the giving you would usually have made over a 12 week period, or be an extra one off gift in addition to your regular giving. Any gift you make, however large or small, will be greatly appreciated. Cheques can be posted to: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx but please ensure you take the appropriate care – a trip to the postbox can be your daily exercise but please keep up social distancing!

1. Donations via our online fundraising page

We have set up an online fundraising page which can be viewed here: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. Donations made via this page come directly to St xxxxxx, and gift aid can be collected on these donations. Gifts can be a one-off donation or a recurring gift (those of you wishing to make a recurring gift via the fundraising page will be prompted to set up a stewardship account.)

1. Text giving

We have set up the provision for St xxxxxxx to receive text donations. Please text xxxx to xxxxx. This can be done at any time, but perhaps you would consider making a text donation at the time you would usually be visiting church, e.g. on Sunday mornings

Thank you for your prayers, support and steadfastness during these turbulent weeks and months.

With my own prayers and best wishes for your safety and wellbeing at this time,

Revd xxxx