**Novel Coronavirus**

The third mark of mission says that we must **respond to human need with loving service**



*Chia ying yang/flickr*

God calls us to respond to the needs of others.

As Christians we might want to engage fully with the third mark of mission in being especially aware of what those around us might need and what we might do to help. What follows are some suggestions for taking care of neighbours and family during national emergencies, when people are required to stay indoors for their own protection. Currently, this applies to the evolving situation regarding novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), and especially regarding those people in isolation or quarantine and under conditions where people are required to stay at home by order of the government (as is now current from 23/03/2020).

**This is NOT advice what to do about novel Coronavirus itself. Please follow government advice and advice from the churches as it changes.**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

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

To be of maximum help to people, we should all follow government and medical advice and any advice from the churches. To respond in loving service we should:

**Be sensible**

**Be safe**

**Love our neighbour as ourselves**

Below find suggestions for Christian service to in the community:

* Understanding vulnerabilities
* Mental wellbeing
* Spiritual needs
* Practical help

Older people and those with underlying health issues are not just vulnerable to disease. The measures to control and contain the disease may lead to other vulnerabilities of which we should all, as Christians, be aware of. Everyone may be vulnerable to some of these issues:

People may be:

* Vulnerable to other disease (not just COVID-19)
* Vulnerable to anxiety, fear and rumination
* Vulnerable to putting themselves at risk
* Vulnerable to increased loneliness and isolation
* Vulnerable to the loss of social contact on which people depend for their mental wellbeing
* Vulnerable to scammers offering false information or trying to exploit the situation
* Vulnerable to desperate behaviour (people with addictions, phobias, sudden stress)

*Times of emergency are times when we can fully respond to God’s call to recognising the needs of others and be responsive to them.*

**Mental wellbeing**

The World Health Organisation has drawn attention to the role of fear and uncertainty in relation to Coronavirus and how the incessant news about it can worry people to excess. We can help with that by:

* Staying at home but maximising contact with people by whatever ways are possible without going out. Be aware of the difficulties faced by people who live in poverty and who may not have a phone or whose internet availability and phone signal is limited in remote rural areas.
* Offering reassurance – dealing with people’s fears and worries about what they see and hear about the spread of the disease. Don’t gossip or speculate but keep connecting and talking to those in isolation.
* Help people to stay connected by whatever means is appropriate and safe. Allow people to express fears but help them to manage the amount of news they receive or follow.
* Encourage people to do other things they enjoy as a distraction from the virus news.
* Guiding neighbours and family to reputable sources when they want information. Fact-check and find good sources to help separate fact from fiction and help people discriminate about that. See this article about misinformation and how it spreads <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-51931394?fbclid=IwAR2wltIOmBXVtX1ckh4fPV_dRJ8xD-H0bz-IBV4yt1yIS8L7L5CFIwgJEb8>
* Appropriately sharing your faith and trust in God, and not scaremongering.
* Reassuring that people won’t be left alone and that there is help available that they can trust.
* Protect people against unknown callers and scams. Be available for people to check with you if they are worried about being contacted by strangers.
* Be aware that being effectively shut in with family members for significant periods can lead to rise in family tensions, arguments and physical and mental altercation. If you can do so remotely, offer a safety valve if possible for heightened emotions and tensions and a means of distraction where family tensions are particularly difficult.

**Spiritual needs**

If churches are closed for public safety this can have a big impact on people for whom church services are a social and spiritual lifeline. Even people who only go to church irregularly may find the idea that they can’t extremely upsetting. Changes to the numbers of people permitted at the occasional offices or bans on weddings and baptisms can cause anxiety and distress, and especially with regard to funerals.

As fellow members of the Body of Christ we can help alleviate the sense of being cut off from the Church and the sense of loss in not being able to participate personally in the sacraments, by staying in contact as much as possible and helping people navigate online sources of church activity.

* **Prayer:** letting people know they are prayed for and joining with them in prayer at particular times of day. Supporting key workers and decision makers regularly in prayer.
* **Communion:** helping people understand any current advice about participating in Holy Communion and updating them as that changes.
* **Worship:** helping people who have the facility to join in online worship and streamed services. Contact with loved and trusted clergy can help people feel less anxious and more cared for.
* **Pastoral care and support:** providing ways to talk to members of the clergy and church members about pastoral matters, perhaps by suggesting ways in which people can find a time to talk confidentially and alone even if they are at home with family (note advice has been issued for personal confession). There are many resources for spiritual comfort available.
* **Encouragement:** people who are isolated and also feel uncertain about what God is doing in these times can be encouraged by sharing your faith and honesty. Help people count their blessings and give thanks to God as a counter to fear and uncertainty.
* **Caring for people who are being blamed:** the fear and anxiety about the virus has led to increased hate speech and blame directed against innocent people. We can help by counteracting any narrative of blame and protecting people by showing our care and love for them within our communities.

Check constantly reviewed and updated advice for the Church of England here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches#na>

**If people get ill:**

**Be sensible**

**Be safe**

**Love our neighbour as ourselves**

* Provide reassurance. Help people to feel that even if isolated or quarantined they are not forgotten about and that they are not alone.
* Help people understand what will happen if a person has to go to hospital. Find out current advice about visitors, precautions and practical impact on family and friends.
* Provide support for those worried and distressed if a member of the family is ill and they cannot visit or stay with them.

**Practical help**

We can help in a number of ways:

* Checking people are ok by phone or by a visual check from outside if you go for exercise. Remember to keep safe by social distancing if you are outside for any reason. Has anything changed? Are people coping? What partners in your community might be able to help if people are in difficulty or not coping with the situation?
* Link into any street Facebook groups or other social media networks for local parts of the community. Use these networks to flag up issues or find out who is doing what to be aware of neighbours. This will help identity areas of particular need and prevent duplication of resources if for example, food, medicine or medical help needs to be delivered.
* Find good, up to date information about the current health advice as it changes. Help people to navigate NHS contact and 111 system if necessary. People who do not speak English particularly well or who are worried or confused about the system may need support to get medical advice and assistance. This includes video appointments with nurses and GPs.
* Food – shopping (shopping rings are where people go to the shops, and if they can’t get items ask the next person to look out for them when they go shopping. This cuts down on trips and burdens and stops overbuying). In the current requirement to make infrequent trips out this can help stop multiple trips to the shops but be careful about passing on items and observe social distancing.
* Medication – see if you can help with collecting and delivering prescriptions where the collection is essential.
* Water – remind people to drink enough. Dehydration can lead to confusion and falls.
* Exercise – remind people that they need to move even if isolated. Suggest ways to move and stretch at home or where to go safely for a short walk for fresh air.
* Domestic pets – need walking and care; farm animals need consistent attention. All may need help to get veterinary attention.
* Cleaning - hygiene and sanitation. Remind people about advice to wash hands frequently with soap and not to touch their faces.
* Health support – watching for risk factors and being vigilant. Some people may forget about hygiene instructions or how to take proper care of themselves if they are distracted by the situation.
* Being aware of increased impact on homeless people, people with uncontrolled addictions, self-employed people and people working in the gig economy who now cannot work, people reliant on food banks, people working at home with children. Look for partners in your community and local area who may be focussing on these areas of social need and who may be able to offer targeted help. (See suggested resources, below).

*Taking care of our neighbours helps to keep us all safe and healthy.*

**When the emergency is over:**

Find out what we have learned about taking care of neighbours and friends. Why should we stop? God’s call to loving service and social justice is unending. If you have formed useful and holy habits from being responsive to need, keep doing it.

**Lessons for us all to learn:**

**Be sensible -**

Do not buy more than you need

Do not put yourself at needless exposure and risk

**Be safe** – be wary of strangers and people making promises. Check.

Do not act against authoritative advice from medical professional, government guidance etc

**Love our neighbour as ourselves**

Know that we CAN respond safely and compassionately with loving service in the name of Jesus.

See resources below

**Some Resources:**

**Guidance for churches (Church of England)** <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

**Prayer at home**:

<https://oikodomeo.home.blog/2020/03/17/resources-for-prayer-when-public-worship-is-not-possible/?fbclid=IwAR0nZypvczxNzvrOKX2MpPa91rFW5qpqoI5PjIu4_Kp-SV-EOPcwka72bP4>

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12590/isolated-but-not-alone-resources-for-catholics>

<https://ctbi.org.uk/calls-to-prayer-for-coronavirus-pandemic/>

**All age resources:**

<https://www.illustratedministry.com/flattenthecurve?fbclid=IwAR0oWC_P5PAl2hJ0NoqHnl1pkpy3Sj_kno043Tef2pmWCPAhuWUW1afsYDo>

**Reflection:** <https://canonjjohn.com/2020/03/18/comfort-in-covidia/>

**Mental Health:** <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/while-working>

**MIND** (for support with mental health issues): <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse27d03>

**Children’s Society** (For supporting young people with mental health issues) <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/coronavirus-information-and-support>

**Citizens Advice** (advice on a range of issues such as debt, finance, work, family, benefits, etc, available from a local branch through <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>) ; <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/>

**Age UK** (support for those who are older and vulnerable): <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/> Campaign to End Loneliness: <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/blog/coronavirus-and-social-isolation/>

**Action for Happiness:** <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/news/covid-19-how-to-respond>

**The Trussell Trust** (for information about local foodbanks): <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-warn-coronavirus-will-hit-vulnerable-as-some-foodbanks-struggle-for-supplies.html>

**Crisis** (for information about how to support homelessness people): <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/crisis-calls-for-emergency-measures-to-protect-people-facing-homelessness-in-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>

**Teaching:** John and Olive Drane have a resource for how to offer online teaching called ‘Coronavirus, online teaching & learning in the immediate crisis’. Contact anne.richards@churchofengland.org for a copy of their popular PDF on this.

**Spirituality:** From isolation to invitation <https://www.facebook.com/groups/666388910847014/>