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| A close up of a logo  Description automatically generated | | Revd David McCarthy | Rector || 75 – 79  Glasgow Road, Edinburgh, EH12 8LJ || Office | 0131 316 4292 || Mobile | 07411 236433 || Email | david@saintthomas.org.uk | |  |
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Dear Friends,

*‘We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.’* 2 Chronicles 20:12

I write this letter with a very heavy heart to inform you that the vestry and trustees have decided to follow the counsel of the government and the example of many other churches, both here and around the world.

We are being instructed to follow social distancing measures. These are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The NHS informs us that these are:

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough.
2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible.
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this.
4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs.
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services.

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as far as they reasonably can.

For those who are over 70, have an underlying health condition or are pregnant, we strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can, and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family, if possible.

**What does this mean for St T’s?**

* We will not be meeting in person in the near future for worship services or home groups.
* All church-based activities will cease for the time being.
* All rotas are suspended until further notice.
* We will continue to meet using online resources and conference calls.

It is likely that this situation will last for several months, including over Easter. Our planned outreach events will not now take place. Similar things are happening in our local community, for example June’s Corstorphine Fair has now been postponed to 2021.

This is serious for our nation and for all of us as individuals. It is not only a medical crisis. It has serious economic and political consequences. Millions face the loss of work and are fearing for their homes and security. We are being shaken and humbled by a tiny virus. We are living in new circumstances, the likes of which our nation has not seen for seventy years.

Yet we know that when God’s people face battles, the key is to trust in the Lord. We read in 2 Chronicles 20 that when King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah faced overwhelming odds they were told, *“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s*”. We also know that Jesus died and rose again. And that we are encouraged, ‘*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ (*2 Corinthians 12:9)

We must not submit to fear. We are a people of hope who are also the light of the world. Not meeting together will not be because we are afraid, but because we love our neighbours enough to give up our rights.

I suspect that the world will never be the same again. We will all be less comfortable and less dependent on self. Perhaps this will be a time when many will turn back to the Lord as we are humbled. Let revival begin with us and may we, the people of God, have our eyes on Him and His purposes in all of this.

Below, you will find some details of how current events will affect our life together, how we will respond and how you can help.

We will be unable to meet for some time, but I am a phone call away

(07411236433) or contactable by email (david@saintthomas.org.uk).

This comes with thankfulness for you, some tears, all my love and much prayer.

David McCarthy

**Worship**

**Please note that Central Meeting will not be at church, but we will be online at https//www.facebook.com/stthomasedin from 7.30pm on Thursday 19 March**.

We will continue to offer worship at 10.30am every Sunday. This will be online, initially using Facebook Live. A link to this from our webpage is available at [www.saintthomas.org.uk](http://www.saintthomas.org.uk) . We also hope to provide online prayer times during the week for those who are interested. We’ll again use the Facebook Group for this, though we are also exploring a few other options.

In addition, we hope to open the church during the week for individuals to come and pray. Times for this will be advertised. You will be asked to follow strict hygiene guidelines:

1. Wash your hands before you leave home and also when you arrive.
2. Keep two metres between you and other people you encounter. Please remember to protect our church staff by following this guideline stringently.

**Pastoral**

We will keep in contact via phone and social media. If there are any needs, share them. If you need shopping, let the office know and we will work out a way to help. If you want to volunteer to do this, let us know.

Look after one another and your neighbours. You might want to use the card at the end of this letter to offer help to others. Simply print it off, fill it in with your details and deliver it. We will have printed copies available at church with St T’s details.

**Annual General Meeting**

Our annual general meeting is scheduled for Sunday 29 March. This has now been postponed to a later date.

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator has our accounts. Our constitution says that six of the places on Vestry are to be filled by appointment by Vestry and we will use that power to appoint those nominated thus avoiding the need for an election this year. In this way we will maintain the number of people serving as our vestry members. Details of those nominated will be given following the online vestry/trustees meeting on 30 March.

**Young People**

Phil Taylor will keep in touch with our young people and their parents. We hope to keep contact going via online resources.

**Facebook**

We are encouraging all of our members to set up a Facebook account. We realise that not everyone will want to do this but it is the best way we can think of to help keep us in contact, share needs and give out information.

We currently have a public Facebook page for St Thomas’ Church and a closed group for people who are committed to the St Thomas’ community. The latter was set up recently, with the priority being to be a forum for encouragement, prayer and support. You can view the page, but you need to be invited to join the group. If you wish to join the group, please contact David McCarthy (by email or befriending on Facebook) once you have a Facebook account and we will arrange that.

**How to set up a Facebook account:**

<https://www.lifewire.com/tutorial-how-facebook-works-2654610>

It’s important that you check your security settings in Facebook so that you decide who can see your information.

**How to manage your security settings in Facebook:**

<https://www.lifewire.com/facebook-privacy-settings-tutorial-2654415>

**Email**

We will continue to send out regular email updates including a weekly notice sheet. If someone you know does not have email, please notify the office and we will arrange for information to be posted out.

**Giving**

We are so grateful for all those who give so sacrificially to the Lord’s work at St T’s. We hope that you will continue in that commitment in the days to come. Some of us give in the offering on Sundays and these are precious gifts. Obviously, if we are not meeting on Sundays this will be difficult. However, if the church building is open for individual prayer during the week, you will be able to leave your offering then. Alternatively contact our treasurer Agnes Murray on 0131 336 3677 or agnesianm@gmail.com for other ways to give.

If you would like to give by standing order, the church bank details are:

Bank of Scotland:

Account name: St Thomas’ Church

Sort code: 80 22 60

Account No: 18836867

**About Covid-19**

**COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus.**

**Stay at home if you have coronavirus symptoms**

Stay at home if you have either:

* a high temperature – you feel hot to touch on your chest or back
* a new, continuous cough – this means you've started coughing repeatedly

Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

You do not need to contact 111 to tell them you're staying at home.

Testing for coronavirus is not needed if you're staying at home.

**How long to stay at home**

* if you have symptoms, stay at home for 7 days
* if you live with other people, they should stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person got symptoms

If you live with someone who is 70 or over, has a long-term condition, is pregnant or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else for them to stay for 14 days.

If you have to stay at home together, try to keep away from each other as much as possible.

Read our [advice about staying at home](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/).

**Urgent advice:Use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service if:**

* you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home
* your condition gets worse
* your symptoms do not get better after 7 days

[**Use the 111 coronavirus service**](https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/)

**Only call 111 if you cannot get help online.**

**How to avoid catching and spreading coronavirus (social distancing)**

Everyone should do what they can to stop coronavirus spreading.

It is particularly important for people who:

* are 70 or over
* have a long-term condition
* are pregnant
* have a weakened immune system

**Do**

* wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
* always wash your hands when you get home or into work
* use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
* cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
* put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
* avoid close contact with people who have symptoms of coronavirus
* only travel on public transport if you need to
* work from home, if you can
* avoid social activities, such as going to pubs, restaurants, theatres and cinemas
* avoid events with large groups of people
* use phone, [online services](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/gp-online-services/), or apps to contact your GP surgery or other NHS services

**Don't**

* do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
* do not have visitors to your home, including friends and family

The NHS will contact you from Monday 23 March 2020 if you are at particularly high risk of getting seriously ill with coronavirus. You'll be given specific advice about what to do.

Do not contact your GP or healthcare team at this stage – wait to be contacted.

Who is at risk?

**How coronavirus is spread**

Because it's a new illness, we do not know exactly how coronavirus spreads from person to person.

Similar viruses are spread in cough droplets.

It's very unlikely it can be spread through things like packages or food.

**Travel advice**

There are some countries and areas where there's a higher chance of coming into contact with someone with coronavirus.

If you're planning to travel abroad and are concerned about coronavirus, see [advice for travellers on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus).

**Treatment for coronavirus**

There is currently no specific treatment for coronavirus.

Antibiotics do not help, as they do not work against viruses.

Treatment aims to relieve the symptoms while your body fights the illness.

You'll need to stay in isolation, away from other people, until you have recovered.

**More information**

* [GOV.UK: coronavirus action plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan)
* [GOV.UK: information on coronavirus and the situation in the UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public)
* [NHS England: coronavirus for health professionals](https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/eprr/coronavirus/)
* [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG): coronavirus advice for pregnant women](https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/)

