

18th March 2020

**Important update regarding church activities during the Covid-19 pandemic
– please read all the information below**

Dear Church

In the words of Health Secretary Matt Hancock, ‘...it is with the greatest of regret and the heaviest of heart...’ that we have taken the decision, following national Elim guidance, to suspend all services and small group gatherings until further notice.

To quote the letter received from General Superintendent Chris Cartwright on Tuesday 17th March 2020:

“As a result of the latest Government and Public Health advice regarding the COVID-19 crisis on Monday 16 March 2020, we are taking the decision to suspend all Elim Church services from and including this Sunday, 22 March until further notice.

We do not take this decision lightly but do so believing we have a public duty to act responsibly in terms of the duty of care to all members of the community.”

I lay out below what our interim plans will be in response to this matter and at the end I will add some personal thoughts and reflections on what this means for us spiritually as a church and as individuals.

Sunday Services

We are blessed to have multiple media through which ministry can reach people directly when we cannot meet face to face.

We will seek to communicate worship, prayer and teaching ministry through the following ways:

1) Live Streaming

We are double checking issues with copyright at present, however it is our aim to be able to broadcast via Facebook live each Sunday morning from within the church building using a few people to work the equipment necessary to enable while maintaining social distancing measures.

We are on a waiting list for higher speed broadband so at present this will be done using just a mobile device and its own internal microphone. We will monitor the quality of this through feedback from others as it may not be a helpful vehicle for worship if the sound quality is not good enough. It is, though, perfectly adequate for preaching and leading prayer.

2) Recorded online content

The videos that are streamed will be stored on the church Facebook page to access at anytime following the broadcast. Alongside this will also be the ability to access the sermon audio recording via the website as normal.

3) Physical Resources

The notes and powerpoint slides for all messages will be posted out to anybody who does not have access to online media.

Small Groups

Small groups cover anything from men's and women's to housegroups, prayer meetings and team meetings.

The easiest platform to enable closed small group meetings is an application called 'Zoom'. It is something which can be downloaded as an app on your tablet or smartphone or used online via their webpage.

The administrator for the meeting can send a meeting code to all users for them to join and it will use the camera in your device so that everyone can see each other simultaneously.

We encourage everyone with access to a computer or device with a webcam to download the app and set up their email and password in order to log in.

For more details visit: <https://zoom.us/>

The basic plan is free and the church will pay to subscribe to host meetings for longer than the free 40 minute period meaning you don't have to pay anything, you simply need to create an account.

We will communicate dates and times of all planned meetings via all relevant channels.

If you struggle with any aspect of setting these systems up then please call Pastor Lee, or someone you know who has set it up successfully, for support.

Pastoral Care

We recognise the impact that isolation, both through displaying symptoms and being in an 'at risk' group, can have on people's wellbeing and mental health.

We hope to enable the following strategy to counter any negative effects in this time.

1) Care Packages

A team of people will come together to provide some basic essentials such as a loo roll, tea bags, soap (where available) to those who are elderly, isolated or in need. Included in these packages will be a small gift and perhaps something sweet! We hope that these will be an encouragement and resource to those who need them and that it will help curb a feeling of isolation.

We will not be able to come into someone's house when dropping these off, though we may ring the doorbell and say hello from a safe distance while leaving it on your doorstep!

2) Specific needs

We will welcome any phone call or email to request help from all church members who are unable to provide for themselves. Please contact the office on 01277 350805, Pastor Lee on 07917157889 and if nobody answers you can leave a message with what you need or ask for a call back.

We cannot guarantee that we can supply what you need, but we will do our best while it is allowed and we are able.

3) Regular Contact

We will be producing a contact list for people who volunteer to stay in touch with others in the church on a weekly basis, especially the elderly and isolated.

It will work in such a way that, depending on how many volunteers we have, one person may be given three people to ring on a weekly basis to encourage them, pray with them and see how they are.

4) Regular post

For those not online we aim to do a newsletter type production each week which we will send by post or deliver directly. We will also email this out in the normal way.

Finances

We recognize that the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, businesses and individuals is significant. We would like to highlight the following:

1) Giving in light of your personal circumstances

Many people give by standing order to the church and for this we are immensely grateful. However, if you have been adversely affected in your income and you need to change your level of giving through standing order then please do so. It would be helpful for our planning and budgeting if you're able to drop a note to our finance officer, Susan Lee, to inform of her of any changes. You can email her at finance@ingatestoneelimchurch.org.uk

2) Giving in light of services being suspended

While accurate figures are being produced, it is estimated that in a single month the giving through the offering bag can range between £1000 and £2000. As you can understand, this will be a significant reduction in our monthly income as a church.

While we have a relatively healthy bank balance it would be much appreciated if we can help reduce the deficit in income as much as possible by people giving through other means. We will be planning or accepting the following:

a) Giving online – we hope to set up an online payment facility via the website and also giving by text. We will communicate this when it is set up.

b) Giving by post – Cheques can be sent directly to the church via the post and can be made out to 'EFGA Re: Ingatestone'. We will aim to bank these as soon as possible, however there could be delays depending on the postal service and/or access to the bank for deposits.

3) Seeking financial support

For the latest money advice in this time 'Money Saving Expert' is a good website where up to date advice and information can be found on how to apply for support and communicate with lenders in cases of not being able to repay loans etc. Please visit:

<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip/>

Concluding Remarks

I believe that this is a transformational time for the church in our nation.

We often sing words such as ‘blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering...’ in times where we know very little of what it means to suffer. Yet in this time where we will be without most of the regular methods of doing church I believe our worship will be transformed into something much more meaningful and powerful than it ever has been.

We also talk about the mission of the church being outside of the walls of the building, however we have relied heavily on people entering over our threshold in order to reach them with the gospel. We have no choice now but to be a scattered church, to be a witness wherever we are in our homes and communities. In the book of Acts the story of the church is such that while it was gathered it was able to build itself up and lay firm foundations of faith. When it was scattered it became the missional vehicle which God had always designed it be.

I believe that God can do a new thing in and through his people at this crucial time and that when we return to our buildings and gatherings we will not only appreciate our fellowship in a new way, we will also be stronger in our faith and communicating the gospel when we are away from one another.

At our last gathered Alpha session we asked the question, ‘Has God spoken to you through his word?’ I believe he has:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (digitally, telephonically, in generosity, through prayer and intercession), baptizing them (when the pool is reopened!) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20.

May God bless you and bring you peace as you be a blessing and bring peace to others.

Yours in Christ and on behalf of the church leadership

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Carmichael".

Pastor Lee Carmichael