

20th March 2020

Update: Castle Hill Baptist Church Response to Covid-19.

Last night the diaconate met to prayerfully consider the latest advice from our Government and Baptist Union about how we best protect all those involved in the life of our community.

Consequently, it is with sadness that we have decided to close the building on Castle Hill, including Gateway Café. Further, all CHBC physical gatherings and activities will be suspended immediately and for the foreseeable future. To be clear, in addition to those already announced, that includes:

- Sunday morning services
- Church meetings
- Tiddlers
- Easter Experience partnership with Crossteach (1st April)
- All house groups
- Gateway and Helping Hands Café

Further, these other events have also been cancelled or suspended:

- All CTW regular and special events, including the Good Friday service and Walk of Witness
- The BMS Action Team visit at Easter (17-20 April)
- Baptist Assembly (8-10 May)

We are living through unprecedented times and I'm sure you know these decisions have not been taken lightly. We take the guidance given very seriously for both our country's good, our own good and particularly to care for one another. We also understand some churches are still opening to allow private prayer. We considered this option but feel the risk is too high and unnecessary.

Whilst this is certainly sad and unsettling news, we also know we have a God who is good and will use what is happening for his glory. The diaconate will continue to meet remotely to continually assess the situation but realistically we do not know how long restrictions will be in place. Therefore, we have to take seriously doing church a different way.

As we turn our minds from adversity to opportunity, I want to share some of the exciting new initiatives we are proposing for us as church community, enabling us to minister to one another, those near us and those immediately living around the church. For any of these to come to fruition, we need those who are able to serve (within the restrictions given) to come forward. However, I hope even those who are self-isolating for at least 12 weeks should see opportunity to be involved in our ideas below.

Pastoral Response – practical help; spiritual and emotional support

House Groups and Connect Groups (*Tiddlers, Monday Lunches, CAMEO, Craft Group, 3:16 Youth Club, Gateway*) will now become core to ensuring we are supporting and checking regularly on one another's emotional, practical and spiritual needs. Whilst each group will have their own ways of making this work, Kevin will still be touch with pastoral leads to support them in thinking this through. He will also email guidance on visiting; but the bottom line is this—if you can possibly 'visit' in any other way (i.e., by phone, letter) do it; do not physically visit. We are all going to need our small communities to be intentional about keeping connected so that no one gets isolated and the responsibility doesn't drop onto one person's shoulders.

If you are single or married but with neither partner linked with a Connect or House Group, we will be in touch to help find where your natural relationships lie. This way we can ensure you're plugged into a church network during this time of no Sunday gatherings and potential isolation.

Can we take this opportunity to remind you that anything done in the church's name needs to follow all our policies and procedures, especially relating to safeguarding. This also needs to be considered when offering practical help. All these policies are on our website.

WHAT CAN I DO? Would you be willing... ..if so, please let Kevin know.

- ...to chat with or play a game with someone over the phone who wanted company?*
- ...to offer practical help (pick up shopping, medicine, deliver books) for those in need?*
- ...to share your books, games, DVDs, talking books etc. with those who need new stimuli?

* will require DBS check and agreement to adhere to CHBC safeguarding guidelines

Self-isolation, serious illness and mental health

If you need to self-isolate, find you have coronavirus, any other illness, or feel your mental health is suffering, please keep in touch with Kevin or Liz by phone, email or messenger. We recognise the on going challenges of life and illness do not cease just because of this crisis. Please do not feel you are burdening us—we want to support those who need it in our community.

We will be signposting resources through our website, including exercises recommended for maintaining good physical and mental health, ideas to alleviate boredom – loan schemes and online courses for learning new skills, and general good practice advice relating to coronavirus.

WHAT CAN I DO? If you find a resource particularly helpful, please send it on to webmaster@warwickbaptists.org.uk We reserve the right not to post everything we receive.

Worship & Prayer

It's often (rightly) said that the church is the people, not the building. This is true of how we gather for worship – we might not be physically in the same place but we can still worship collectively at the same time. Therefore, we are looking to put together a weekly online service, built from community content and contributions. This will be a bit like a TV show, in that it will aim to create a worship service involving lots of different segments by different people, helping us maintain community. You will need to give consent to be on public film as the final video will have

the potential to be viewed anywhere in the world (you never know who finds things on the internet!)

To enable this, we will make a pre-recorded service that we aim to release by 10.30am each Sunday via YouTube onto our church website (<https://warwickbaptists.org.uk/church-online/>). We will also make it available on DVD for those who request it. There will not be a long sermon—there are plenty of those available online, on tape/CD (we will put up some links). Plus we intend to upload our series from Nehemiah and Colossians and last year's Deeper teaching on the person of the Holy Spirit. All this will take time so please be patient. **However, we hope the first online service will be available this Sunday – an email will confirm.**

We also have the idea of producing a second video to resource families to worship together. Children sharing messages with each other, story telling, links to some songs, a short talk and downloadable creative prayer/Bible activities, inviting pictures to be sent in for the following week. Some of these resources will be sourced from material available online but we are also keen for those within our community with a passion in this area to be involved.

As we put down our various rotas, this offers new ways to serve. We will modify our plans based on the level of support that we receive.

HOW CAN I HELP? If you want to be involved, we will need people (any age) to:

- Help with overseeing the compilation of one of the two services
- Lead intercessions
- Read the Bible / story-telling (for family worship)
- Be interviewed about how life is for you
- Be an interviewer
- Send in videoed short reflections / testimonies / pictures (more about that soon)
- Burn DVDs
- Distribute DVDs
- Help prepare programme of creative activities
- Brainstorm new ideas

Prayer 365 Prayer will continue to be at the heart of our church life. We want to maintain the rhythm of church as best we can. So, each week we want to circulate a prayer pointer sheet, which will include a short devotional. Anyone can contribute items to be included. These prayer pointers will help unify our individual prayers when we intentionally come together at certain times of the week.

We ask people to continue to commit to a regular Thursday morning time of intercession, 9.45-10.15am. We will also add a similar prayer meeting every Thursday evening, 8.30-9pm, on Facebook Live. We want to encourage everyone to use this resource throughout the week for individual prayer into topics of salvation, kingdom and fellowship. Each prayer meeting will have a communal prayer given for the start and end to further create that sense of unity whilst apart.

Also, don't forget all are welcome to use **Prayer Link** to confidentially or publically share prayer requests. Send your message to Joyce Matthews (prayer@warwickbaptists.org.uk) or give her a call/leave a message (01926 777602). If you want to join this network (which operates by email

and phone), contact Joyce and she can arrange this. Please mark messages 'public' to be automatically included in the prayer pointers for the week.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Prepare or contribute to the prayer pointers sheet
- Write a short devotional
- Lead a Facebook Live meeting

Communication

We want to ensure those who are not on online or use email can access the majority of what we're planning. Similarly, we want to ensure that those who are visually impaired or don't read don't miss out. All this is new thinking for us and whilst we'll try hard to get it right, we'll make mistakes. Gracious constructive comments about ways we can do better are welcomed.

Email and the website will be our main sources of communication. We will use Facebook as well but recognise not everyone is on there. Our website now has a LATEST NEWS section that has a feed from our Facebook page (for those not on there), a blog, CHBC News and updates on Coronavirus. We also have a RESOURCES section, which will gradually expand as you all contribute things you've found helpful! Do go online and have a look. It is a work in progress but will be up to date soon...

A formal phone chain will be re-established for those who don't use email or would prefer information by phone. Paper copies of prayer pointers, CHBC News and any other major information items will be printed and posted to those who make this request. If you know people who are missing out, please let us know or put them in touch with us and we will get them added into this system. Please consider: if you can access things online, that saves the church money.

We are looking to set up a centralised call system so you only need dial one number and can then be redirected to the people in the church you may need to reach. More to come...

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Distributing paper copies of church information
- Connect anyone who needs paper copies of communications with Kevin.
- If you want to be on the phone chain for information, let Kevin know

Local Support

We want to reach out to the local community immediately surrounding CHBC. We know there were people who were vulnerable, isolated or lonely before this virus hit. We therefore want to turn CHBC News into a weekly community newsletter – not full of adverts – but content that encourages and entertains: quizzes, puzzles, interest stories, quirky facts, encouraging Bible verse and on the bottom an offer from us to help practically, spiritually, pastorally, as needed.

This won't happen without a dedicated team of people thinking about what can be included each week—perhaps taking responsibility for an area—and someone drawing it together. We don't envisage more than one or two sides of A4 to keep it simple and costs down. This is about being a

presence and offering an open hand to those who want to reach out and accept it.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Coordinator of CHBC News
- Contributors
- Distributers
- Designer/editor
- Prayer team

Closing Thoughts

Rev Jonathan Jee (Vicar at St Paul's, Leamington) shared this helpful thought. He said, 'Lent is a time when we often give up doing things we used to do in order that God can work in us differently. We are being forced to give up the way we usually meet together. We can still meet with the Lord, on our own, in ones and twos [and the many ways mentioned above]. However, when we're able to worship together again there will be a new joy...after this time...in the desert.'

I think that is true for us. In this enforced time of change, it is natural to mourn what is lost and the changes imposed on us but actually there is also space for God to do a new thing amongst us. To remind us that he is in control. To remind us that this is his Church and he will bring the growth. To show us that sometimes dramatic circumstances open our eyes to new ways of being church and his people.

When all this is over, I pray we'll be amazed by all those people we'll know who we never spoke to because we were all too busy or they were hidden behind their doors. I pray we'll know the names of faces we've seen in passing and can now talk freely with in the street. And I hope we'll find a new ease in inviting them to church events or indeed inviting church friends to your house and them at the same time; something unthinkable in our 24-7 work-driven world of now.

May we embrace this opportunity to do things differently: supporting one another in practical ways. Praying for one another both personally and from afar. Keeping in touch with one another in a distinct reflection of how Christ loves and watches over us; resting in his peace often.

I realise this is a lot to take in. We are effectively rebuilding the structures of our church to deal with all that is happening (and there is much more to mention, let alone your ideas!) But I hope you will be able to support everything we feel God is saying to us about how we can 'be' as church, as we seek to keep Christ at the centre of all we do and share his radical love for all.

Keep praying. Keep in touch. Keep safe.

Yours, in Christ,

Kevin

Rev Kevin Johnson and the diaconate