

St Anne's Parish Church, West Heath



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2nd Pastoral Letter from Fr Paul Cho to all members of St Anne's

Monday, 30th March 2020

Dear Brothers and sisters of St Anne's,

Before writing this 2nd pastoral letter to you all, I have just finished my extended prayer to give thanks to the Lord for keeping us in safe, and to ask Him to continue to protect us from this deadly virus, called 'COVID 19'. Now I am writing to ask you, "How are you?" even though I know that you are all fine from my daily communication with our Lay Pastoral Team and Church Leadership Team. Also, I am writing this letter to let you know that my family and I are OK.

The Archbishops mentioned their pastoral letter to all clergy on 27th March 2020, "As we move towards Passiontide, focusing on what Jesus did for us on the cross, more than ever this is brought into stark focus." Once I preached about the real meaning of Lent and why we keep this time in our church calendar, quoting, "Lent is set aside to praise and worship the Lord; to read the Bible more, and to pray more often. Christians who observe Lent correctly anticipate deeper intimacy with the Lord." Forcefully or voluntarily, I am sure that all of us are doing this in this unprecedented time while we are staying at home.

Again, our Archbishops said in the same letter, "We are in a time of great fearfulness. The numbers of those becoming seriously ill and dying is increasing. It is therefore very important that our churches remain closed for public worship and private prayer. The Church of England is called to model the very best practice. We must lead by example. Staying at home and demonstrating solidarity with the rest of the country at this testing time, is, we believe, the right way of helping and ministering to our nation. Therefore, for a season, the centre for the liturgical life of the church must be the home, not the church building."

We, as a family of the Church of England, follow our Archbishops' guidance but, in the last two weeks, to be very honest, I have been feeling very awkward because on Sunday I was staying at home, not in church. This is not the first time I have not been to church on Sunday, because during a few times in my life, I stayed at home on Sunday because of sickness, however, this is the first time I am witnessing that there is no worship services at all in the church on Sunday.

Although there were many substitutes online to replace the empty churches, such as the Archbishops' online services and many others' streamed virtual services, I have not felt a real sense of being in worship to the Lord. Why I felt this is not definitely because I am an old-fashioned person because I am a person who is very advanced with the recent digital technology. I know God is everywhere with us. I know that anywhere we worship the Lord can be a church. Despite the fact I know this basic knowledge, why I kept feeling inside me something missing, not something but actually big thing. That big thing is my brothers and sisters I usually worshipped together, even with no smiles on their faces. I am missing them. I am missing you.

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We all know that this is very challenging time for all of us, not just for me. However, this, in a sense, can become a very valuable time for us. For me, I have been recognising the value of my brothers and sisters who have always been worshipping with me. I did not recognise this before because I have never thought they could not be with me like this. I am trying to build the feeling of togetherness through my daily prayers for all of you by name, but again, to be honest, it cannot replace our hugging, shaking, chatting and laughing together. In my prayers, I am not asking God, "Why?" instead, saying, "Dear Lord, WHEN can I see my brothers and sisters to worship You together?" I do not know how long it will last but I know that it will not last forever, and I hope that it will end soon and of course soon we stand together praise and glorify our Lord's name in hand in hand.

By then, we will keep doing what we do to maintain our spirituality in a good health as well as our physical one. We keep looking after each other through our group caring system (Thanks to all group leaders and Janet the team leader). All group leaders will keep calling you to check how you are daily bases. Church leaders will keep exchanging ideas of how we can help our brothers and sisters to keep up their spirituality with a strong faith and will produce digital resources available (Thanks to Stuart and Ian) and will try to keep you updated from our own and outside information on our website (Thanks to Charitas the webmaster). Also, we will do our best to run our Foodbank as normal to provide food parcel to those who needs to be supported in our church and the community of West Heath (Thanks to Elaine). In addition to that, we keep doing our basic never-ending stuffs for our church building (Chrissie, churchwarden) and for our finance (Georgina, Treasurer). And most importantly, we will keep praying for each other.

Finally, I would like you not to forget that I am praying for you by each of yours name and to ask you to keep me and my family in your prayer in believing that we will all sail through this uncharted water together with help of our Lord Jesus.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you whatever the situation we are facing!

With lots of love and blessings,

Fr Paul Cho

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