



**THE PARISH CHURCH OF
ST MARY THE VIRGIN & ALL SAINTS
POTTERS BAR**

**The Walk, Potters Bar
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To the Parish and community of St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar.

Re: Temporary closure of Church and Hall

Dear friends in Christ,

I am writing to you to give you a brief, clear update of what the latest directive is for our church. This command has come from our Diocesan Bishop, Alan of St Albans, with the full support of the Senior Team in the Diocese, who are themselves following the explicit instruction of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

In short, every Church of England church has been ordered to close its doors to all members of the public, and no acts of worship or prayer are to take place within church, whether public or private, until further notice. This extends to all clergy and licensed lay leaders of worship, to whom it has been made crystal clear that we are not allowed to offer prayer in church, even by ourselves. I had hoped that I would be able to continue saying the Daily Office in church and celebrating the Eucharist there, especially on Sunday and even if it had to be without anyone with me, but sadly that is no longer an option. Instead, we have been told we must only offer worship at home.

We are all as Christians being asked to set a good example to the rest of the nation and comply with the Prime Minister's instructions to us last night in totality. As that instruction includes that places of worship be shut and all unnecessary journeys cease, my own journeys back and forth to church several times a day must now stop, and I shall be forced to do all my ministry from the Vicarage. I ask that all those who do have keys to the church and are in the habit of letting themselves in for various good reasons during the week now stop doing so, and we have also instructed those groups who regularly hire the church hall that they cannot meet in our premises for the time being.

You may have noticed that Prime Minister's stipulated period of three weeks from yesterday takes us exactly up to and includes Easter Day. Passiontide begins this Sunday, and we would normally be gearing up for the richest time of the Church's year, Holy Week. I am quite truly devastated that we will not be able to offer Christ our prayers and praises at this holiest time of year in the way that the priest and people of St Mary's have done since our church was first consecrated for worship over 100 years ago. I am especially sorry for those who have recently joined our church and would be experiencing the beauty and power of our Holy Week liturgies for the first time.

At this time, I find myself asking the question that our forebears in faith the Hebrews did after they were captured and brought to exile in Babylon: “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4)

But we must hold tightly to the central tenet of our faith, that despite the fact that our celebrations of the Resurrection will be tragically restricted and muted this year, Christ is still risen, nothing can ever change that. Our God lives, and he is still worthy of our prayers and praises, and so we must continue to be his people. In the words of the Eucharistic prayer “It is indeed right and good, it is our duty and our joy, always and everywhere to give you thanks and praise, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.”

I ask one last thing of you all, which is to hear the call of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Francis, and stop whatever you are doing at 11:00am tomorrow to say the prayer that unites Christians across the world, the Lord’s Prayer. The Pope has appealed to all Christians to join him in praying this prayer as we ask God to “deliver us from evil”, most particularly at this time the evil of the coronavirus. On our Facebook page I shall be leading us in this prayer, and following it with the office of Prayer During The Day, which is a short act of worship that you can all join in with by following this link and clicking on Prayer During The Day: <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>.

If you haven’t yet found it, all our services are currently being streamed through Facebook and can be found here <https://www.facebook.com/pg/stmaryspb/videos/>, where you can either join in live or catch up later. More information about this was given in my “View From the Vicarage” newsletter which was sent out last Saturday and can be accessed either via our Facebook page or church website, <http://www.stmaryspb.org.uk/>.

Please do join me digitally for our worship as often as you can, and especially on Sundays at 10:00am. It is a huge encouragement to me to know that you are all watching and praying along with me and the rest of Christ’s holy Church throughout the world.

God bless you all, and please continue to pray for me, as I pray for you.

Yours in Christ,

Fr Stefan Chrysostomou

Vicar of St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar

Eve of the Feast of the Annunciation, 24th March 2020