

Rosemary Presbyterian Church

Registered Charity in Northern Ireland - NIC 104448

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Dear Friends,

We are living in very uncertain times as we listen to many news bulletins about the impact of Covid 19 (Corona Virus). This pandemic is challenging us in every area of our lives and community. Events have overtaken us and the following formal advice has been issued to all ministers and Kirk Sessions;

1. All congregational organisations and activities should cease until further notice.
2. All Sunday gatherings for worship should also cease until further notice.
3. Until further notice, steps should be taken to ensure that numbers attending funeral services and weddings are kept as low as possible.

We are also advised "At this stage, it is not possible to ascertain a realistic end date for the above restrictions, hence the phrase 'until further notice'. However, be assured that this formal advice will be withdrawn as soon as government guidance permits."

As events develop each day we can sense fear growing as to what the future holds for us. The challenges we face relate to our health and the health of our loved ones, the economic and social effects of the virus as we seek to put into practice the instructions and advice given to us by our government.

There is no doubt that this pandemic will change our lives for the future but we need to remember the constant refrain of God's Word, 'Do not fear!' We need to keep perspective on who God is and what He does, how He continues to provide His presence and grace each day no matter what our circumstances.

There are some actions we can continue to do in the midst of what is happening.

(a) Look after our own health and the health of our loved ones. It is important to listen to the advice of the health care professionals. The Public Health NI website (type in 'Corona Virus') will provide the latest information and advice and will tell you when it was last updated. It is important to practice good hygiene. This will also include looking after your mental health. There are also helpful websites which will give direction here for such things as healthy diet, limiting the amount of time spent on news bulletins or in front of brightly lit screens and encouraging us to connect with people as well as engaging in some sort of exercise.

(b) Look after your spiritual health.

In Hebrews 12:1-2 we are told; 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.'

Let's look to Jesus as our example in very difficult and testing days. The gospels remind us of many difficult days for all kinds of people and it was Jesus presence which transformed their situation. His grace was indeed sufficient!

While we are experiencing difficult times there are also opportunities for us to refocus our lives on Jesus as the one who has begun the work in us and promises that He will bring it to a completion on the day of Christ. This is also an opportunity to think creatively about how we can be the church. As someone has suggested that while we exercise 'social distancing' we can practice 'distant socializing!' We have the opportunity to keep in touch by phone. I and the Kirk Session have been encouraged to engage in our pastoral work by telephone and only to call when absolutely necessary, with proper precautions in place. Please to not hesitate to contact myself or one or any of the elders if you need help.

Please be assured that we are seeking to provide creative ways by which we can keep in touch and provide spiritual help especially at this time.

We are hoping to provide some resources such as a newsletter, including some teaching and messages on the Rosemary website and Facebook page.

It is also important to see this time as an opportunity to engage with God in reading His word and prayer. It is crucial that we seek God, thanking Him for His grace, provision and presence, but also bringing to Him our families, our health care professionals who are on the frontline of fighting the virus, those who are most vulnerable (those with underlying health conditions and the over 70's) and also those who will feel the economic impact of the virus (workers whose jobs are at risk, employers whose businesses are being threatened).



It is an opportunity to take time to read, whether that be articles on the internet or books which will encourage our faith. I hope to provide some of these details over the coming weeks.

It is important over the next few days and weeks that we do not lose our focus, especially that fear become the driving force in our lives. Let no one feel isolated or lonely, one of us is only a phone call away. We are told not to fear, to look to Jesus as ‘the author and perfecter’ of our faith. He endured all that was before Him in order that we might be able to have this special relationship with Him through faith. Let’s hold onto this as we seek to find new ways to be the church in the days ahead. We are all in this situation together and we can only get through it as we work together encouraging and supporting each other even if that is at a distance!

Let’s continue to pray for each other as we support one another at this time.

Warm regards,

Philip McCrea
Your Minister