

"DOMESTIC CHURCH" NEWSLETTER No. 2: 24TH MARCH 2020

Dear Fathers, friends ...

Have a cuppa and a good read! There is a lot of essential stuff here in this message that I need you to know. It's probably about a **30-minute read**, more when you follow the links. We have all got plenty of time now to read and explore it (except of course for our wonderful NHS workers!) Please read it all and carefully, even if not all at once; you can come back to it later. This is not designed to be a one-time use message but rather an ongoing resource to keep. Here we go!

This email covers: the lock-down ordered by the Prime Minister last night; lessons we need to learn from pandemics in the past; the four ministry Directories of our Domestic Church and the Resources applicable to each.

THE LOCK-DOWN - LET'S GET REALISTIC!

Well the Government's lock-down is upon us. Many of us are saying: "about time too!" We know that this will cause economic hardship. We know that this will make loneliness worse, particularly among elderly people. We also know (because of what the Chief Medical Officer has said) that this pandemic will not reach it's worst point until the end of May ... although if we all obey the rules now that might be pushed a little earlier. The Government has said that it will review the lock-down in 3 weeks ... but to be honest, that is just to satisfy the civil liberties lobby. The reality and truth of this is that lock down is going to last for months. There might be a brief easing off in the high Summer to the early Autumn but the likelihood then is that the pandemic will hit again in the Winter of 2020 / 2021. This is what happened in the Spanish flu pandemic of 1917/19 in which it is estimated that 50 million people worldwide died.

Here is Metropolitan Silouan's Encyclical about the closure of our churches. <https://www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Met-Silouan-Lockdown.pdf>

LESSONS FROM HISTORY - WHY THE SOLUTIONS RARELY CHANGE

Throughout human history and its countless pandemics and epidemics, the only real weapon we have had at our disposal is confinement. Today we have vaccines, but they won't be available until next year. Confinement to home is the firebreak that stops the virus fire spreading. The plague that hit Florence in 1629 is instructive in this matter. This is from a recent article in the Telegraph:

In his book Florence Under Siege, published rather prophetically last year, Professor John Henderson says that when the plague stalked Florence in 1629, the authorities threw up a

cordon sanitaire around the city, but it didn't work. The guards got bored; peasants slipped through. With thousands suddenly dying, the Florentines imposed a complete shutdown in January 1630, ordering the majority of citizens to be confined to their homes. Food was delivered to their doors and it's possible that, for some people, their diet improved: bread and wine every day, some meat, rice and salad. It was as close as the early modern era came to socialism. The flipside was harsh punishment for anyone who defied the curfew, including prison, and that probably meant death.

Workshops closed, games were banned, lovers were separated. Mass was said in private, just as is being done today. The priest would ring a bell to announce that the service had begun and the entire city would join in at home, which is beautiful and a vast improvement on all those videos of Italians singing O Sole Mio on their balconies (that would drive me mad). The plague finally abated in the summer and the citizens took to the streets in a Corpus Christi procession to give thanks. The city must have got something right. The death rate was roughly 1 in 10, a high number, but much lower than in other parts of the country. Verona lost an astonishing 61 per cent of its population.

Let's hope that the current lock down has come soon enough for us to be like Florence rather than Verona!

DOING OUR BIT AS A CHURCH - THE FOUR DIRECTORIES OF OUR DOMESTIC CHURCH

Our responsibility to each other in Christ means that we have to be both practical and spiritual. We have to focus on trusting God and caring not only for each other but joining local community groups (online of course - search for your neighbourhood on Facebook) to help out where we can. To this end, I have created four "Directories" for our Domestic Church at St. Aidan's. Each week (if not more often) I shall update you as to what we are doing in each Directory or sector of ministry. I need you to contribute your ideas and resources as well, so please email these to me please.

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY

We have, of course, started streaming the Liturgy live on Sunday at 10.15 am on my Facebook feed. All the information about that is explained and linked on the parish web site <http://www.aidanorthodox.co.uk> I have uploaded another copy to YouTube for those of you who will absolutely not have a Facebook account. Go here to watch and rewatch ... <https://youtu.be/gfnoUMQnQe8>

Unfortunately, the internet companies are slowing down the global internet and, understandably, prioritising essential web services. It took about 35 hours to upload that YouTube video. Clearly, I cannot keep on doing that, clogging up the bandwidth ... SO ... that **single video** of the Liturgy will remain as the only copy on YouTube. If you want to watch the Liturgy live or in a recording each week you now **HAVE to have a Facebook account**. After all if

you don't like Facebook, you only have to use it for this! Check out the front page of the parish web site for full, easily understood instructions.

Natalia Marcelo (whom many of you know with James and their family before relocation to Berlin) has offered a checksheet to help the faithful fully participate in streamed services. You will find it in the image file attached.

The **sermon each week**, as an audio recording, will hopefully still be published on our parish Ancient Faith Podcast page here ... <https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/voicefromisles> and you can find many fantastic, spiritually inspirational and practical articles and recordings on Ancient Faith's blog here ... <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com> all Orthodox!

Concerning **Holy Communion at home** ... I have written about this before, and again, if you have not read it already, the instructions are on the front page of the parish web site. Please remember that in order to take delivery of the Pre-Sanctified Holy Gifts or to acquire some more, (one person at a time!), you need to make an appointment with me **no later than 6 pm each Friday evening to arrange collection of these from church OUTSIDE church. Because of the national Lock-Down I cannot now let you in, even one by one, on Saturday morning between 10 am and 12 noon.** Only I am allowed to go physically into the church building. I shall be wearing disposable gloves to keep it clean.

We are all starting to think about **Great and Holy Week and Pascha**. What can I offer you? ... fewer services obviously, ones that be more easily managed in our kitchen! These services, God willing will be streamed from my house: (I will confirm this nearer the time, I know the timings don't sit well with how they should be but practicalities rule now!))

Palm Sunday as usual on Sunday - I will post the palm crosses to you, blessed and before the service but only by email request (include your current address please)

Great and Holy Thursday: 10.00 am: Vespereal Liturgy of St Basil for the Last Supper

Great and Holy Friday: 3.00 pm: Great Vespers of the Deposition from the Cross

Great and Holy Saturday: 10.00 am: Vespereal Divine Liturgy of Christ's descent into Hades

Holy Pascha: Sunday morning as usual at 10.15 am. No Midnight service - not practical in our street!

Don't forget that the **variable service texts**, week by week can be found here:- <https://www.antiochian.org/liturgicday> As published before, a comprehensive online **directory** of all our services can be found here: <https://www.orthodoxprayer.org/index.html> The calendar was sent to you in a recent email.

THE PASTORAL DIRECTORY

I want to encourage you to **get involved as much as you can**, remotely of course and from indoors, using telephone, Skype, social media etc to keep in touch with both **members of the congregation** that you know and in the **local community**. **We must not let vulnerable people slip through the net** of the State's provision. The task of us looking after each other cannot be achieved by the State alone even when we have to stay at home as much as possible. Let me know if you can help in matters concerning the Church of St Aidan directly.

We also need to look after ourselves. Please do read Fr Emmanuel's inspirational and practical article which covers this here: <https://www.aidanorthodox.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Facing-Reality.pdf> It is also attached to this email.

THE EDUCATION DIRECTORY

It is my intention within the next few weeks (God preserving me!) to start publishing **Bible Studies** and **all-age Christian Education Resources**. Available right now is our **E-Quip Course** - check it out here: <https://www.equip-orthodox.com> and our **Children's Teaching** web site which now could easily transformed into a home-schooling resource ... with all those lovely hours of little and not so little ones under your feet and bored at home! Go here: <https://www.followers-orthodox.com> Followers is not quite complete yet (year 3) but it will be over the next few months. There is a huge amount to find in there already though, complete with lesson plans, worksheets and other children's resources. Many different learning styles are catered for. Jump in if you have children (3 to 18) and see what you can usefully use. (I am very grateful to everyone at St Aidan's who has contributed to this great work and a few others outside our parish).

THE MISSION AND SERVICE DIRECTORY

Evangelism does not stop with this virus, any more than it did when the Church was under persecution (including persecution today). Indeed, the Church has experienced some of its most remarkable growth in testing times. The same applies to us and all Christians. **Service in the community** does not stop with the pandemic either; indeed, there are increased opportunities to serve in these times (within the constraints of course of government regulation and first-class public health practice).

We have a particular problem at the moment concerning receiving people into the Church by **baptism or chrismation or the celebration of marriage**. These services cannot now take place. Only **funerals** in church may take place ... and then with only the closest family members and a cantor present.

As far as weddings are concerned, we have none pending at St Aidan's and any future marriages are going to have to wait until the pandemic dies down and, hopefully, it is then safe enough to reopen the churches, for a time at least, before any second wave of the disease in

the winter. Please do not plan anything without first consulting me. (I know you wouldn't any way!)

What do we do about **Christian initiation**? Baptism and chrismation is going to have to wait as well BUT, I can easily prepare any adult candidate using "**The Way**" **Course** by email correspondence with a baptism or chrismation later. Infants are going to have to wait UNLESS (God forbid) there needed to be an emergency baptism - but that would take place in hospital under strictly controlled conditions, with me using a shortened service.

So, we have to learn **new patterns of discipleship** and, to that end, we have the great resource of Holy Tradition to rebuild those skills and the repentant, obedient, trusting faith to acquire those gifts of the Holy Spirit particular to our new situation that will help us bear much fruit for God, His Kingdom and His Church. None of us knows in testing times how long we shall live to accomplish these great works. That allotted span is known only to God. It is OUR responsibility though, with a joyful trusting faith to continue to work hard for Him.

We shall be exploring many aspects of this Mission and Service Directory in the weeks and months to come, and, indeed, implementing them as God sees fit.

Finally, about your giving to God's work for those who give to the work of our church by envelopes (which is ongoing) ... this method is cancelled for the duration of the pandemic. Please consider setting up a **bank standing order** to continue your contributions. This will be much appreciated. I am attaching a copy of our bank paying in slip so that you will have the information to give to your bank when setting up a standing order (preferred) or making a single payment. I shall continue to claim **Gift Aid tax refunds** for those who have signed up to that unless your financial situation changes ... in which case, you need to tell me immediately please. Let me know if you have any questions about this or indeed any other matter.

Thank you for your patience in reading this long message! Do keep it and come back to it as an ongoing resource. To make that easier I am including it as a Word document among the attached files.

Please do keep your **ideas and resources** coming in so that we can continue the fullest possible expression of our Christian lives at St Aidan's!

Yours in Christ

Fr. Gregory and Fr Emmanuel