Pastoral Epistle from the Dean: Serving our Communities

26 March 2020 (updated since)

Dear Friends and Colleagues

I am writing to update you on the various community initiatives that are taking place across Oxfordshire. There is similar activity across Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, the other two counties of which the Diocese of Oxford is comprised. I will write again to you about those two counties* as soon as the information is available. Meanwhile we are closely coordinating with the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and his team, together with the key hubs and support networks that are providing help and volunteers across our communities at this time.

As it is likely that people’s sense of isolation and fear could escalate in the coming weeks, we are keen to try and make sure that as many people as possible are supported in this challenging time, whilst also at the same time playing our part in helping to ensure that everyone remains safe and well.

Some of the ways you can help are by connecting to the existing volunteer and support networks that have already been set up (with the full endorsement and support of City, Town and County Council). Through our network of churches in partnerships (formal and informal) in villages and small market towns, many initiatives already link well to Town and Parish Councils, and to Parish Meetings.

Please do consult with these websites which are pulling together many of our community initiatives: www.oxfordshireallin.org and www.achurchnearyou.com. These websites should give you an indication of how you could get involved with your local community, if you have the time and capacity to do so.

Of course, at this time, we know that many individuals will be profoundly grateful simply to know that they are being cared for and remembered by something as simple as a ‘phone call. Indeed, such gestures can help enable everybody to stay safe and well, but also connected – which of course, is a really fundamental part of what it means to belong to any community.

The churches across the Diocese of Oxford are often good places from which to be coordinating community efforts. (Please take time to have a look at some of the ideas here).

At this current time, the usual mechanisms for replenishing foodbanks may well not work as they once did. But if you are able to go shopping, or out to fetch medicines for yourself, it may be that local community networks have information about people who may need some help and support with their deliveries. For example, SOFEA in Didcot gives useful advice on what can be done in your local community.

Faith leaders across the counties are trying to ensure that some of our most marginalised vulnerable citizens are not overlooked at this time. Again, if you are able to help and support, your local church, temple, mosque, synagogue or community centre, they may well be able to help you support others.

Christ Church Cathedral is here to serve all the people of the three counties of the Diocese of Oxford. Its unique foundation brings together the world of research and learning through the University together with the kind of community service that churches have traditionally offered for two thousand years. At this time of challenge and crisis in our nation, we hope you will join with us all in doing what you can to support those around you who have greater need.
The contact details for the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire – who can draw on the support of his 36 deputies who are spread around the County - are these:

Tim@stevenson-oxford.co.uk 01865 515477 (and please leave a message on the answerphone if it is not answered and his office will get back to you).

Particular sources for further information and advice are online, if you wish to volunteer. See also this link and the volunteering platform www.oxonvolunteers.org.uk.

Two more useful sources of information: https://oxfordtogether.org and https://nextdoor.co.uk/ which allows you to work out if anyone is in need in your direct neighbourhood.

A specific example of one of the many charitable/not-for-profit organisations who are focussing particularly on the needs of those most vulnerable in the current crisis is The Porch Day Centre. They are now moving into an emergency plan providing an outreach to the homeless and vulnerably housed. This is an unprecedented situation which is putting higher demands on the charity to make the necessary changes to its service delivery to ensure it reaches the high risk members of our community.

The Porch would be grateful for donations however small so we can provide all the necessary protective equipment to our staff and volunteers on the front line. They need to purchase first aid kits, disposable catering containers, flasks, disposable utensils, thermal bags and items for the dignity packs for our female members. See their fundraising campaign.

I will post further details and updates of initiatives in due course, focussing more on Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. In the meantime, please do be in touch through my PA, Dr Jess Oliver if you have any queries.

This come with my warmest good wishes to you, and each and every one of us at this time.

I do encourage you look out for one another, try to stay safe and healthy, and to be mindful of the needs of all those around you – both near and far – in this challenging time.

Yours, as ever, Martyn

*Update

Coordination in Berkshire is best routed through the Bishop of Reading. In Buckinghamshire, the main efforts are currently led by small community groups, social media based and working at local level. Support is provided by Buckinghamshire Council who have a hub running with a community email address which these small start-ups need to contact at communities@buckscc.gov.uk

Local libraries are also getting involved, and the council has established eight local support groups in these locations:

- Buckingham Library
- Chesham Library
- Princes Risborough Library
- Marlow Library
- Beaconsfield Library
• Wycombe District Council offices
• Chiltern District Council offices
• The Gateway in Aylesbury

The County’s Community Foundations are also gearing up: www.heartofbucks.org and www.mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk

They seem to be using their networks to help with funding.
www.totalgiving.co.uk/appeal/coronavirus-response-appeal Forgive me for adding to your list, but many may find the Oxford Hub a useful place to go as they are trying to coordinate help to those who need it most (working with the Council)