



The Church of England is preparing to take the church into people's homes – through TV screens, laptops, computers and mobile phones – ahead of the first Sunday without public worship.



Hundreds of churches and cathedrals across the country are to live stream services without congregations, marking Mothering Sunday and a National Day of Prayer and Action tomorrow, which is being observed by all major Christian denominations.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, will lead the Church of England's first national virtual service tomorrow morning. It will be broadcast simultaneously at 8am on the 39 BBC local radio stations in England and as BBC Radio 4's Sunday Worship. It will then premier on Facebook through the Church of England's page at 9am.

Meanwhile the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu will be live streaming a short prayer time on his Facebook page at 10am, 12 noon, 4pm and 6pm on Sunday. The time of prayer will include the Lord's Prayer and two Taizé Chants and will be around 10 minutes long.

The Church of England has also issued a special prayer for the National Day of Prayer and Action. The text is below.

Across the country cathedrals, parish churches and non-traditional church gatherings are adapting to the challenges posed by the restrictions on public gatherings to help limit the spread of infection in different ways.

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Stephen Cottrell, said: "The Church has never been a building, it has always been a people.

"We are about to discover what that means.

"From this Sunday onward the Church will meet as usual, but it won't be happening in our buildings.

"It will be happening in our hearts and in our homes."

Peterborough Cathedral will be marking Mothering Sunday in a Holy Communion service live streamed by clergy on Sunday morning with pre-recorded music from the choir, including a special hymn for Mothering Sunday and a greeting from the choristers recorded before the Cathedral choir school closed.

The Cathedral will also light candles in memory of those whose mothers are no longer alive, following several requests made through social media.

St James's Church in Clitheroe, Lancashire, will host a service on its YouTube channel, led by the Bishop of Lancaster, Dr Jill Duff, marking both Mothering Sunday and the National Day of Prayer and Action on coronavirus.

Holy Trinity Church in Meole Brace, Shrewsbury, will also be among hundreds of parishes live streaming a virtual service on Sunday through Facebook.

The Revd Phil Cansdale, Vicar of Trinity Churches and Area Dean of Shrewsbury, said: “There are some amazing community networks that many of us, as churches, are developing – not just online.

“We are trying to be creative and to be a blessing to the community.”

At St Lawrence Church in Doncaster, Messy Church - a non-traditional church gathering - is now meeting in a Facebook group to provide support and prayers both for volunteers and families.

At St Martin-in-the Fields Church in Central London, morning prayer and a lunchtime Communion service has been live streamed during the week, while the church will live stream a communion service tomorrow morning.

The Revd Sally Hitchiner, Associate Vicar at St Martin’s, said: “Amidst the anxiety over coronavirus, people are focussing on a message of love, hope and kindness.”

Nationally the Church of England is expanding the number of digital and print resources to support people praying at home and growing in faith in new ways.

More than 300 live streaming services have been added to AChurchNearYou.com and this week the Church’s digital team has held webinars with around 200 churches to inspire and support them to use digital platforms to reach their communities during this time of social distancing.

The Church’s “Time to Pray” app, which includes simple daytime and night prayer services, is now free to everyone and an accompanying daily audio offering on SoundCloud and iTunes was launched on Friday, with the Archbishop of Canterbury leading worship.

In addition to the *#LiveLent* reflections, which are available both in written and audio form, there will be a new series of mental health reflections.

Finally, the Church’s smart speaker apps provide a range of prayer and other Christian resources for people to access at home.

A prayer for the National Day of Prayer and Action

Come, O Spirit of God,

and make within us your dwelling place and home.

May our darkness be dispelled by your light,

and our troubles calmed by your peace;

may all evil be redeemed by your love,

all pain transformed through the suffering of Christ,

and all dying glorified in his risen life.

Amen.

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