

Dear Members of our Church Family,

COVID-19 infections have continued to rise over the Christmas period to an extent that Boxing day was designated the busiest day for the National Health Service (NHS). The reasons for these heightened demands included the increase in the number of cases that resulted from people contracting the COVID-19 virus at a time when the NHS is generally busy.

Places like East London was so busy that some hospitals could not find enough spaces to treat new patients inside the wards and emergency areas. Consequently, images were shown in which Ambulances were parked on the front of one Hospital which was reported to be used as treatment space by medical staff. The order for administering the COVID-19 vaccinations is appearing much more clearly as General Practitioners (GP) have now started to give the vaccinations to people on the bases of priority. Albeit at the present time the speed of vaccination is unable to stem the flow of people getting infected.

Accordingly, GP's and the NHS are maintaining their advice that individuals should self-isolate, check for symptoms, keep social distancing, look after our well-being and guard against the infection.

Amidst the ongoing uncertainties, churches are facing decisions about whether we should continue to stay open and have religious activities in our buildings. Notably, the decision so far seems to be siding with the need to be cautious and to close. Because the safety of members attending the premises needs to be kept paramount. The uncertainties that churches face is also experienced by other institutions. Schools are in the midst of similar challenges as to whether they will be opened come the first week of January or would there be some delay or phase return back to the classrooms. Experts are making assessments based on what happened last September 2020 when and there was a noted increase in infection as students return to school and universities.

The new variant of the COVID-19 infection now discovered is reported by scientists as being more easily transferable. The need to keep the transmission rate between people to below one; means that pupils must be tested before they meet in schools and universities. This requires a mass testing regime that the government has promised to make available through the support of military officers working with the schools and providing backing through remote links. Football matches are being suspended because players tested positive for the virus and as shops, restaurants and bars in areas registered as under Tier 4 restrictions remain closed and families cannot visit one another. The reality of a complete lockdown in order to bring the risk of transfer down; is the step that is now dreaded as we wait for a review of the regulations by the prime minister on Wednesday.

Last week's reading: Luke 2:22-40; Promised salvation for all people through a single son born to Mary. Jesus' purpose was to save others, all who would believe. Reports this morning announced that the Medical Regulators in the UK have given approval for the general use of a vaccination produced by Oxford University and AstraZeneca a Biological Technological Company. The government is reported to have procured

quantities to vaccinate up to 50 million people from this stock. Its advantages were noted as being able to be stored under temperatures equivalent to that of a domestic fridge. This makes it easier to transport to a various location. Which is needed now as care home are still waiting to receive the stock of earlier vaccines that they were allocated.

As this is probably the third product that is welcomed to tackle Covid-19 in the UK. I wish to bring in the words of the United Nations Secretary-General: who said that the whole world would need to work together to eliminate the coronavirus. Because as people travel from one part of the world to another. They are likely to spread the virus.

We are thankful that when God sent us his Son, he made Jesus Christ available to the whole world, Jews and Gentiles. Whosoever believeth, should not perish.

Next week. Readings from John 1: 10-18 narrates that Jesus is in the world. Yet the world did not recognise him. May God's Holy Spirit help us to see Jesus and accept Jesus so we may become Children of God. I wish us a blessed New Year. Jesus Christ is Lord.
Amen.

Loving Regards

Sydney Samuel