

Statement to Students – 19th March 2020

Philip McCormack – Hi everyone. My name is the Reverend Professor Philip McCormack and I am the Principal of Spurgeon’s College.

Helen Stokley – And I am the Reverend Helen Stokley and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Spurgeon’s College.

Philip – For some who have never visited the college, because I know there are some online students that maybe watching this video, we are sitting in front of a very famous frieze of Charles Spurgeon speaking with his students, on a Friday afternoon, and I know that Spurgeon often looked forward to the opportunity to share his knowledge, wisdom and insight with his student cohort, and it reminds us that the college has a long and lustrous history and that it has faced and come through many difficult challenges.

Everyone will be aware of just how difficult the current situation is. As the world faces a deadly pandemic, our primary concern is that all of our student body and whichever the current fashion you study with, that you stay safe and that your family stays safe and that you are well and that you look after yourself.

Well, we wanted to try and give you a situation update on what the college is doing and how that will affect you and your studies as we move forward, and I want to reassure everyone that the college has not closed. The site may be closed to students and to visitors but the work still continues.

Some of you will not know that the college has been investing heavily in the last eighteen months in its ability to deliver its academic programmes and ministerial training programmes virtually and online. So we have invested heavily in software platforms like Panopto and IT infrastructure around the college that enables the college to actually transition from a physical college at this time of emergency, into an online virtual platform, and to all intent and purposes, the normal routines of the college are continuing although in a different mode. That means that Registry, Admissions, Placements, Ministry, Operations Department, the life blood including our lecturing staff are now operating and working online and virtually. Helen will give you some practical guidelines in a moment on what that will look like and some good news in relation to e-resources. What we want to do in this video is to assure the student community that the academic life of the college continues albeit in a virtual realm. That means, and if you have seen the announcement we have put on the Moodle platform, that we are working to the original academic timetables. So we want to encourage students to continue to work on their assignments and continue to meet the assignment deadlines as you have been introduced to and have been expecting in this semester. Now, of course, in this current situation there maybe students who need to seek an extension to their work and that means that the Special Cases Committee is still

continuing to work. Indeed, the Special Cases Committee operated this morning and so the normal process of the college continues and the students are required and invited if necessary, to apply for any extensions that you may need in the normal way, the same way that you would, the difference being that the cases will be considered virtually and not face to face.

All of the large projects the college are doing are continuing except virtually. Helen will describe, I suspect later, at how we are becoming very adept at using Zoom and other Social Media platforms in which we can communicate with the students. But the key message that I want you to hear from me as Principal of the college, supported by the Board of Governors is that our students remain and continue at the heart of how we're approaching this crisis situation. We want your experience and your encounter with Theological Education and Counselling to continue as it normally would, so it doesn't matter whether you are a Theological student doing the BA for itself or whether you are in ministerial training in placement, either church based or college based or a counselling student, we want your experience at Spurgeon's College to be as good as it possibly can be, so one of the things that our online students might experience as well is that we are working on at the moment will be enhanced and so that your experience of studying at Spurgeon's will also be enhanced and developed. I want all of our student body to recognise and appreciate that we are working very hard and we thank you so much for your patience with us. It has been a mammoth task to, in time of emergency, to move from a physical college into an online platform but we are getting there and you will begin to see really interesting and important things happening in the next few days and Helen will now talk you through some very practical points which I think will be instructive but also encouraging. Helen.

Helen – Yes, as Philip said our main concern is that you are well and we want to look after you. We want to look after you not only academically but pastorally. So one of our first priorities is that we want to run pastoral groups virtually by Zoom. You may have heard of the product Zoom, it offers the free version that you can download and you can interact with the staff. You will be hearing from your pastoral tutor on how they will set that up, how they will organise it and they will be in contact with you about looking after you and checking in with you. If you don't have a pastoral tutor because you are on an ETM course, Pastoral Supervision, Online or you are studying with us in a different way, the staff are still going to be reaching out to you, checking up on you, seeing how you are doing, because our main concern is for you at this difficult time.

All of the staff, as Philip has said have now gone home, apart from just a few of us who are here making the final arrangements. Staff has access to their work computers; they have access to their work network databases and all the normal resources. They also now Zoom and therefore holding virtual department meetings, teaching staff meetings, professional staff meetings and as Philip said Special Cases meetings. In the near future, if you are a

ministerial student, you will be hearing from some of my colleagues who will be setting up annual reviews, accommodation interviews and all the normal things that were on your schedule but by a virtual way. If you don't have a video don't worry, we have a phone system that works and we will be find a way that works for you so that we can communicate with you. As you can imagine it takes us a little while for us all to get used to this new way of working. So we are encouraging you to email us, some of you have our mobile numbers on our signatures, so you can give us a ring and we will get back to you. If you have a problem, if you don't understand, or if you have a concern, drop us an email and we will do our best to answer your question. We want you all to really look at Moodle though. We are going to be pushing out lots of resources in the next few weeks. In the coming days tutors are recording their lectures to camera and uploading them into their areas so that you will be able to watch that lecture, you will be able to get the same information, the same teaching, the same resources they would have given you had they had been in the classroom. We know I was a student at Spurgeon's college and essays are everyone's concern and as we sit in the Library here surrounded by many books and we realise that many of you will be very concerned that you can no longer access these books however, in the last few days publishers across the world have reached out to institutions to make online versions of their books available, so it's been amazing to be able to take advantage of that, so some publishers are giving us links to their online versions, the PDF's on their books and you can find them in the Library area of Moodle.

We have also signed up for something called Perlego, don't worry about the name! It's in the Moodle Library area and that's been given to us for free again in order to access over 17,000 current Theological books. The tutors have been looking at it, it carries many of our texts, they have been collating reading lists and again they are in the Library Moodle area, so please do have a look at that Library page because each day it's changing. Tutors are scanning some of the books in the Library. We have a system going on so that we can scan just a chapter, we want to be copyright compliant and ensure though that the key texts are available for you.

If you are struggling with resources, you don't know what to do, you can't find what you need, please drop Rob in the Library an email or your unit tutor and they will be able to advise you.

For those that are on the Equip to Minster, the weekend course, again, we are going to be taking that online, we need a little bit of time to record the videos, but you will be able to view that teaching in the Moodle platform at your leisure and then you'll have the resources to write your essays.

There are meetings this afternoon taking place regarding the Counselling and Pastoral Supervision courses and more information will be pushed out to you about how we can deliver some of those key teaching blocks to you remotely.

If you have Moodle questions, if you were an infrequent user and now need to use Moodle a bit more and you are not too clear, please email moodle@spurgeons.ac.uk and Joanna will be able to respond to all your questions.

We also know that some of you are contacting us about fees, about student finance, about concerns about how you may pay your fees, about concern about when you pay your fees. Again, as we said, we want to help you, we want to look after you, and we appreciate that your life may erradicatley be changed and that your circumstances may be different. Please do email finance@spurgeons.ac.uk and let us know if you have got any problems, make suggestions to us about them and we will come back to you and we will find a way through.

We are also really conscious that many of our Ministerial students are looking after churches, they now find themselves at the front line of pastoral care in a virtual environment, they find themselves in the front line of running a church where they can't see anyone and there are concerns and there are new ways to do things that people need to get used to. Do take a look at the Baptist Union website whether you are a BU student or not, just google Baptist Union website, they are pushing out videos, they are giving you ideas, they are running training on how to do virtual church, so do take a look. We are also going to be putting up some resources about thinking about doing church differently in this new situation.

And finally, we want to remind you to rest. There will be so many demands on your time, maybe children, maybe church, maybe things are just a little bit different than normal. Do remember to take some time out. Do remember to look after yourself and do remember that as a community we need to look after each other. Some households will not be busy. Some households there will only be one of us and we just encourage you to check in with your fellow students. Drop them an email, pick up the phone, ask them how they are because as a community, together we want to care for each other as we go through this crisis, as we go through these coming days.

So what I want you to hear is that if you have got any concerns about being a student at Spurgeon's College, drop us an email, contact us and we will help you through this unusual and unprecedented time.

Philip – No one could have anticipated the level of disruption that we are facing as a result of a pandemic like this. But, in my time at the college I have been incredibly impressed with the student community and the way in which it cares for, and looks after its members of the community, and, we know that at this time, there is an awful lot of pressure and challenges upon you, we want to support you and, to that end you will hear frequently from us, you will hear from your tutors and you will hear from members of staff.

We want to try to make this time as instructive and enabling as it possibly can be and so, please stay tuned, check Moodle, check your emails, and as a college community, I believe that by working together we can use this to be a fruitful time in terms of preparing for Christian Ministry and service. The college has a long history and it has faced many challenges and I am convinced that the college community of staff and students and stakeholders will face this and will work on it and by the Grace of God will come through this stronger on the other side.

You are in our thoughts and prayers. But remember, stay in touch and communicate as frequently as is practical.

Every blessing. Bye bye.

Helen - Goodbye