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The Right Honourable Boris Johnson, MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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17th September 2020

Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to you in both a personal capacity and on behalf of the community we serve in Washington, Tyne and Wear, to express deep concern with regard to the continually changing rules, regulations and lockdowns we are having to endure.

There is no doubt that back in March a deal was made with the British people where we agreed to lockdown to protect the NHS and save lives. Hindsight has taught us much about that, but we can only act now in the present. At its peak, we were seeing over 1000 deaths a day from COVID-19 and scientists estimate over 100,000 new infections each day. Studies revealed that at least 5 million people had been infected by May with some suggesting significantly more.

The lockdown worked, the NHS was thankfully not overwhelmed. Questions will be asked about, but we will probably never know whether, the economic, educational and psychological toll it took on people was worth it, but we cannot change history.

It was no doubt a very difficult time for many of us. As the local Vicar, I have taken many many funerals over this period. We have tragically had two suicides amongst those deaths. My own father also died very suddenly through this period, not from COVID, but from him doing something that he would not have been doing had we not been locked down.

We are now several months out of lockdown, and we have seen an uptick amongst diagnosed cases locally and nationally, but nothing compared with March. I have been told by one nurse that the hospitals remain 'empty'. What I am seeing on the ground however, is a great deal of fear amongst young and old alike, much of it irrational because there is still the perception that catching it will 'kill them'. These are not helped by the numerous graphs being published misleadingly suggesting that the recent rise in infections is actually as bad as the first peak, back when testing was minimal.

I am seeing numerous people with severe mental health problems and a lot of distress. I am also seeing (and feeling) a lot of anger at new restrictions at a time when neither the NHS is at risk nor the death rate seeing any dramatic change. I am also seeing numerous people

whose livelihoods and businesses are being further destroyed as they have fallen through the cracks of furlough and business support and I fear many more suicides may occur.

I'm sure your scientists will have told you it is too late to eradicate the virus from the UK. It is endemic. We can only try to hold it at bay until a vaccine becomes available or 'herd' immunity is obtained. As we have seen in Sweden, that while they initially failed to protect people in care homes, this virus does follow a very standard G curve of an epidemic and it seems all but over in that nation. Our lockdown came so late that we have seen a very similar curve with, in fact, a higher death rate per million than Sweden.

Our lockdown truncated the virus spread in some communities and they are now seeing the virus spread as would be expected had there been no lockdown. Given the economic and psychological impact of the restrictions and unless we are not being told something about this virus, further lockdowns seem to be based more on fear and media pressure rather than scientific fact, as expressed by the Oxford Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine and numerous other pathologists and scientists.

It is right that we continue to protect the vulnerable and elderly as best we can, but the new restrictions (and especially where we have local lockdowns), are effectively working as a collective punishment of the majority of people, most of whom would be unaffected by this virus. It is particularly harsh on larger families and especially the home-schooling community who often do educational groups together and support each other, but have no exceptions noted in the regulations.

The rule of 6 may be simple, but the world is not simple and this law is at best unjust. It risks harming community as people tell on neighbours for simply having grandparents over to visit. It risks a loss of trust in police as they are asked to interfere with family life. It certainly further damages trust in government. It risks effectively criminalising many families who simply give up and ignore the law. It risks people deciding not to go for COVID tests when mild symptoms present as they do not want to lock down. Ironically, it also risks increasing the spread as 6 individuals can now meet up from 6 households, but a family of 6 cannot see anyone together. In fact 5 from one family could meet 1 person in the home, while the 6th could go down the pub with 5 other people from 5 households in a room full of dozens of other people. Being simple, this law has created an absurdity that neither protects people from the virus, treats people like children and risks undermining the nature of law. I have never heard so many people saying they will circumvent or ignore a law until this one.

Rather than legislation at this time, I believe we need a grown up conversation about responsibility and personal actions. We also need a grown up conversation about death and dying. I have heard it said by politicians that every death is a tragedy. As a Vicar who deals with the bereaved on a weekly basis, I beg to differ. Almost all deaths are sad, but certainly not tragedies. My own gran is 95. For the past 10 years she's been telling me, 'I won't be here next time you come.' When she dies we will be sad, but also thankful for her life and know that she has gone to, in my Christian belief at least, a better place.

When I visit families, more often than not they will tell me that death has been a release for the deceased as the suffering of a sick and dying person has come to an end. What is a true tragedy is the suicide of a young father because the lockdown has taken such a toll on them that they cannot cope. We need to come to terms with the reality that death of elderly and frail people is a very normal part of life which for the past 60 years has increasingly been hidden away in hospitals and care homes All of a sudden it has become a very powerful reality for everyone again. We seem to forget that on average 500,000 people die each year.

Far from locking down again, while keeping some sensible precautions, especially for the elderly and vulnerable, we need to let people get on with life and begin to rebuild the economy. Allowing young people to catch this virus and build immunity is not a bad thing. I acknowledge that there is a tiny risk, but we live with risk every day and it has been shown statistically that the death rate for under 40's has been unaffected by CV-19. i.e. every-day normal life is as risky as CV-19 for over half the population. The evidence also points to the fact that 40-60% of people are inherently immune, so quite quickly the number of people actually vulnerable to this disease is, as a proportion of the population, very low. Many illnesses are quite horrid and, as you experienced personally, CV-19 can be very horrid for a small number, but for most, the symptoms are barely noticeable. We cannot live in semi-permanent lockdown to protect the few who are truly vulnerable, or we will be there forever.

Neither the government nor the NHS can cure death. No doubt it is a topic for philosophers and theologians to speak about, but what is being done to our country to seemingly try and prevent a few more CV-19 fatalities may well cause more death than it saves, not least as people avoid getting treatment for other diseases. These rules are certainly causing untold suffering to families, lonely individuals and many others as I have seen first-hand. They also stop churches function in much of their pastoral capacity as so much support takes place informally between people and would be inseparable from 'social' interaction.

As a Cambridge educated Natural Scientist, I could write much more about the dissenting scientific opinions that contradict whatever executive summaries you must be reading to lead you to impose these laws on us, but there are many who believe this to be a virus that has already done its worst in the UK and we are simply seeing an extended 'tail' because of the lockdown. From the data I have seen in comparison with Sweden, the evidence is strong.

We should protect those who are vulnerable, but I urge you to hand responsibility back to the British people and treat us like adults. It is wrong to collectively punish 60 million people because a few are irresponsible, and even when we have seen these inappropriate raves and house parties, the reality is, so long as they are not mixing with the elderly and vulnerable, the actual risk they present to the NHS and society is very very small. Young people will be young people and need to be or they may well find worse things to do.

We cannot continue to live in fear, it is crippling. Nor do we want to live in a police state with government micro managing family life. Our freedoms have been hard won in history. It feels like people acting to be seen to act in response to media pressure and past failings, and if we continue on this path I fear for what might happen to government, society and indeed social order. Far from going back into a full lockdown, it is time to revoke these laws that have set a terrifying precedent for the future. It is time to hand power back to parliament and the British people.

Yours Sincerely



Rev Nick Barr-Hamilton BA, MA (CANTAB)

cc. The Rt Revd Paul Butler, Lord Bishop of Durham,
Rt Hon. Sharon Hodgson, MP for Sunderland West