

Dear all

I have just finished and broadcast the last live service from the vicarage, and, as promised, here is some information for our return to church services, in the form of FAQs (frequently asked questions).

The Church of England's guidelines begin:

"I was glad when they said unto me, "let us go to the house of the Lord."" (Psalm 122 v1)

Re-opening our churches for public worship will inevitably be a time of mixed emotions – joy at being able to come together to worship in our church buildings; sadness for the loss or absence of some members of our church communities; uncertainty about what the future "new normal" may be...

What time will the service start?

The service will start at 10.00am as usual. However, you would do well to aim to get there in good time. We have no idea quite how long it will take to get people in safely.

How many people can the church hold?

There is no definitive answer to this. We have about 25 pews available. Due to social distancing guidelines, each pew can hold either a single person, or a couple, or a 'bubble' or a family. We might possibly have to tell people that we have reached capacity.

Is it safe to return?

Nowhere is 100% guaranteed safe in this pandemic. All we can say is that we have taken every precaution that we can, following the most recent guidelines from the government and the Church of England. We have undertaken a full risk assessment, and will maintain best practice regarding social distancing and hand sanitation.

What about those who are over 70 or clinically vulnerable, those who may have symptoms, and those self-isolating?

CofE guidance states:

While those at extra risk and the 'clinically extremely vulnerable' should be advised of the risks of attending public worship, a *decision* to do so is theirs alone.

Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household...

Those who are considered to be extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 will have been advised to shield and are currently advised not to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship. From Monday 6 July, those shielding individuals may choose to gather in groups of up to 6 people outdoors and form a support bubble with another household, they will therefore still be advised not to attend places of worship indoors.

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend the place of worship due to the risk that they pose to others; they should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household.

How can we maintain physical (social) distancing?

- A one-way system will be used inside the church
- There will be floor markings, both inside and outside church
- Pews will have notices where to sit
- There will be a queue system for entry into church, and for receiving communion

Can I sit in my usual place/where I want?

I am sorry, but this is not going to be possible. Some pews have been cordoned off to maintain social distance. And, in order to manage things safely and quickly, we are asking sidespeople to guide worshippers to fill up from the front. It's going to feel strange, but will bring (literally) a new perspective on worship.

Do we have to keep a register of who attends our church buildings?

This is not mandatory, but in line with government guidance for other venues, we will be ticking off a register as you come in. We have a list of regulars, and their phone numbers. If you are not on it, we will ask you for your details. We will securely keep an accurate temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in order to assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks. After 21 days, this will be securely destroyed. It is GDPR compliant.

What about hygiene?

On entering and leaving the church building everyone, including staff and volunteers, will be asked to use hand sanitiser. After the service, most of the church will be cordoned off again until the next service. This gives the 72+ hours for any possible virus to die off. Those areas that will be used for private prayer will be cleaned.

The church will only be open for private prayer on Wednesday and Saturday, again giving 72+ hours after the service. (Areas used for private prayer will not be used on Sunday).

Can we open our toilets?

The hall toilets will be kept shut, but can be opened on request – the sidespeople have a key. Cleansing wipes are available.

What about children attending worship?

We warmly welcome all children and young people; they are part of the worshipping body of Christ. Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian and appropriate hygiene precautions followed.

There will be no children's area in the church throughout the duration of restrictions.

There will be no specific children's activities/Sunday School until at least September.

Can we use communal service books and news sheets?

We will not be using service books. Service sheets will be placed on your pews by sidespeople for you to use. They must be taken away by you after the service.

Will there be music?

The organ can be played. Chris will play music before and after the service, and also at certain moments during the service. These will be an integral part of the service.

Sadly, we currently cannot have any congregational or choir singing – services will be said. Spoken responses during worship should also not be in a raised voice.

As we hope to record the service, for copyright reasons, we cannot have recordings as an alternative to live singing.

Should I wear a face covering?

At present there is no government requirement to wear face coverings in places where social distancing can be complied with. However, people may wish to do so, and this is a personal decision. Some sidespeople may choose to wear masks, and the communion will be distributed by the priest with a mask

What about the collection plate?

We would encourage people to give by standing order. However, you still may give by cash and envelope. The cash will be bagged immediately and left for a week (beyond the safe 72+ hours). It will not be brought up and blessed.

Can I light a candle?

For the immediate future, we will not be having an opportunity to light a candle on Sundays. If you wish, you may light a candle on Wednesday or Saturday, when the church will be open for private prayer. Otherwise, please ask me, and I will light a candle on your behalf when I go in to say Morning Prayer.

Will there be refreshments?

No refreshments will be served in church, and we will ask you to leave immediately after the service has finished. However, you are invited to meet others socially, observing social distancing guidelines, in the vicarage garden, if you wish to chat.

How do we receive communion?

We will have communion only in one kind (bread only). The sidespeople will advise when to come forward, and there will be a one-way system (down the nave aisle, returning by the south aisle). Communicants are asked to take responsibility for social distancing as they move around the building.

The communion bread will have been broken under hygienic conditions, and covered during the Eucharistic prayer. There will be a station in front of the communion rail, and you will receive standing.

The priest will have sanitised their hands, and will drop the bread into your open hands. As there will be less than the recommended 2m social distancing, the priest will be masked, and there will be a marking on the floor to stand at.

What if someone becomes unwell whilst in church?

If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19, they should go home immediately and be advised to follow the stay at home guidance. If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

Other people who may have been in contact with the person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly after the interaction, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace. If they do develop symptoms they should follow the stay at home guidance.

We do have a COVID-19 prepared First Aid kit.

The church will be cleaned in line with Government guidance where a suspected case of COVID-19 has been recorded.

My apologies for the extensive detail, but we do want you to be fully aware of what is required, and to be assured that we have thought very thoroughly how to manage the return to church as safely as possible.

Please do not hesitate to ask me if you have any queries or concerns.



Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark