

Dear all

Over the last week we have had various meetings looking towards the end of this year, and pondering how we might manage the usual pattern of services. One thing is very clear – the upcoming seasons of Remembrance, Advent and Christmas are going to be like none other we have experienced before.

We will not be able to enjoy the large gatherings we are used to for Remembrance Sunday parades, for Carol services, Crib Service, Christingle and Midnight Mass. And yet the world goes on. Seasons turn, and we wish to commemorate them in some way.

At the Priory Church, we will try to continue the normal pattern as far as we are able. To this end, we hope to get something of a return to a pattern of services as we have had before.

We will continue to have a single Sunday morning service, which will always be a Communion service. The pattern will be:

1st Sunday – a 1st Sunday Praise-style service

2nd & 4th Sundays – a more traditional (though still modern language) service

3rd Sunday – a Family Service

5th Sunday – led by Friday Knights

As of 1st November, we will be adding Evening Services:

1st Sunday – an Evening Prayer (hopefully eventually to return to Choral Evensong)

3rd Sunday – an 'Alternative' Evening Prayer

Also, from Thursday 5th November we will be recommencing our Thursday morning Communion services at 9.30am.

All of these, of course, are subject to current guidelines. As many of these services as possible will be live streamed on our Facebook pages. Masks will be compulsory for all, except for those who have exemption.

We are approaching the Remembrance-tide. As usual, we will be holding our Annual All Souls service to remember those we have known and loved, who have died. As usual, we have invited the next of kin of those whose funerals we have been involved with over the last 3 years. This year we will be tight for space, so please let me know if you wish to attend the service if you have not received a letter.

Remembrance Sunday. There will be an Act of Remembrance on Sunday 8th November at 3.00pm by the memorial planter in Church Street. This will be followed by laying of wreaths at the war memorial in the church. There will, however, be no parade. Places will be limited by space in the church.

Another thing to remember is that the **clocks go back** this Sunday, 25th October. This is the good one – the time we get an extra hour in bed. It is also the less embarrassing one if we forget to adjust our clocks! If we forget to put our clocks back, the worst that can happen is that we may arrive before the church doors are open. If we forget to adjust our clocks in the spring, we suffer the embarrassment of walking in just as the final blessing happens, and everyone turning around to look!

I don't know about you, but I have yet to resume anything near my usual social life. I have not been in a pub or restaurant since March, and I can't remember the last concert I went to. This is in part distancing, and partly because the opportunity is not really there. But this is affecting church as well.

As I have said before, we can never guarantee 100% safety, but we can comply with regulations and guidelines that are known to be very effective. I know some people are not coming because they are concerned for their own health – understandably in higher-risk groups. I know others are not coming as they are in places where the risk of picking up infection is higher, and they are shielding others. This is at times necessary for our protection. And we are very fortunate for the internet, that enables us to livestream services for those not able to attend.

But we do miss something vital by not coming together. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts his readers *...let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (Hebrews 10: 24-25). While they did have an urgent sense of the Day of the Lord approaching imminently, which we have perhaps lost – rather having the sense that we're in for the long haul – nevertheless, we are faced with our own challenges. How much we need encouraging, and sometimes provoking! While the 1st Century church didn't have phone, Zoom and Skype, and we can, and need to use these methods, there is nothing quite like being in the same space speaking out our responses together, praying 'live' together, and simply the comfort of seeing one another.

Our Facebook live stream can help with this for those who are not able to attend. But I do wonder if we will have lost the habit that regular churchgoing created in us. I hope not, and urge you to continue the desire, even if the practice is not currently possible. The Priory Church has survived the Black Death and other plagues throughout the centuries. And we can survive this pandemic with the strength that God supplies through His Spirit, and the encouragement that we can give to one another.

One final thought. I have mentioned before the CRES course I am embarking on. For the first essay I intend to look at *Creation: Proclamation or Sacrament?* This is based on Psalm 19: 1 *The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork*, and Paul's statement in Romans that *Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made* (Romans 1: 20).

This was also inspired by one of the most glorious choruses ever written, based on that Psalm reading, from Haydn's *Creation*. Here is a link to an excellent version conducted by Christopher Hogwood (albeit at a cracking pace!).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4lSauxyFWo>

While I was looking for it, I came across this version by the Akua Akyere Memorial Youth Choir – a non-denominational choir based in Tema, Ghana. Whilst not as polished, it shows how the piece traverses cultures, and is so full of joy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh2-FM0mXkg>



Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark