

## ***Planning for our future at Christ Church***

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020

Dear All,

### **We will be opening our buildings... but not yet!**

As Rob mentioned last week, the Deacons along with Mike Smith, our Property Chair, met yesterday to discuss possibilities regarding the reopening of our Church buildings and gathering together again for worship on a Sunday morning. As you will be aware, the Government decided that such a gathering for worship would be allowable from the 4<sup>th</sup> July. However, while we would all absolutely love to be physically together again for worship, having very carefully considered Government, URC and Baptist Union guidelines along with who we are as a Church in terms of our age profile, we do not believe it is the right time yet for us to do so. We would now like to share our reasons for this decision and our current plans on the way ahead.

### **What would gathering actually be like?**

Firstly, perhaps we should highlight some key aspects of what any Church gathering would be like. Before any gathering or any event could take place, there would have to be extensive preparation. This would include full Risk Assessments for the buildings and staff, a comprehensive cleaning plan, purchasing and setting out signage and floor markings, the marking out of pews that could be used and the removal of soft furnishings and toys. This is not the exhaustive preparation list! Of course, a thorough cleaning regime would also be required after any Service or building use.

When it comes to actually gathering for worship, we would all need to queue with social distancing and enter one (or one household) at a time. We would all have to use hand sanitiser on entry (and again on exit). We would need to keep a record of all those present for NHS Track and Trace purposes. We would all need to sit as directed with only those from our own household. We would not be able to go within 2 metres of each other (without additional mitigating measures) and so there would be no handshakes or hugs with one another. While Stephen would be able to play the organ, we would not be able to sing hymns and songs together. There would be no Junior Church or Children's corner. Any children would have to stay with their families in the Service and would not be able to spend time together playing and socialising. We would have to have as short a Service as possible with no socialising afterwards, (yes, that sadly means no tea or coffee!) and then we would all have to leave in turn with no chatting outside in the garden or car park.

### **The risk to us as a Church Family**

Secondly, any of us who fall into any of the COVID-19 higher risk categories would have to be strongly discouraged from returning to the Church buildings at this point in time. For us as a Church family, that does in fact include quite a lot of us. We do not want folk who have an increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19 to be at an increased risk of infection. We also do not wish to have just a few of us gathering again with too many of us excluded due to these higher risks; this is not who we are as a Church.

As a Diaconate, we strongly feel pastorally protective and responsible, (as well as legally responsible!) for the care and wellbeing of all who are part of our Church family and indeed, for those who might wish to join us once we are back in our building. Given the risks of COVID-19,

given the required preparation, the unusual shape of the whole experience which includes social distancing, no singing and no 'tea and chat' and given the limited number of us that should even consider gathering together at the moment, we believe we should not open for worship or for private prayer right now.

### **What we are doing now**

Lastly, while we are adopting a cautious, and we hope, careful and caring approach, there are nonetheless preparatory tasks that we will be attending to very shortly. We will start preparing for our return now and this will include doing the Risk Assessments. Even though we are not opening the buildings yet, we are still required to do these. This will happen over the next couple of weeks, with some of us doing the initial work next week before a further Deacons' Meeting in the near future. Should these assessments change any of our thoughts or intentions, we will, of course, let you know immediately.

However, while we do not know yet, and so cannot say yet, when we might return to worship in our Sanctuary, we can say that this will not be until September at the very earliest. We will review our Risk Assessments again later on in August and will also consider any reported changes with the risks of COVID-19 and within all the guidance we are receiving. When we feel that it is possibly the right time for us to start gathering together again, we will then seek your thoughts about opening and will ask about your own intentions if we were to do so, before making any final decision together as a Church.

In the meantime, we will continue to be the Church together in our 'lockdown' mode and will maintain our current approach to worship, fellowship and pastoral care. We are doing our best to support and care for folk within our Church family but if ever you need some support or are aware that someone else might, please do reach out to one of us and we will do all we can to help.

Every blessing to you all,

*Neil and Rob*

*On behalf of all the Christ Church Deacons*