

Planning for our future at Christ Church

28th August 2020

Dear All,

What we heard from you and what decision was made

The Deacons, along with Mike Smith, our Property Chair, met again yesterday afternoon to continue our discussion regarding the reopening of our Church buildings for Sunday morning worship in September. Thank you to those of you who were able to let us know your thoughts. Your feedback has been very helpful to us and we will address some of the additional points raised by some of you in the process but firstly you will recall that last week, we asked you to consider:

- a) Whether you think we should open the Church building for Sunday worship in September
- b) Using the personal risk assessment, whether you would attend Church if we move forward with this in September.

This is the feedback we received:

There are 88 households listed in the church directory. We were able to make contact with 75 of these. 56 of the 75 said they thought we should open the Church building for worship in September. In response to the second question 43 households said they would attend if we did. This number included 30 individuals, 10 couples and 3 families.

We are delighted that so many of you support the idea of reopening in September and indeed, that so many of you hope to join us then. We are saddened by the reality that we cannot all return yet but we respect that for very understandable reasons a good number of dear friends will not be able to join us initially. We will continue to try and keep everyone included in our worship and in all we do as a Church.

Following further careful consideration of all the relevant factors and all your responses, the Deacons are fully supportive of the Church opening again for Sunday worship at 10.45 a.m. on Sunday 20th September 2020. We are happy to move forward but do remain cautious. We take our pastoral and legal responsibilities seriously and remain committed to doing all that needs to be done to thoroughly and properly prepare for our reopening. Of course, our reopening plan assumes that the Government guidelines for Places of Worship do not significantly change and that the prevalence of COVID-19 remains very low within Ipswich and the surrounding areas.

Responding to your questions and feedback

We are very thankful also for the questions asked and feedback we have been given about the probable nature of the worship experience and would like to offer some further notes. We outlined some of the key restrictions we would have to live with to ensure a realistic picture of what gathering for worship would be like before asking for feedback. For any who would like to take a closer look at some of the key guidelines for Churches, we have included links to the main guidance documents we are seeking to adhere to at the end of our letter. (They are all regularly updated!). In addition to those available through the internet links, there are a number of other relevant guidelines covering other areas of interest to us, all available on the URC and Baptist Union websites, and we have found notes within the URC Risk Assessment template helpful too.

The restrictions we have previously highlighted come from these documents and very little interpretation has been necessary on our part. Quite a few friends have asked about the restrictive approach to socialising after leaving the Church Sanctuary but whilst still within the Church's grounds. Here we admit that there has been an interpretation within our Risk Assessment process but we are more than happy to reconsider this. The guidance which flows from the specific Government guidelines for Places of Worship (and features within Denominational Guidelines) is the requirement to limit members of different households from interacting with one another within the buildings, car parks or gardens of a Place of Worship. This is in addition to maintaining social distancing. On reading the Government guidelines, it was

thought best to keep our own guidelines straightforward. But we respect the questions being asked of us and will look at a more flexible approach to this aspect of the guidelines. We will include this in our notes when we next write, nearer the time of reopening.

Following a few thoughts shared with us by a number of friends, it is apparent that we had not given sufficient attention to how long the virus lasts on surfaces and what positive benefits this might have for us. This is very helpful because if the Sanctuary is always left empty for 72 hours between being used (the greatest length of time the virus survives on a surface), this will significantly affect the amount of cleaning required and will perhaps mean, for example, that things like pew cushions can remain in use and that opening the gallery becomes more feasible.

Some further notes regarding questions about our Service: On reopening, we intend to continue with the same format of Service that we have now. As the Service has to be short with no congregational singing, our current format should work well. Importantly, to preserve as much inclusivity as possible, with many dear friends unable to join us initially, we plan to have a single Service available each week, either for home use or for delivery within the Sanctuary. The weekly Service handout will continue until further notice.

Whilst the Diaconate decided to not go online or use Zoom for Worship Services in our deliberations in March and again in April, we have an ongoing conversation about livestreaming or recording and sharing or Zooming our Service and that conversation will now continue with our fellow Deacons as we explore online options for Christ Church folk and indeed, for any other people who would wish to join us in this way.

We have also discussed Holy Communion. Presently, we are working on a plan which follows the Baptist guidelines on this point and this will be discussed by the Deacons shortly. Hopefully, Holy Communion for those able to be in the Sanctuary should be both safe and possible.

Possibilities for Junior Church and a very limited number of choir singers will also be explored in due course. There are, of course, guidelines for these too! We feel we should focus on all that is required for us to return to worship first and then develop and evolve as we go and as we can. It will be an ongoing development, a 'work in progress' and if now, or at any time, you have any questions or comments or think we are missing something, please do not hesitate to speak with either of us or any of the Deacons.

What happens next?

We will now press on with all the planning and preparation required as outlined in our letter last week and will write to you all again before our return to Sunday Worship in our Sanctuary.

In the meantime, we continue to be the Church together in our 'lockdown' mode and will maintain our current approach to worship, fellowship and pastoral care.

Every blessing to you all,

Neil and Rob

On behalf of all the Christ Church Deacons

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july?fbclid=IwAR3A46TZvPmhHBFvQ5MOzmVUxr1hjCWwJuOX2t6b25YO4Hlm9vu-2yp2QA>

https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/Emerging_into_the_new_normal.pdf

<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=258760>

<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=257882>