



Revd Tim Vickers, Vicar of St John's Church, Harpenden
5 St John's Road, AL5 1DJ vicar@stjohnsharpenden.org

*The Feast of St Francis of Assisi
4th October 2021*

Dear Friends,

The lifting of coronavirus restrictions will have brought relief and joy for some, and anxiety and uncertainty for others. I am grateful for the cautious response taken by our Churchwardens and PCC during the interregnum as we discern the impact on our congregational life and society at large. Throughout the pandemic Saint John's has continued worship and continued church life as far as possible, as an affirmation of the importance of the spiritual life to individuals and the community, whilst working within the guidance in effect at the time to mitigate virus transmission and keep everyone as safe as possible – and I thank God that we have not had any cases linked to church.

Our attitudes are still very mixed, as shown in our recent congregational survey, particularly with regard to the wearing of face coverings and social distancing. As I think of these diverse responses I am reminded of Saint Paul's words in Romans 12.15-16 when he tells us to 'rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep' so that we might 'live in harmony with one another'. Although life will look a lot more normal, it is important to remind ourselves that the pandemic is not over.

In this new phase of our life together, I would like our watchwords to be *caution* and *courtesy*. Caution in terms of moving forward carefully and continuing with some of the infection control measures which are now usual to us all. Courtesy in terms of our attitude to one another and being sensitive to different needs as part of our Christian vocation to love one another.

In July the Churchwardens and PCC decided to gradually lift restrictions as the situation merited. However, we have reached a point where we need to review and particularly look at the issue of face coverings and social distancing. Having consulted with Churchwardens and PCC, I describe below the next steps Saint John's will take from Sunday 10th October, particularly with regard to worship. These will be reviewed in the days ahead and particularly at the start of November. I hope that they will provide both comfort and encouragement to all of you, however you are feeling at this time.

Face coverings. We will not be requiring the wearing of face coverings but we ask you to continue to do so for worship when moving around the building or singing. This is especially the case for our Sunday services where we have the largest number of people with the greatest age range present in church. There is no need to wear a mask when in you're seated, but please be mindful of those near-by who may still wish to wear a mask. We are fortunate to have a large and well-ventilated building that lowers the risk of virus transmission, and to facilitate this the doors of the church will continue to remain open during services, as the weather allows. If deemed necessary, we may designate some areas of the church for people who wish to wear masks and those who don't. The Clergy will continue to wear masks to distribute the Sacrament.



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Social Distancing. Although there is no legal requirement for social-distancing, it is still strongly encouraged. There will be a few pews saved at the back for those who wish to wear masks and socially distance for the whole service. You are welcome to sit with whoever you like and in whatever number. There is room for people both to sit together or to remain separate as they prefer. To help alleviate the pressure on our Parish Eucharist there will also be a monthly 8am Communion on Sunday and an I am midweek service, in addition to daily Morning and Evening Prayer at 9.30am and 5pm.

Sanitiser will continue to be available, and you are strongly encouraged to use this when entering the church. The clergy will continue to use Sanitiser regularly throughout services and testing themselves regularly for your reassurance.

Singing. We will gradually increase the amount of singing in each service. As part of our courtesy to each other I ask that we wear face coverings when singing.

Holy Communion will continue to be distributed in one kind (the Body of Christ) from a standing position – for most services this will be in the Nave as now, although the 8am Communion will be in the Lady Chapel. Whilst I would dearly love to see the return of the Chalice, prudence would suggest delaying this for what I hope will only be a little longer. Likewise, while kneeling to receive Communion is an important reflection of our devotion to the Sacrament, it is more practical at this time to continue standing.

Track and Trace. Whilst not mandatory, we are looking at ways to keep a record of everyone in church so that if someone tests positive, we can inform all those who may have been present. Track and trace is the easiest way to do this, and I ask your support in this for the time being.

Cleaning: in line with current Church of England guidance, at the end of every day frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, will be cleaned.

Church Opening. It is no longer only for private prayer that our church is allowed to open. We intend to plan to open the church up daily, and whilst we hope people will come in and prayer, I wish to ensure that all are welcome to come and visit our wonderful church, for whatever reason.

Collections will continue to be taken at the back of the church rather than passing around collection bowls. I would also like to encourage you to use the contactless payment machine, and if doing so, remember that it can be used before the service as well as afterwards. As ever, we encourage regular members of the congregation to donate via Planned Giving, using the information on the Giving page of the website.

The Peace continues to be shared without physical contact, except for those within the same household or where you know physical contact is welcome.





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Refreshments, social events and meetings can now resume to a large extent and with no limitations on numbers. It is worth remembering that in all cases it is prolonged proximity, particularly indoors where risk is greatest, and therefore as many activities as possible will take place outside, and I would also ask you to bear this in mind. Those preparing food and drink will continue to take infection control measures for your reassurance.

Livestreaming of worship will continue

The measures above are not necessarily exhaustive and some other changes will be brought in gradually, so do get in touch if you have any questions.

I want to thank all of you for your faithfulness to God and your support for Saint John's during this time. I am particularly keen to hear your feedback and especially from those of you who might need to take extra care so that I, the other members of the ministry team and Warden, can continue to support you.

With prayers and best wishes,

Revd Tim Vickers
Vicar of St John's

