

Plans for our Public Worship at Itchingfield and Slinfold as we move into Step 4 of the Government Road Map.

Brothers & Sisters in Christ

“Within the Church we believe that everyone is known and loved individually by God and that as many members within one body we are called to be responsible to and for one another, respecting the more vulnerable whose suffering is our suffering (1 Cor 12:12-27). The move to step 4 means we are being asked to take even more personal responsibility around coronavirus than when we were compelled to adhere to Government restrictions.

These restrictions have necessarily been blunt instruments and for some people and in some places seem unnecessary or overly restrictive. For others, each easing of restrictions seemed to bring additional risk to themselves or those they love who have remained vulnerable to the virus.

As a body we now need to move forward without these legal restrictions and as churches decide how best to manage the risk to ourselves and others. Church leaders are best placed to know their own communities and environments, the situations where there will be many people together who do not normally meet and the places where they will come together; to listen to the voices of vulnerable in their communities and where their fears and concerns lie. “

Extract for the Church of England current Covid Guidelines

As you will be aware on the 19th July the Government moved us to Step 4 of the Road Map and all remaining Covid Restrictions were lifted. The Church of England have updated their guidance on Public Worship to reflect this but have also advised extreme caution as there are a growing number of cases once again. This situation was always expected, and even though we are heading into what will be a third wave the consequences have been mitigated by a greater number of people having already had 2 vaccines which lessens the spread and reduces the severity of the disease for many.

As we gather in church we still need to be mindful of each other's feelings and possible anxieties as well as continuing to ensure we keep each other as safe as possible. The last 16 months have been tough and we have had to make many sacrifices and this has gone a long way to help keep our worshipping community well.

The Church of England's advice is that incumbents are to “feel empowered to make locally appropriate decisions,” and so after carefully reading of the current guidance, discussions with others and prayer I intend that we proceed as follows.

Track & Trace, Social Distancing and Sanitizer: We will continue to have hand sanitizer at the door and I would encourage everyone to continue to use the sanitizer as you come in and when you leave. Please continue to ‘sign-in’ and remain socially distanced if possible.

Face Masks and Singing: it is no longer mandatory to wear a face covering but I recommend still wearing one if you feel able to. For many singing has been the hardest sacrifice to make,

and now that the restrictions have been lifted we are allowed to sing once again as a congregation. The current advice is that we do this in a well ventilated space and look to reduce the singing we do. I plan that we sing but with masks on and not return back to the full number of hymns just yet; we will continue to say the Gloria.

Colds & Sniffles: As we all get out and about more it is very likely that we will pick up the odd cough or cold. Sneezing is also reported to be a common Covid symptom for those that have been vaccinated. Can I politely ask those who do either to wear a mask at all times while in church to prevent others catching it or to stay at home for that Sunday. Again this is us helping to keep each other safe.

Sharing the Peace: Recently we have been sharing a 'virtual peace', which we will continue for the time being. There will be many who are uncomfortable with the thought of touching at present.

Holy Communion: Since the pandemic began we have only been receiving communion in one kind. Although the restrictions have been lifted and we could now receive again in both kinds, I for one do not feel comfortable about sharing a common cup, so I am proposing that we continue as we are for the time being.

Refreshments after: I do not propose to introduce this just yet, but hope to soon, when infection rates come down.

I know that some of you might feel I am being too cautious, but I have spoken to people who are vulnerable and concerned about the restrictions lifting, I will continue to keep the situation in prayer and make revisions when I feel they are appropriate. We are called to love our neighbour and I think we can do this best by keeping them safe.

Love in Christ,

Revd Sandra

21 July 2021