

28.02.2021



Dear friends

New life, New hope

This Sunday would be officially the last day of winter. As I write this letter to you, the outside looks beautiful with lovely sunshine. The trees and flowers are blooming; the warmth of that gentle spring breeze; the sun and the blue sky. A third of the population of now received first dose of vaccines. Children will be able to meet their friends at school. Grandparents will be able to hug their children and grandchildren again. It was a long and hard winter. But the world is now full of signs of new life and new hope. God gives us new life and new hope as we continue to walk on in this journey of Lent.

Recovery plan

Following the Prime Minister's announcement regarding lifting restrictions, the Ministry Team and I have been discussing our recovery plan. There are still uncertainties and plans can change (it is the one thing we all had to learn through the pandemic!). But I think it would be helpful to have a rough idea about how we are going to make a progress as the nation comes out of the lockdown. It could be helpful for you to be aware of the direction of our plan which is why I am sharing it with you here.

Please note though that it is not something that is set in stone. The plan will be continuously reviewed and discussed not only by the Ministry Team, the Standing Committee and the PCC but by different committees as they make their plans for recovery. So I am sharing this with you to provide you a groundwork to begin your conversations and thinking process in regards to what your responses would be.

You will notice that the recovery plan is in synchronization with the government's 4 staged plan. This way, I believe, we can set a good example of the Church being part of a wider community and a force of harmony and unity in times of trials.

Abington Church Recovery Plan Draft

as of 27 Feb 2021

*This is the outlines of how we might proceed with the easing of the lockdown. The plan will be constantly reviewed and evolved by variety of groups of the church and I will continue to update it. Each stage is in synchronisation with the government's plan.

7 March (Sunday): **Pre-Recovery Stage**

7 March (Sunday until 29 March): Services to be livestreamed from the church building

* Preachers, readers, intercessors and other lay leaders or members such as Churchwardens, Deputy Wardens etc may choose to be present in the building.

* Incremental approach to be taken

29 Mar (Monday): **Recovery Stage 1**

- People will be allowed to meet outside, either with one other household or within the "rule of six", including in private gardens
- The stay at home rule will end, but the government will urge people to stay local as much as possible
- Outdoor sport facilities will reopen, including golf courses and tennis and basketball courts
- Formally organised outdoor sports can also restart
- Parents and children groups can return but are capped at 15 and must be outdoors. Indoor groups can take place for vulnerable children and where parents need the groups to go to work
- Weddings attended by up to six people can take place in any circumstances

1 April (Maundy Thursday): Online Service led by a lay minister

2 April (Good Friday): Simple Outdoor Service (weather permitting) led by a lay minister (No livestream)

4 April (Easter Sunday): Outdoor Services begin

* Reservation required.

* To be livestreamed.

* In case of rain or cold weather, we open for indoor service for those who reserved up to 40 people.

* Easter Egg Hunt and Easter Trail will be available for children and families

* Easter churchyard art to be installed.

11 April (Sunday): Outdoor Service

(to be livestreamed. In case of rain or cold weather, the service will be held in the church with 40 of those who reserved.)

12 April (Monday): **Recovery Stage 2**

- All shops allowed to open
- Restaurants and pub gardens will be allowed to serve customers sitting outdoors, including alcohol
- Gyms and spas can reopen for individuals and households
- Hairdressers, beauty salons and other "close contact services" can reopen
- UK domestic holidays away from home permitted, with self-contained accommodation able to reopen for use by members of the same household
- Children allowed to attend indoor play activities, with up to 15 parents or guardians allowed to join them
- Zoos, theme parks and drive-in cinemas can reopen
- Libraries and community centres can reopen
- Weddings attended by up to 15 people can take place

18 April (Sunday): **Indoor Services begin with social distancing measures**

- * Reservation required
- * Maximum number 47 in the building
- * Toddler's group gradually reopen

17 May (Monday): **Recovery Stage 3**

- People can meet in groups of up to 30 outdoors
- Six people or two households can meet indoors
- Pubs, restaurants and other hospitality venues can seat customers indoors
- Up to 30 people can meet to celebrate weddings or other life events, like christenings
- Remaining outdoor entertainment, such as outdoor theatres and cinemas can open
- Indoor entertainment such as museums, theatres, cinemas and children's play areas can open
- Performances and large events will be subject to limits though. For indoor events they can be at half capacity or 1,000 people, and outdoors they can be at half capacity or 4,000 people - whichever is lower. For large venues (at least 40,000 capacity) up to 10,000 will be allowed to attend
- Hotels, hostels and B&Bs can reopen
- International leisure travel will resume no earlier than 17 May
- Adult indoor group sports and exercise classes can start up again

23 May (Pentecost Sunday): **Indoor Service continues with increased numbers**

- * Pew cushions may be used again.
- * Reservation will still be required. Seating plans will still be in operation.
- * Maximum number: 100
- * Choir singing may be allowed (TBC).

***8.15 am service resumes**

***Weekday service may resume**

***Junior Church on Sunday resumes**

21 June (Monday): **Recovery Stage 4**

- All legal limits on social contact will be removed
- No legal limits on the number of people who can attend weddings, funerals and other life events. From April, the government will run pilots for events such as large weddings, festivals and work conferences. This will help to determine how measures such as enhanced testing might allow large groups to attend without social distancing
- Nightclubs will be allowed to reopen

27 June (Sunday / Patronal Festival):

Special Service on Patronal Festival and on the end of restrictions.

- * No seating plan is required. No reservation is required but a tracking system to be implemented.
- * People may be asked to sign in as they come in for track and trace.
- * A training for welcomers may be needed to guide newcomers and sign them in.
- * Communal singing may be possible (TBC)
- * Discussion to be taken on the practice of sharing of the chalice before it is reintroduced.
- * A special churchyard art to be installed.

- * a special service for the residents of St. Christopher's may be possible at the chapel at an appropriate time.
- * a special service for the staff of ST. Christopher's and other care homes (APV and etc) may be appropriate.

Prester's lockdown musings: Always winter, never Christmas

As the day to day reality of life under lockdown became more familiar, I realised there was a literary parallel. It is one that will be familiar to many Christian readers. In his story "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" C.S. Lewis invented a land called Narnia, accessible through the back of a wardrobe. Lucy, the most spiritually sensitive of four children sent as wartime evacuees to the house with the wardrobe, is the first to find her way through to this different world. She finds herself in a wintry landscape, where she meets a faun carrying some parcels. His name is Mr. Tumnus. He explains "it is winter in Narnia, and has been for ever so long." The white witch, the villainess of the story, has got all Narnia under her thumb. "It's she that makes it always winter. Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!"

Always winter, never Christmas: it sums up perfectly an experience of a drab reality with seemingly no prospect of hope or change. For many people their experience of lockdown seemed like that. With the need to isolate, so many things were lost. Later in the year, as the second lockdown came, even the promise of a comparatively normal Christmas was withdrawn, to be replaced by part of one day with one part of your family. It became clear that the best hope for a way out was the development of one or more vaccines.

As C.S. Lewis' tale unfolds, it becomes clear that the four children's presence in Narnia is foretold as being essential to wrong being put right, and Narnia returned to its former glories. They will need to meet up with Aslan, the Christ like lion figure who is the rightful ruler of Narnia. Together they must fight a battle with the witch and her evil forces.

To say too much would risk spoiling things for any who may not yet have read the book or seen the film. But the crucial point is that, with Aslan nearer, the witch's spell begins to break. The trees shake off their robes of snow. Streams thaw. Flowers appear. "Your winter has been destroyed, I tell you!" says the witch's servant. "This is Aslan's doing!"

I write this as the government are about to announce the relaxation of some of the restrictions we have had to endure under lockdown three. The evidence indicates that the rate of new infections is going down, and that this is linked to the vaccination of more than fifteen million people. For this we give heartfelt thanks to the scientists who developed the vaccinations, the medics who administered them and the administrators who ordered early and in massive amounts. Those of us fortunate enough to have had a vaccination can testify that, in addition to the medical protection it affords, there is also a real psychological boost. The world is a less threatening place. We will come through.

Some people see no real role for God in relation to the pandemic. They will thank the scientists and the medics – though maybe not the politicians! Our Lent study groups based on Tom Wright's "God and the pandemic" give us the chance to reflect on these issues. For myself, I see the unusually rapid development of a number of effective vaccines as a very definite answer to many people's prayers. And it seems that the pandemic has given rise to a definite increase in the numbers of people thinking through the big issues of life and faith. One sign of this is the increasing numbers of people reading C. S. Lewis!

Prester (Lay Reader), 21 Feb

Friends, we have come so far. There are signs of new hope and new life around our lives as well as in nature. So thank you and well done for making it this far. We will get through this. Let's keep going. For now, the task for us remains the same: Survive! That is enough right now. And we will survive for God is with us. He has walked with us all this time and he will lead us to new pastures. May God bless you all and guide you wherever you are.

With every blessing and love in Christ

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