

The Ewelme Benefice
The parishes of Dursley and Uley with Owlpen and Nympsfield

Recommended guidelines for use across the Benefice following the lifting of restrictions by the government on 19th July 2021

These guidelines have been put together in consultation with the Churchwardens and my colleagues in ministry. The basis on which decisions have been taken is underlined by these words from our bishops in a pastoral letter received today:

As we begin to live life following the lifting of government restrictions, we are very clear that today is not 'release day' or 'freedom day' or 'going back to normal'. As one person commented on social media, 19 July is 'responsibility day'. This next stage is only possible because of the vaccination programme - the virus has not gone away.

Just as at the start of lockdown many people immediately thought of neighbours and those who are vulnerable and sought to offer support, so too we now need to be paying great attention to all those around us with various vulnerabilities and fears, not least in our worshipping communities and local contexts. What does it mean for us to be the body of Christ as we live the weeks ahead?

As we saw at the beginning of lockdown in March 2020, people respond in different ways due to their circumstances, personalities and experiences. There will be those who are longing simply to live as before with no physical distancing or face coverings and who will delight at being in a crowd once more. There will also be those who are anxious, not least those who are still not fully vaccinated, and those with particular personal and family health situations.

Whilst it is true that going forward we need to enable one another to live with the realities of a virus which is not going to suddenly disappear, and we are not to be driven by fear, we do also need to be sensible, cautious and compassionate as we continue to live this next season one step at a time.

The church buildings

- Hand sanitiser still to be available for those who wish to use it.
- Churches can be left open for private prayer with previously restricted areas opened up.
- Cleaning before services to continue.
- Pre-booking no longer required but we are still being asked to encourage people to make use of the QR check-in codes or to record their name on a registration list on arrival.
- Buildings to be well ventilated during services. Suggest tower and priest's doors also left open in St James.

Social distancing

- For Sunday services (other arrangements will apply for funerals and weddings) continue to keep every other pew free.
- Allow people to choose where to sit after being handed service booklet etc.
- Emphasise that people should feel able to move to an area where they feel less crowded and be confident to explain to others why they've chosen to do so.

Masks

- At the beginning of each service, explain that, out of care and consideration for others, for the time being we would prefer masks to be worn at certain points during the service.
- People are asked to wear masks when they move around the building.
- People are asked to wear masks when they come forward to receive communion.
- People may remove their masks when they are in the pew during the service.
- People are asked, for the time being, to wear a mask when singing. This does not apply to choirs.

Singing

- This is now permitted in church and we appreciate that people have been longing to be able to sing again during a service.
- We are aware that the national guidance points out that this is a time when there is an increased risk of catching or passing on coronavirus.
- Keeping every other pew free will help with social distancing.
- Wearing a face mask for the time being during singing is a cautious approach but recognizes our need to be aware of others and of those who will be concerned about this.

The Peace

- People will be asked not to move out of their pews to exchange the peace and to avoid physical contact except with family members or within own bubbles.
- An exchange of words is acceptable – ‘peace be with you’
- We will continue to maintain social distancing and be aware of those who do not wish to have any physical contact at this time.

Communion

- Arrangements for those who preside at Holy Communion will remain the same.
- For the time being we will continue the practise of not bringing the gifts forward in an offertory procession.
- Collections will not be taken during the service. These arrangements remain the same.
- For the time being we will continue the practice of receiving communion just in one kind (the host only) Words will not be used at this time.
- People will be asked to come forward wearing a mask and to receive as they have been doing during the time of restriction.
- The system for moving around the church building during the administration of communion will continue in the same way.
- This will be reviewed again in September.

After service coffee

- We suggest deferring the re-instatement of this until September to allow consideration during August as to how best to do it.
- People can be encouraged to remain, both inside and outside the building, to chat after the service, being encouraged to be aware of social distancing and of other people's concerns.

Live-streaming

This will continue for the time being.

We will need to review the possibility of making live-streaming a permanent feature.

These recommendations are for us to use in the churches of the benefice during August. Towards the end of the month we will review them and consider the implications for September.

The full guidance received from the C of E can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/COVID%2019%20Guidance%20from%20the%2019th%20July%202021%20v1.0.pdf>

Churchwardens will need to review and update risk assessments

Canon Michael 20th July 2021