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RE The partial reopening of Christ Church & St Mary's for worship from 6th Sept 20

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It has been a while since I last wrote to you all, much has changed in that time. I would like to give you some information about our preparations for the Autumn at St Mary's and Christ Church.

1) Our teaching series for the Autumn

Over the autumn we will be looking at 'A life worth living' following the book of Philippians. We will be thinking again about the difference that knowing and following Jesus can make to our lives. We will be looking at this for all of our services. (Our video services will have a number of guest speakers, including the new Bishop of Chester).

2) PCC's and APCM's

Both Churches PCC's have met in the last month.

- At St Mary's there will be some additional storage installed in the coming weeks, to help minimise Covid risks, this has been funded by a couple of grants. We have also agreed to hold **the APCM on 14th October**. Chris Deacon will be standing down as warden, leaving a vacancy, there are also some PCC member vacancies, please have a word with me, or the wardens if you would like to get involved. Information sheets, and signup sheets for stewards are now up in the church.
- A date for Christ Church APCM has not yet been set.

3) St Mary's stolen flags!

As you may be aware the Stone path at St Mary's was stolen a few weeks ago. The Police have CCTV footage and are following this up, in the meantime people from the local community has generously given us over £1000 towards replacing it. The rest will be covered by our insurance. We hope to get this work done soon, but in the meantime, take care on the temporary path that has been laid.

4) Re-opening the churches for worship

It has been 14 weeks since the Covid-19 lockdown started, and we closed the church buildings. However during that time, many of us have managed to worship together whilst in our homes, using services on the internet, over the phone, or with the help of the BBC! In the slower pace of life that many have had forced upon them, most people have felt God's presence with them, and many that I speak to feel that they are growing in faith.

One thing that has been universal for our church family is that we have missed fellowship with each other, and we have missed worshipping together 'in person'.

Both churches have been open for a number of weeks for private prayer, this has already come to an end at Christ Church, and will also finish at St Mary's at the end of August.

Growing Jesus' Kingdom Together

Each Sunday from the 6th September onwards, we will be reopening both churches for 'worship' on a trial basis. St Mary's will reopen with a spoken service, using the Book of Common Prayer at 8am. And Christ church will use a simple, more modern, spoken service at 9.15am. 'Online@9' and the 'video services' on the internet will continue for the time being. Once the schools are back in and new guidelines come out we will look at how to reopen the 11.15am service, to cater for both adults and Children.

Due to the Covid situation we are required to work within some very strict guidelines about what we can and cannot do. For example we can...

- Meet to worship, provided social distancing and hygiene regulations are complied with.
- Have communion, but only the bread
- We can have music, but it cannot be too loud.
- Welcome as many people to worship as the building can safely hold. But there is a limit, and once over this we may have to ask people to leave ☹️.
- Welcome children, but they have to stay with their families, and cannot wonder/touch things etc etc

However, we cannot yet...

- Sing, touch each other, have communion wine.
- Serve refreshments
- Have youth/children's groups

So as you can see, things will be a bit different for a while. However, God is still God, Jesus is on the throne, and Jesus' promise that 'when two or 3 are gathered together in my name, I will be there amongst them' is still true. For those of us who are ready and able to gather, whatever the style, our worship will bless God, and God will meet with us through it, as he will those at home. So please do not be too dismayed!

Children and families

We are very disappointed about the situation with children, ***we hope that once schools are back in, things will be clearer, and we can find a way for people of all ages to gather to worship.*** In the meantime we will have a few activity packs that we can give to any children who come, and sit with their family.

Vulnerable and shielding

We know that some people are not able or ready yet to come back to worship. We plan to keep the 'Phone a friend' network to keep running. Christ Churches 4pm telephone service, Zoom at Noon, and the online services will continue for the coming weeks.

What has been put in place to minimise the Covid risk in the churches?

- Social distancing when standing and seated.
- Hand cleansing stations as you come in.
- Face coverings will be worn by people over 11, except for medical or lip reading reasons.
- Stewards will welcome you and advise you of seating arrangements.
- At Christ Church alternate pews have been closed off, at St Mary's alternate rows of chairs have been removed.
- At St Mary's, colour coding of chairs has been introduced, to enable cleaning and social distancing (The red chairs are 2m apart, and can be washed down between services, so will be used at 8am, the red and blue upholstered chairs can then be used at 11.15am, and afterwards left for 72hours, by which time an any residual virus will have died, and the chairs can be used again safely)
- All kneelers, bibles etc have been removed and single use orders of service will be provided.

Growing Jesus' Kingdom Together

- Collection plate will not be passed around. The lectern will not be used for readings etc
- Regular cleaning of buildings
- Kitchens and other areas have been closed off
- Toilets are available, with self cleaning stations for people to clean the toilet and surfaces after use.
- If we have larger numbers of people, there is provision for a one way system.

What might coming to church look like?

- You'll need to arrive in plenty of time to allow time for everyone to get settled in the church before we start.
- You will need to social distance along the path until you can enter the building.
- On entry you'll need to sanitise your hands, you may be given an order of service, and any arrangements for the service will be explained to you by a steward.
- They will explain to you how the seating works, and may direct you/your household to specific seats (these will be chosen enable us to get the maximum number of people safely in. You may not be able to sit in your preferred area).
- Children must stay with their family groups at all times.
- The offertory plate will be on the side on the way in, it will not be passed around.
- The service leader will not be wearing a face covering, (to allow lip reading etc), but will keep a suitable distance from the congregation to remove any risk.
- The service will not have any singing, but may use music that you can listen to.
- If it is communion, there will be social distancing during distribution, you will need to take your face covering off as you come up. There will only be bread distributed and this will be dropped into your hands. Scrupulous hygiene will be applied to handling of communion bread, however if people prefer a blessing is always available.
- At the end of the service you may stay and chat for a short time with people, but social distancing must be maintained. Please be considerate about face coverings – we have lip readers in the church.
- Please leave, following the directions of the Stewards, remembering that the church grounds are considered to be part of the church buildings, and social distancing applies there too.

I'm sorry that this seems to be a big list of do's and don'ts. But they will not get in the way of our meeting with God, and bringing Him praise, it'll just take a week or two to get used to. And God delights first and foremost in our desire to worship him.

Everything is temporary (Except Jesus' love!)

This is a rapidly changing situation and we have quite limited personnel resources, so inevitably things will change. We may need to review what we can sustain over the long term, so we will all need to be flexible! God's love and a sense of humour will see us through!

5) Welcome back soon?

Whilst things are still far from normal, I know that God is with us, we may feel lost and disorientated, but God has this all in hand. I do look forward to welcoming you back into church, when the time is right for you. But whenever that is,

“May the Lord Bless you and Keep you, and make his face to shine upon you, and give you peace”

Every Blessing

Bruce Perrin

Growing Jesus' Kingdom Together