

The Re-opening of our churches for Public Worship and Private Prayer

A Message and Notice from: The Rev'd Tony Forrest - Rector

“I was glad when they said unto me, “let us go to the house of the Lord.””
(Psalm 122: 1)

3rd July 2020

Re-opening our churches for public worship has presented us with challenges and it has been approached, not only with care, but with many mixed emotions – joy at the prospect of physically gathering to worship in our church buildings; sadness for the loss or absence of some members of our church communities; the practical difficulties of cleaning the buildings and providing an environment in which it is adequately safe to gather, with procedures that ensure that remains the case.

All clergy have been asked, at least, to consider continuing to stream worship, both to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 as well as to those who have joined worship for the first time on-line during the lockdown period. However, we are looking forward to opening for public worship as well as private prayer - albeit cautiously.

Following a meeting with the Church Wardens from the Benefice, we have discerned that although Corhampton Church will have to remain closed at this time, we are able to open our other churches (details on the website, in church porches and on the Pew Sheets).

The standard pattern will vary when there is a Sunday Service to be held in that church and if a wedding or baptism or funeral is held, and if there is a change to our risk assessment or government guidance. In essence the plan is:

Meonstoke Church is generally available for **private prayer** from Tuesday to Thursday and on Saturdays and Sundays (1000-1700).

Public Worship will take place monthly, on the first and third Sundays of the month starting on **5th July**.

Droxford Church is currently available for **private prayer** on Thursdays and Sundays (0930-1630). **Public Worship** will take place monthly, on the second Sunday of the month starting on **12th July**. Thereafter, the church reopens for private prayer on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays with exceptions.

Exton Church is generally available for **private prayer** from Monday to Thursday and on Saturdays and Sundays (1000-1700). **Public Worship** will recommence monthly, on the fourth Sunday of the month starting on **26th July** and on the fifth Sunday in August (**30th**).

To ensure your safety, the churchwardens and I have been working on a safe way forward with limited numbers attending, a shorter length of service, no singing, seating plans and spacing, optional communion with bread only, and much else besides. It seems sensible that anyone currently shielding or with a health condition that places him or her at greater risk

should not yet attend, but rather join us in the on-line service (<http://www.bridgechurches.org.uk/calendar>).

We intend to hold the following service with limited numbers:

Meonstoke	5 July	1030	Morning Service followed by optional Communion
Droxford	12 July	1030	Sea Sunday Service followed by optional Communion
Meonstoke	19 July	1030	Morning Service (BCP) followed by optional Communion
Exton	26 July	1030	Morning Service followed by optional Communion
Church Green, Meonstoke	2 Aug	1030	Simple Lammastide Service followed by optional Communion

We shall also hold an outdoor ‘Drumhead’ service of thanksgiving for the Cessation of Hostilities at the end of the Second World War (VJ-Day 75) on Church Green on Sunday, 16th August at 3 pm.

For services in July (and perhaps beyond), we shall need to know who would be attending. We shall also need to collect ‘tack and trace’ information for all those attending.

Some more important Detail

‘The New Normal’

In order for our church buildings to be opened safely, some basic principles of physical distancing, hygiene and general safety must apply to us all. Specific details of ‘one-way systems and areas that are out of bounds will vary from building to building – please read the notices and respect any barriers.

For your safety, behind the scenes instructions on cleaning and for conducting the services are in force. To keep our cleaning etc. within our limited capacity, please do follow the instructions given out.

This guidance is rooted in the Bishop’s instructions, and the Church of England’s advice and the published Government Guidance.

This information is lengthy, but it designed to keep us all safe and to improve the prospects of being able to gather in the future with fewer restrictions. So please be patient! Here are the main points for us all.

Key Points

The Government and CofE have an advisory ‘cap’ of 30 for services weddings and baptisms if not conducted during ‘routine communal worship’. However, due to the size and layout of our churches and the requirement for social distancing and other Public Health

regulations, we shall set our 'cap' initially at 25, but, subject to further risk assessment, with a view of only increasing it to 30 once we are satisfied risk will remain minimised.

I would ask you to book a place if you wish to attend any service in July to help us with managing numbers and seating. The black service books cannot be used and orders of service with reading sheets will be provided. You are asked to take both home and to re-keep the Order of Service for your personal use each week – it will be helpful for on-line participation too. Please avoid touching any copies other than your own.

The two-metre 'rule' remains in place for public worship except in situations where closer contact cannot be avoided. Additional Public Health precautions will then be taken.

The wearing of face-coverings is voluntary.

Those at extra risk and the 'clinically vulnerable' are advised that attending public worship can never be completely free from risk and that streamed services will continue to be available for the foreseeable future. The decision whether you should attend, or not, is entirely yours. Please feel under no pressure, this will be a slow and steady process for some time – we can gather spiritually, even if we are unable to gather physically.

We must request the names of attendees and, we presume, some contact information for new attendees to be recorded and kept for 21 days to assist 'track and trace' if required (further details from the government are yet to be provided).

Singing, chanting and playing of brass or woodwind instruments are not permitted at the present time, but a further update may be available quite soon.

Holy Communion can be held as specific precautions will be taken, including the continued suspension of the Common Cup. There will be a pause in morning worship before Communion to allow those who do not wish to receive the sacrament in its physical form to leave, if they wish and to reduce the numbers of people and the time spent in the church building. Communicants will be expected to sanitise their hands before and after receiving communion and my mouth and nose will be covered during the distribution. No one else will handle the paten or ciborium.

A retiring cash collection will be made (no plate will be passed around) and you should place your donation in the receptacle provided close to the exit. Please consider:

- Making you donation through the Parish Giving Scheme as it becomes available in each parish – it is up and running Droxford and Exton and Meonstoke will be in the scheme very soon; or if that is not possible for you
- Setting up a standing order or revising an existing one; or in the meantime
- Using a cheque payable to the respective PCC rather than using cash.

In Meonstoke, a contactless card payment system will be available – this may prove to be a useful asset, do consider making your donation that way!

Sadly, we are unable to serve refreshments at the present time and equally sadly we must ask those attending not to linger in the church any longer than necessary – but do not feel

rushed to leave if you wish to pray further. The church will be locked after the service until it has been cleaned.

These instructions and precautions also apply our surrounding grounds (including churchyards and Church Green), so at the present time outdoor services do not provide us with any additional freedoms, such as singing or reduced spacing.

For those who are over 70 or clinically vulnerable, those who may have symptoms, and those self-isolating

Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household. You may want to consider whether, based on your local circumstance, you have set times when churches are open solely for those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, such as those over 70 or clinically vulnerable.

Those who are considered to be extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 will have been advised to shield and are currently advised not to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship. From Monday 6 July, those shielding individuals may choose to gather in groups of up to 6 people outdoors and form a support bubble with another household, they will therefore still be advised not to attend places of worship indoors.

Symptomatic People

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend the place of worship due to the risk that they pose to others; they should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household. Remote participation should be considered using streamed services.

Where individuals are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household, or because they have been requested to so by NHS Test & Trace, they should participate remotely.

Children and Young People

We warmly welcome all children and young people, they are part of the worshipping body of Christ. Young children must be supervised by the parent or guardian and appropriate hygiene precautions followed.

Our facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, and toys are sadly not available because they cannot be adequately cleaned.

If you become unwell while in church

If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 in a church building they should go home immediately and be advised to follow the stay at home guidance. If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In

an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

Other people who may have been in contact with the person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly after the interaction, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace. If they do develop symptoms, they should follow the stay at home guidance.

Everyone in the Benefice and on the electoral roll beyond, and in our neighbouring Benefice remains in my prayers each week, street by street. I pray that you, and those that you love, remain as happy and as healthy as possible. Please do remember to join us in our on-line services; it is part of our collective worship and we are gathering, in effect, with those in Church.

Loving God, Be with us as we begin to see what is possible.
Help us to show your love to all who seek to return to our churches.
Inspire us to understand their hopes and dreams.
Uphold us when we feel weary,
comfort us when we feel overwhelmed.
Bless us as we bless others.
This day and always.
Amen.