Dear Friends,

With winter approaching it seemed fitting to write another pastoral letter to update you on our thinking with regards to Covid guidelines in our churches in the coming months.

The recommendation of the government and Church of England is to try and keep public spaces well ventilated and to maintain social distancing wherever possible. During the summer months we have been able to achieve this, keeping doors and windows open in our church buildings allowing a good through-flow of air. But with the temperature beginning to drop we have a choice to make, we either keep the doors and windows open and forgo the heating or have our churches heated and reduce the amount of ventilation in our buildings.

From many years experience, I know that to try and welcome people into a cold church building is nigh-on impossible, as people vote with their feet and it is not long before the church is empty. Also, with many parishioners being of a venerable age, it would be irresponsible to expect them to come to a service in an unheated church. Therefore, we have decided to go with the second option and heat our churches, reducing the amount of ventilation.

In Lady St Mary church we are blessed with a large building that can house a good number of people without being too crammed. This means worshippers will be able to spread out and thereby maintain social distancing. On top of this we will split the church into two sections, the rear of the church will maintain strict social distancing, with the recommendation that face masks are worn throughout the service. The front section of the church will be a little more relaxed, although we would still encourage thoughtfulness to those around. In the smaller churches we would encourage worshippers to wear face masks throughout the service if possible, whilst maintaining social distancing.

To ensure that all worshippers are kept as safe a possible the clergy will regularly take lateral flow Covid tests and will administer the holy communion with their faces masked and sanitised hands. The elements will continue to be administered as they have of late, with the worshippers receiving bread intincted with wine.

For those who are extremely vulnerable or who feel safer staying at home we will be continuing our online worship on YouTube and also on the telephone for those without the internet.

Please be assured, your wellbeing is of paramount importance to us, and the Ministry Team will continue to monitor and implement the national guidelines, doing all we can to make sure that we provide a safe environment for worship.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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