

A Pastoral Letter relating to worshipping in our parish churches at this time

Dear Friends,

You will no doubt be aware that following the Prime Minister's announcement last Monday about tightening restrictions, the church leaders of the land have given much thought to the right way to respond. This goes for local churches too. Here in Wareham we have decided to continue offering worship within our churches as well as online and telephone services. Keeping my ear to the ground, I know that among parishioners there is a wide range of opinions as to what we should or shouldn't be doing. As Team Rector, I would like to state briefly why I think it is important to keep our churches open for worship at the present time.

1. The obvious reason is because we have been given permission to do so, unlike the first lockdown. I am sure that the Government (and their advisers) and spiritual leaders of our nation have given much thought to this matter and come to the conclusion that the benefits outweigh the possible dangers. The spiritual wellbeing of our nation is important.
2. Online worship is very important too for those who cannot or choose not to attend church, but it does have its limitations, particularly when it comes to ministering the sacraments. Holy Communion and Baptism can be shown online but the benefits cannot be received.
3. Having been a Hospice Chaplain in my earlier ministry, I appreciate the holistic nature of today's medicine and it is important to offer the best possible care physically, spiritually and emotionally.
4. Speaking to the members of the general public, including health workers, I have found that the majority are pleased to know that the church is still open and serving the community. As our Bishop highlighted in a letter to clergy and churchwardens our church buildings stand '*as signs of hope and places for prayer within the local community.*'
5. As a parish priest, I think it is important to provide ministry for the people, for whom I have the cure of souls, and this should be as all-embracing as possible. Therefore, until I am forbidden to worship in the churches for which I have the cure, or advised not to by my superiors, I will always do so.
6. I think it is important to treat you, my parishioners, as adults capable of making up your own minds as to how and where you worship, and until that choice is removed this will remain the case. Having said this, if in doubt I urge you to err on the side of caution.
7. My final point may seem a little tangential, but given that there are so many brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are deprived of the opportunity to worship in churches, it is a privilege (human right, even) that should not be given up lightly. At the moment we have the opportunity to worship in our churches, we should thank God for this – whether we choose to take advantage of it or not.

Of course, there is so much more that could be said, and I do not expect you to agree with all that I have written, but I do think that it is important for you to understand the reasons as to why we have taken the course of action that we have here in Wareham Parish. I can assure you that having seen first-hand the affects of COVID-19, I (and the ministry team) have not taken our decisions lightly, and I cannot stress enough how important your safety and well-being is to us. Please do prayerfully consider what is right for you at this time, recognising that it will be different for each and every one of us. This matter will be reviewed regularly, and we will keep you posted if there are any further developments. Finally, if you are attending worship in church please do follow the new guidelines attached to this letter.

I pray God's love and protection for you all.

Simon Everett – Team Rector

Guidelines to Worshipping Safely in Church

During this new lockdown public worship is permitted to continue, but we are putting stronger safety measures in place as follows:

If you are attending worship in any of our Church buildings, we would appreciate it if you would take time to read the following guidelines and make sure that you follow them to ensure your safety and that of the other worshippers.

To all worshippers:

1. Please make sure you are checked in at the Track and trace desk, which will be in the church porch.
2. There will be the offer of new face mask for each person entering the church.
3. If wearing a visor this must be accompanied by a face masks unless you have a medical exemption.
4. Please make sure face masks are worn properly, covering nose and mouth.
5. Please sanitise your hands when entering the church building.
6. Please stagger your entry into the church building in order to maintain social distancing.
7. We ask you to kindly refrain from holding conversations within the confines of the church after the service, in accordance with Government guidelines. Remember there is Zoom virtual coffee at 11.15am each Sunday, the link is available from the Parish Office.

To ensure your safety in the church building, we will:

8. Increase the spacing between the pews using one in three, as opposed to every other pew at present.
9. Separate the entry and exit by using the different doors in the inner porch.
10. Shorten the service (whilst keeping its integrity) in order to lessen the time congregated together.
11. Make sure the Holy Communion is administered safely with social distancing maintained at all times.
12. Have the Church Wardens manage the exit of parishioners at the end of the service so as to avoid crowding at the exit. The Clergy will be in the outer porch or outside (weather permitting!).
13. We may sometimes need to cordon off the main aisle to avoid bunching. Should this happen there will be wardens to direct you to or from your pew.
14. We will open the church doors at either end of the church after each service and these will be kept open for an hour to let fresh air circulate around the inside of the church building.

We believe with these guidelines in place we have done all that we can to make the worship in our churches as safe we can, and we humbly ask your cooperation on all matters relating to health and safety. Please be assured a warm welcome awaits all who wish to come and worship with us. Alternatively worship is available online, go to

<https://tinyurl.com/warehamchurches>

Or listen by dialling; 01202 078008 (charged at local rate).