

Results of the Wareham Parish Survey 2020

Thank you to everyone who completed the 2020 parish survey.

2020 has seen unprecedented upheaval in our lives that none of us expected. The pandemic and the lockdown led to the closure of church buildings and to worship services moving online. This time of isolation has brought real challenges to our daily lives, as well as unexpected blessings. We trust that, through this difficult time, God is at work and calls us to continue to walk with him. As a parish, we want to discern how he is calling us forward in the 'new normal' and with this in mind we are keen to learn from all of you: your experiences of church life during the last few months, and your feelings about church and the future as we emerge from lockdown.

Your responses to the survey are incredibly helpful as we pray and plan for the future. In what follows, we want to share with you a summary of the results, as well as our thoughts and responses to some of the questions you raised.

Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4

These first three questions asked which of the online services respondents had participated in and showed that the majority (75%) had regularly watched the YouTube services and more than the two respondents to the survey were listening to the phone in service. For Zoom activities, including Breakfast@9, virtual coffee, homegroups, prayer meetings and the quiz, 45% had not joined in at all, whereas 39% had joined regularly. Question 4 asked why people had not engaged with online services. The most common response was that people did not have the necessary equipment or skills to join in, although others reported lack of time, or a sense of alienation from the church. It is clear that there is a significant group of people who are able to watch YouTube but are either unable or unwilling to join in with Zoom activities.

Question 5. *What else could we be doing to help support you at home, both spiritually and practically, during this time?*

Forty-four people responded to this question and nearly all of them were positive and appreciative of what was being provided by the ministry team at this time. However, on the pastoral front it was clear that despite our best efforts there were some parishioners who were slipping through the net, and not being contacted. This is regrettable and if you are one of those people, or you know of someone who is feeling left out, please do contact the parish office and let us know, and we will endeavour to put this right.

Some suggested that there could possibly be more mid-week input, either services, Bible study or short services (Daily Prayer). We will look into this and we hope to broaden our online ministry as we move into the autumn and winter months.

One person asked why we could not have a virtual Holy Communion by Zoom or some such and wondered why we had not addressed this sooner. Early on in the lockdown we decided that as the Holy Communion is about breaking bread and pouring wine and sharing with others we would wait until we could **actually** do this, after all this is what our Lord did, and commanded us to do. We felt that if we could not share with our flock, then we should join in abstaining with them, and then truly celebrate when we can physically gather together.

With regards to virtual Holy Communion it is like comparing a restaurant meal cooked by a top chef with a meal presented on TV. You might be able to see what the meal looks like, you might even be able to conjure up how it might taste but you will not have the joy or nourishment of actually eating it. Angela Tilby helpfully writes: 'the bread represents the truth that we are one bread, one Body. But that is not all. Before it is shared, the bread is broken, recalling Christ's sacrifice. This sacrificial dimension is weakened if the bread that we consume comes from the privacy of our separate kitchens. It then becomes an essentially private act; the bread is not truly broken because it was never truly united, and so the sacrifice of the cross is not set forth in our midst.'

Another person questioned how hygienic it is to share the wine from the chalice; could we not have individual little cups like many non-conformist churches? At present this is not allowed in the Church of England, again it comes back to the Holy Communion being a shared meal at which we all partake of the one bread and one wine. Of course, at present we only take communion in one kind (bread) so this is not an issue but if the chalice is pure silver then this does have disinfecting, antimicrobial qualities which should mean any chance of catching an infection are very slim (but no one is taking any chances at the moment!).

Question 6. *Has your understanding of how we can be Church changed during the lockdown period? If so, in what way?*

Fifty out of seventy-five responded to this question. There was an overall deeper appreciation of Church being the body of Christ and the gathered community of Christian people even when there is no church building to worship or gather in. However, most agreed that they missed the **actual** personal fellowship that they would find in the church building. This said, many recognise that online services and meetings have served the Church well and will continue to do so, even when our church buildings are open (especially to the elderly, housebound and sick). Others commented on how our online services/meetings/quizzes etc. have brought parishioners from the different churches closer together (something I have been trying to do since I arrived -

Rector), coupled with this, a number of those who responded said how they had appreciated the variety of songs and hymns and the lighter feel of the liturgy (service structure), and shorter sermons!! There were also a few who wanted everything to return to how it was pre-lockdown.

Questions 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Questions 7 and 8 asked about the likelihood of people coming into our buildings when we were able to reopen. Only 10% of people said they would be likely to come into St Martin-on-the-walls for private prayer, and in fact very few have done so. However, 61% said that they would be very or quite likely to attend services at Lady St Mary and again this has been borne out in practice. Your responses were very helpful for us in planning these reopenings.

Question 9 asked how people felt about returning to worship in a church building. Just over a third were 'very keen to return as soon as possible' and the same number again were 'concerned about the risk but would like to do so'. A fifth did 'not yet feel ready to do so' and 7% felt it would not be safe to return 'until the risk posed by coronavirus is significantly reduced'. Question 10 revealed that nearly 90% would be able to travel safely to and from church.

Question 11. *What concerns do you have about returning to worship in church buildings?*

Most people answered this question, with a total of 61 responses. Broadly speaking, the comments can be grouped together as follows:

47% of comments expressed concerns around the safety of gathering for worship in church buildings (and of being indoors with more people in other settings as well). These concerns were mainly about the risks of the virus spreading when a group of people are gathered indoors. Some concerns related to the degree to which church buildings can be made 'safe' while others related to the likelihood of some people not adhering to guidelines (e.g. on the use of face coverings and social distancing). Several responses made the point that a significant proportion of parishioners are in the more vulnerable categories.

18% of comments expressed concerns which were not about safety but about the impact of the current restrictions on worship services. A number of these responses mentioned the lack of singing as a significant issue. Other issues mentioned included those related to receiving Holy Communion, sharing the Peace, and the way that social distancing would make people feel less connected and inhibit fellowship.

32% of comments said they did not have concerns about returning to worship in church buildings, either because they believed that all necessary precautions were being taken, or because they felt that the threat posed by coronavirus was low (particularly in our area), or both.

Finally, 3% of comments expressed concern that, as we return to church buildings, things will eventually revert back to the 'old normal' we knew before. The implication perhaps being that this would be a retrograde step when we have the opportunity to move forward and build on the new connections and sense of unity that have developed during lockdown.

Question 12 *What are your hopes about how Church could be in the future, in the 'new normal' following the crisis?*

Encouragingly, this was the open-ended question that provoked the greatest response and, therefore, unsurprisingly had the widest range of comments, many of which overlapped with responses made to earlier questions. The responses ranged from going back to how things were pre-lockdown to more significant changes in worship and wider Church activities. The obvious, immediate hopes were for a restoration of hymn/song singing in our church services as well as receiving Holy Communion in both kinds. Some expressed a hope that those of different traditions might be able to draw closer together and respect their differences, possibly through holding more combined services. It was also hoped that we might be able to have services that would appeal to 'non-Church' parishioners. Someone suggested having a drive-thru service – in Wareham?!!

Throughout the survey there was frequent mention of having slightly less formal services, particularly in Lady St Mary church. There was also a hope for more prayer, more outreach, more Biblical teaching and greater inclusivity. One response in particular captured the sentiments of many of the responses throughout the survey, and goes to the heart of what the Rector was asked to do by the Bishops before taking up his post. It reads: 'I hope that in a large parish like Wareham there could be more of a feeling of Church family within the whole parish, respecting and accepting of each other's different ways of worshiping and joining together as a whole Church family for worship of varying types. We have seen a start for this with the different types of worship offered in our online services, which I hope most people, from whatever tradition, have enjoyed. It would be lovely to be one with each other as a Church family.' Amen.

Every blessing,
The Ministry Team