



Church of the Good Shepherd

Moving Forwards from 19th July

In the light of the government lifting lockdown restrictions this week, we want to update you on some important next steps that we're about to take as a church community. We want to assure you that our first priority will always be to protect the safety of every soul in our parish. In the same way that we pray each day for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, we will do our utmost to safeguard the same.

No two churches will be the same for a while to come yet, so please be mindful that careful assessments have taken place to ensure the best possible safety of everyone so that no one feels excluded from attending a service.

Any place where multiple people can gather is still going to be an area of risk. The virus isn't going away, and even those who have accessed both doses of the vaccine may still be at risk from contracting or spreading any variant of Covid-19. Those still waiting for a second dose, or who – for whatever reason – have not been vaccinated (and we are here to love not judge) are at greater risk. God calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to protect the widow and the orphan, and to love one another as God loves us. No one would willingly put a loved-one at any kind of risk or in any danger.

While many of us have loved resuming gathering in-person, Sunday 25 July will be the first time since March 2020 when we can gather together without legal restrictions on communal worship and so, over the coming weeks, we want to welcome you back to in-person services. One of the things this means is that we can sing in worship again. As we've experienced over the last few months, there's something so powerful about being in the presence of God with others in a worship environment. At the same time, we're very mindful of the uncertainty some may feel about returning because of the current situation. Please be assured that we will do all we can to continue making our gatherings as safe as they can be. Here are some key things for you to know as we move forwards:

- **Hand sanitisers** – will remain and we ask that you continue to use them as you enter and leave the building, and of course at other times you feel necessary.
- **NHS Test and Trace** – If you choose to check-in or provide your contact details, your information would be shared with NHS Test and Trace in the event of two or more COVID-19 cases being linked to the day you attended. In this case, you would receive advice to book a COVID-19 test as part of the Test and Trace 'venue alert' process. You would not be required to self-isolate unless you tested positive for COVID-19.
- **CoGS Kids & Youth** – We're able to increase Sunday and midweek group capacities, with ongoing monitoring. Windows will be open for ventilation and, while there won't be any social distancing for children and young people, we will continue to avoid unnecessary physical contact.
- **Spacious seating** – Although social distancing is being lifted, we will still be keeping extra space between rows in the hall. We will also set a space aside for those who wish to remain 2 metres apart.
- **Face coverings** – As per government guidance on face coverings in enclosed spaces, we encourage you to wear a face covering while you are entering, moving around, and leaving the building, unless exempt, and a few masks will continue to be available upon arrival. You will not need to wear a face covering while seated in the hall. However, we understand that many will feel more comfortable continuing to wear face coverings

at all times indoors, so let's continue to honour and respect one another as we navigate the easing of these requirements.

- **Singing** – Although singing is now allowed we encourage you to wear a face covering whilst singing to reduce airborne droplets. As usual, you may sing outdoors without a face covering.
- **Close / physical contact** – We encourage you to be mindful about engaging in close and/or physical contact with people at church services – let's not assume that others will feel comfortable with this and let's continue to help one another feel safe whilst also enjoying the easing of restrictions to the extent that you and those you interact with are comfortable to.
- **Refreshments** – We will not be serving refreshments in the hall after the service but they will be available in the lobby from the counter. We do advise the wearing of face coverings whilst queuing and please do continue to allow people space. We encourage you to move outside with your drinks to socialise. To help this, we are investigating the purchase of some sun-sails for the patio area so that you can stay around after Sunday services to reconnect with church family and enjoy time socialising, come rain or shine, throughout the summer.
- **Communion** – Although the common cup is now permitted the PCC has made the decision to continue receiving in one kind only for the time being. Janette, as vicar, receives the wine *vicariously* on everyone's behalf. As a member of the Church of England we have to abide by its ordinances which do not permit using individual glasses. We will, however, return to using gluten free bread rather than wafers.
- **When not to attend** – As per government guidelines, if you or anyone in your household has been diagnosed with or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, high temperature, persistent coughing, breathing difficulties/shortness of breath, loss of taste/smell), you must not attend an in-person service. If you have been identified as a close contact with someone who is experiencing symptoms or has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or you are required to self-isolate due to returning from international travel, please also do not attend an in-person service.
- **Serving** – Over the coming weeks, we'll be able to bring back a number of serving areas for the first time since last year. We know that many have also been waiting for this point to return to serving roles and we are so looking forward to welcoming you back again! If you would like to resume your Serving role, or you would like to discuss your return to serving further, please email Posy at office@cogs.org.uk. Also, if you aren't yet part of a team but would like to explore serving opportunities and get involved, do speak to Posy.
- **On-line services** – We are continuing our commitment to online ministry for those who are still checking out church, living outside of our area or unable to get to church. We want to continue reaching and serving as best we can, as well as helping those who are part of our online family to build community and fulfil the mission of Jesus where they are.
- **A possible Midweek service** – we are also investigating the possibility of providing a simple half-hour service midweek with no singing for those who feel unable to come to a larger gathering.
- **Monitoring** – We will continue to monitor the situation throughout the summer and make adjustments if necessary.

Throughout the pandemic the majority of people have been grateful for the precautions in place, as frustrating as we know many of you have felt. Now, as together we learn to live with the virus, and we begin to look forward to the summer, we ask that you continue to be sensitive to the needs of those around you.

We must be personally responsible and consider the obvious and hidden risks to both ourselves and others.

Philippians 2:3 reminds us, *'But in humility consider others as more important than yourselves'*.