



Pastoral Letter July 29th 2021

Recent guidance from the church of England has been written in response to the decision by the Government to move to step 4 of the 'Roadmap out of Lockdown'. The approach taken by the Government in this step is to remove most coronavirus legislation but to promote guidance that emphasises the personal and corporate responsibility of individuals and organisations to protect others and themselves.

The Bishop of London reminds us **'Within the Church we believe that everyone is known and loved individually by God and that as many members within one body we are called to be responsible to and for one another, respecting the more vulnerable whose suffering is our suffering (1 Cor 12:12-27). The move to step 4 means we are being asked to take even more personal responsibility around coronavirus than when we were compelled to adhere to Government restrictions.'**

For some these restrictions have been over zealous and seem unnecessary or overly restrictive. For others, each easing of restrictions seems to bring additional risk to themselves or those they love who have remained vulnerable to the virus.

As a body we now need to move forward without these legal restrictions and, as two churches, decide how best to manage the risk to ourselves and others. I and the PCC recognise such decisions are difficult, especially when it comes to a decision on a specific point. As the Covid restrictions lift, there remain legal responsibilities for the me as vicar, the PCC and of course the duty of our church wardens Randell and John to maintain oversight for the church and churchyard, especially when it comes to issues such as church capacity and seating.

In our collective discernment we have endeavoured to highlight sensible measures that should apply to most church situations following the latest guidance from central church. In addition, we have provided a risk assessment which is available for anyone to look at on our website and tried to set out why these measures will vary from church to church, even service to service.

In every situation there is likely to be a range of feeling about risk, both to ourselves and to others, that will need to be accommodated by our churches in a way appropriate to each of them. Online and hybrid worship services will continue in our Twinspires@10 services, whilst all remaining services will be in person only.

At present, incidence of the virus is relatively high in our area and the probability is that during the summer numbers will reach or surpass those experienced at the peak of the second wave of the pandemic at the start of the year. We will therefore review our guidance as a PCC on a monthly basis as we take stock of local data.

From the church of England's website '***Vaccination cannot be the sole means of containing the spread of the virus: hand and respiratory hygiene, social distancing, face-coverings and good ventilation are also important factors in lessening the spread of the disease. While these are not mandatory after 19th July, they are still important public health mitigations.***'

We have therefore recognised this in planning our approach to church services.

Specifically, our guidance as a PCC is as follows:

1. **Lateral flow tests:** If you are able to do a lateral flow test before attending church then the PCC would encourage that - remember many people are asymptomatic and may not realise they have contracted Covid, a test will reveal this. In addition, if you are feeling unwell then please do not attend church.
2. **Face Coverings:** It will no longer be a legal requirement to wear a face covering, though the government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed settings to protect themselves and others. We are therefore recommending that face coverings continue to be worn in all of our church services.
3. **Hand Sanitising:** The PCC recommend that hand sanitising is undertaken upon arriving and leaving our church buildings. Sanitising will also continue to be a feature of our Communion services, which will remain in one form only. (ie no wine)
4. **Social distancing:** Although social distancing measures are no longer required by law, the church nationally recognises that decisions to retain some or all of these measures may be necessary to help people to feel more secure in returning to worship and other uses of the building. The standing committee on behalf of the PCC have therefore agreed that there will be a different approach to each of our services.
 - a. Twinspires@10 services will allocate 50% of available space from the centre to the front of church for those who wish to worship without social distancing. The remainder of the church from the centre to the back will be reserved for those who wish to continue social distancing as we have been over the recent period.
 - b. St Boniface services, Twinspires@11, will continue unchanged with social distancing throughout the building.
 - c. Twinspires@6:30 for those who may still have reservations about the consequences of fully open church without restriction, will be unchanged with social distancing, wearing of masks and no singing.
5. **Singing in church:** From 19 July singing and musical performances of all kinds are allowed in churches, including congregational singing. Choirs and worship groups can perform without legal limitations and without wearing masks. However, some activities can also increase the risk of catching or passing on coronavirus. This happens where people are doing activities which generate more particles as they breathe heavily, such as singing or raising their voices. The risk is greatest where these activities take place when people are in close contact with others indoors. The standing committee have therefore decided that at both St Johns Twinspires@10 and St Boniface Twinspires@11, singing can resume whilst sitting and wearing face masks. Hymns and Songs that are necessarily quieter and require less force to sing may well be chosen whilst inside the church buildings. Where practicable services may finish outside the church building with louder more energetic hymns and songs (weather permitting). For Twinspires@6:30 services, there will be no singing for the foreseeable future.
6. **Refreshments:** Please feel free to bring along your own coffees, teas and other refreshments to drink outside after church as these in the short term will not be served at church.

7. **Fellowship after services:** We are all I'm sure looking forward to meeting one another again in person. However, in the short term, the standing committee recommend that all fellowship after our services, occurs outside our church buildings.
8. **Funerals, weddings and baptisms** - will be managed on an individual basis, but social distancing, face coverings and sanitising will be encouraged.

Finally, a comment from the Bishop of London: ***'Taking personal responsibility means responsibility for our neighbour, not just for ourselves, and taking precautions to protect those more vulnerable than we consider ourselves to be. Local church leaders know their communities and their own circumstances, and we will support them making local decisions to keep themselves and their community safe. We would ask everyone to support those making local decisions and respect risk assessments, which are in place to protect everyone as we enter the next phase.'***

Let's pray that we have good grace with one another and bear with one another during this difficult time of transition and that God will be with us through His Holy Spirit in the days and weeks ahead.

Grace and peace,

Graeme