

August 22nd 2020.

In my recent letter, I asked a number of questions regarding going back to church. In the main the results were mixed. Folk from St Boniface were prepared to return to church – though by no means everyone. Whereas many from St John's were happier to wait until restrictions had lifted.

Whilst new guidance emerges every week the most significant seems to be the wearing of facemasks inside churches, which is now compulsory. In addition, congregational singing has been withdrawn for both indoor and open-air services. It's a bit like being at a football match and not chanting. Our sung worship creates the atmosphere in which we meet with God. It doesn't mean that we can't worship without singing. But our main service would be a very different experience without singing. Until we can sing - something that online worship does permit - then the heart of what we do will be missing.

As a consequence, we are going to have to be careful how we migrate back to church. In August we began to worship at St Boniface twice a month in the morning. This will be expanded to include St John's also twice a month in the evenings at the start of September. This means there will be an act of worship somewhere in our parish every week for those who would like to attend, though there will be social distancing, no singing and face masks must be worn.

In the last six months we have developed an online service that helps us to meet together and stay connected to God as a church. The numbers attending, we estimate, have been between 100 and 150 – more than we would normally have attending on Sundays. This has been supported by a whole team of gifted and talented people. God has blessed us in being able to do this and we are likely to continue for at least another few months. In fact, it's likely that even when we return to church our online offering will continue.

We have also tried hard to develop other online content. We have initiated on line Alpha which has been extremely encouraging. So much so that we hope to repeat online alpha again in October. If that is something you would like to support or get involved with, then please let me know. We have also developed some wonderful youth work activities which Andy has overseen. Our online bible study will recommence in September. If you have not joined us before then please do, it's suitable for those with families as you can jump in and out as family needs dictate. And of course, every day of the week we have been engaging in morning prayer – a time to reflect on scripture and pray in fellowship together, if you haven't managed to join us, then please do because your prayers can change the world.

We are also going to run a family concert on Zoom on Saturday the 26th September – I hope you are practicing hard, whatever it is you can do. Our family quiz will begin again in September and will be available on the first Saturday of every month.

If you have any ideas about how we can support other people, improve what we do on-line, or how we can further adapt what we are doing then please get in touch. The church office phone and email are being monitored during normal working hours, please do call or email if you need support.

It's time for us to be the church without walls: a place that connects communities together, keeps hope alive, and demonstrates that peace that only Jesus Christ can bring. Now is the time to be a great neighbour, to stay in touch with others, to pray for one another and to listen to each other's stories. Now is the time to share our faith and keep our heads.

This time away from the church building has reminded us of the vast difference between our relationship with God as Christians against those of ancient Israel who worshipped in the great Temple in Jerusalem. For them it was all about a day spent in the courts of the Lord. This Covid crisis has shown us that we have God with us in the form of His Holy Spirit wherever we are. We have this gift of grace because Jesus died so that we might know God's presence in every moment of our lives. As we slowly begin to return to the church building may all that we do seek to bring glory to Him.

Rev Greame Dixon