

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE FOR ST MARYS CHURCH BULWELL

8th July 2021

Dear Friends

The Church believes that everyone is known and loved individually by God and that, as members of the Body of Christ, 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 Government's move to Step 4 on Monday 19th July means that we are being asked to take even more personal responsibility regarding coronavirus than when we were compelled to adhere to the Government's restrictions. The restrictions have been, by necessity, blunt instruments and, for some people, have seemed unnecessary or overly restrictive. For other people, the easing of restrictions seemed to bring additional risk to themselves, or those they love, who have remained vulnerable to the virus.

As a church, over the past year or so we have been incredibly careful to follow the Government and Church of England advice, and also to look out for one another, pray for one another, and to provide opportunities for worship and prayer (both in person and online) as far as the restrictions have allowed us. Thank you everybody, including St Mary's Prayer Partners, for playing your part in this - it is appreciated.

St Mary's now needs to move forward without these legal restrictions and decide how best to manage any risk to ourselves and others. Following the latest Government and Church of England advice, and after consultation with our Church Wardens, Associate Minister and Licensed Lay Ministers, I issue the following guidance re: easing our transition back towards pre-pandemic ways of worshipping whilst showing due care and consideration for others:

- From Monday 19th July it will no longer be a legal requirement to wear a face covering. However, the Government expects and recommends that people in enclosed settings protect themselves and others. We request, please, that people aged over 12 who enter into the church building continue wear a face covering, unless they are exempt, or are leading an aspect of worship from the front.
- From Monday 19th July it will no longer be legally required to display or ask people to register for NHS Test and Trace. However, the Government is asking that venues continue to ask people to register as it continues to form one of the main ways of the NHS to identify people who may have been exposed to coronavirus. Please continue to use the NHS Track & Trace QR Code whenever you enter the church building or sign in on the forms provided if you cannot use that system. Please remember to bring a pen with you.
- The doors to the South Porch will continue to be left open during services to increase ventilation in the building.
- Please continue to use the hand sanitiser as you enter and leave the church building.
- Please sit only on pews marked with a green tick to ensure that some social distancing is still in place. The upper limit on the size of any congregation, at any service, will be 65 people.
- The removal of soft furnishings remains in place so, if you need a cushion, please bring one with you and take it back home with you.

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- The opportunity to light votive candles remains in place. Please remember to bring your own lighter or matches.
- The toilets are open and are being cleaned regularly. Hand soap and hand sanitiser is available, as are electric hand dryers.
- We can now all sing indoors. We can revert to using the service books and hymn books, which will be quarantined for a minimum of 48 hours between each use. Due to popular demand (!) we will continue to sing the closing hymn outside during the summer months.
- The Peace will continue to be shared socially distanced, without close contact or touching. Processions will continue to be kept to a minimum, and collections will remain via the plates at the front and back of church (or via our church websites).
- The Common Cup may now be shared but, given the continued potential risk to health, Holy Communion will continue to be administered as it is at present; with the option to receive the elements either in one kind, or both kinds via the priest intincting. The use of hand sanitiser is to continue.
- Our 10am Service on Sunday will continue to follow a 'mixed-mode' approach, being both in church and online. Refreshments will continue to be available to enjoy outside after the 10am Service.
- The lifting of legislation means that numbers at baptisms, weddings and funerals are not mandated by law but potentially by the pre-pandemic capacity of the church building. However, there is an expectation by the Government that people act responsibly in indoor spaces, particularly where large numbers of people are involved. Where the incumbent feels a life event service will have additional risk because of the numbers of people involved he can ask the party to comply with additional measures (such as face coverings and a limited number of guests) for the safety of all those attending. Celebrants may refuse to take any services they are not legally obliged to take if they are not comfortable in taking them.

This will remain in place until September when our circumstances and situation will be reviewed, or when the Government or Church of England guidance and advice changes; whichever comes first. Please do not hesitate to contact myself, Rev Bob, our Churchwardens or LLMs if you have any questions or queries.

The relaxation of restrictions on Monday 19th July is only possible because of the country's successful vaccination programme. We are indebted to the people who have developed and administered the vaccines and I encourage anyone who has not yet done so to take advantage of the protection vaccination offers. Many of us, I know, will welcome the possibilities now before us, not least the increased numbers at life events and a long-awaited return of congregational singing. However, this is a difficult point in the course of the pandemic. Despite vaccination rates, cases are up, hospital admissions are up and long covid remains an ongoing concern. Therefore, our approach remains optimistic, but at the same time cautious and careful.

God bless you and keep you safe and well.

Fr Andrew