

## Letter from the Vicar

Friday 26 June 2020

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This week, as I heard the Prime Minister's announcement that places of worship will be permitted to open again for Public Worship from 4 July, I must confess I burst into singing "*...and all the people rejoiced!...*" from Handel's *Messiah*. Our enforced exile from meeting together and worshipping at home is soon to be over and we can return to worshipping as 'normal'. Or is it? Since the Government's announcement on Tuesday no guidance has been published either by the Government or the National Church. Clergy up and down the land – myself included – are trying to work out what is or is not possible. It feels like I'm licking my finger and holding it up in the air in the vain hope of seeing if it's windy and what direction it is coming from!

But what do we know? Firstly we know that just because we can re-open for Public Worship does not mean that we have to. Although the desire and willingness is there to re-open we need to take account of the resources we have at our disposal and thus work within our means to deliver Public Worship that is safe and offered worthily to the praise of almighty God. Secondly, restrictions will be in place on the numbers permitted to attend. We know that 30 people are permitted to attend a Wedding ceremony but it is less clear how many are permitted to join for Sunday worship. Thirdly, not everyone will be able to return in July. I know that many are sheltering and shielding and have been instructed to continue to do so until the beginning of August. Others might not feel comfortable going into an enclosed, albeit cavernous, space so what provision will we continue to offer for those still worshipping at home? Fourthly, we have been told that singing will not be possible. Music, especially at St John's with our strong choral tradition, plays a pivotal role in our collective worship so what will this restriction mean for our getting together and how will it feel like? Fifthly, we know that at present there are strict requirements for cleansing the church each day whilst it is open for Private Prayer. We assume this will need to continue, but how?

As you can tell there is still a lot to be worked out and put in place. Public Worship will not instantly be reverting to 'normal' and some of the Services that were offered before lockdown will need to remain suspended for the time being. The Ministry Team, however, together with the Churchwardens and members of the Standing Committee, are working hard to getting St John's Church, our Parish Church, open for Sunday 5 July. But since the guidance is not yet available this might not be possible. I will notify you again next Friday as to whether we have been able to do all that is required by then to enable us to open safely. If we are not able to be ready in time, as I hope, we will continue to worship at a distance and resources will be made available on our website.

I know also there will be great sadness and pain that I am only planning on re-opening St John's and not our daughter Churches of St Stephen's and St Francis' immediately. I know these sacred places are Spiritual Homes to many of our number, and I share your pain in not being able to return just yet. I hope that we can re-open for Public Worship very soon, but for the time being I need to focus the Parish's resources on being able to offer safe and worthy worship whilst protecting our visiting clergy who are almost all in the vulnerable category.

You will not be surprised to learn that the issue of re-opening for Public Worship has taken-up a lot of my time and energy this week. However, parochial life continues and there have been many other joys to share and challenges/opportunities/sadnesses to embrace. On Wednesday, a sadness, as the funeral of a well-known and much respected Teacher from Heath Lane Nursery School took place. She leaves behind 4 children. On Thursday, a joy, as Peter and Jean Garner celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary. They married in St John's at 10.30am in 1960 so it was fitting they were able to be back in church to give thanks for their marriage. And today, an opportunity will arise, as we are

invited to join MASJ for a virtual Lunchtime Concert. This can be accessed via their website or by following this link: [https://youtu.be/My9bVuq\\_NLE](https://youtu.be/My9bVuq_NLE)

I hope that you have not suffered during the heat of the last few days but rather have been able to enjoy the clear skies and radiant sunshine. Below are pictures you might find interesting relating to our common life. Continued prayers and blessing on you all as we move into a new phase where haircuts and hugs with grandchildren will be possible.

In Christ,

*Mike*

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