

Letter from the Vicar

Friday 21 August

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last night I hosted the rescheduled socially distanced Drinks Evening in St John's churchyard. Turnout was 300% up on the previous week – but that's not really surprising since last week we had thunderstorms and great downpours whereas last night the weather was set fair. I personally found both evenings very enjoyable and a chance to speak with people in person whom I haven't been able to in such a long time. I think most people who ventured out appreciated the opportunity to see friends, albeit remaining at a safe distance.

Much of my time this week has been spent forward-planning for the autumn. This might all prove to have been a colossal waste of time if Covid-19 pushes us into another lockdown, but I prefer to have a plan from which we may deviate (if necessary) than to have to make things up at the last minute. Much of my thinking has concerned Harvest and Christmas. Of course we do not know what our social landscape will look like in October, let alone December, but based on current provisions I am working on socially distanced services that do not involve congregational singing (although how joyful it would be if we can all sing!). I am exploring holding multiple, ticketed, Carol Services and Christingle Services in the lead-up to Christmas. I am thinking about how to hold a Christmas Tree Festival which is both inside St John's and outside in the churchyard, which is both financially beneficial and community facing. I am thinking about how to offer Carol Services to the schools with which we are associated. There are a lot of permutations as you might imagine.

With regards to our celebrations of Harvest, it would not seem prudent to host our usual Harvest Supper as it would be potentially difficult to socially distance a large number in the hall. Instead, we are planning a Quiz Evening which might be conducted over Zoom/might be in person in the church (socially distanced of course)/might be a combination of both. I'll keep you posted as to how this event develops. We would also normally have a large Service of Thanksgiving for the Harvest at which our Junior Choir would have sung and our associated uniformed organisations would have paraded. Such a large service also seems unlikely so I am considering how to alter things to enable as many folk as possible to attend. Our Harvest celebrations are due to be led Bishop Michael.

Last Saturday the Government announced that choirs may sing once more – both for performances and during Acts of Worship. The guidance limits this to 'a small choir...socially distanced...and not too loud'. Our Director of Music and I are working together as to when it would be appropriate for the choir to once again lead us in worship and when we should continue with our current pattern – congregational singing still being prohibited. We are working towards offering Choral Evensong on Sunday 13 September and how best to distance our singers. I'll keep you updated as plans progress.

Thought has also been given to our rearranged Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) and the election of Churchwardens, PCC members, and Synod representatives. This was supposed to happen on Sunday 26 April but since we were fully locked-down at that time our meeting has been moved to Sunday 11 October. Over the coming weeks we will need to confirm those eligible for our Electoral Roll, nominate candidates for positions within the Parish, and publish our Annual Report. This will relate to 2019 and not the early part of 2020 so don't be surprised that Covid does not feature very heavily. Our current proposal is for the meeting to be conducted in person, after a combined Service at 10.00am at St John's. We will record and stream the Service and Meeting for those unable to join in person (although this will be shown later in the day and not live) and consideration is being given to postal ballots for those unable to attend. Questions can also be submitted in advance.

As with so many things, our pre-Covid way of operating was well-oiled and simpler to organise. So many more things need to be considered under our current circumstances but we will do our best to continue to offer the best worship we can, the best fellowship we can, and the best governance that we can.

To help me build-up a reserve of energy for what promises to be an “interesting” Michaelmas Term I am taking the remainder of August off to be with my family and to rest. If you have any questions and queries please contact either Ruth or the Parish Office. I hope you are all remaining safe and well, and secure in the knowledge of our God who loves us, cares for us, and enfolds us in his arms.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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