

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

Dear Friends

This Sunday worship begins again in St Godwald's and a worship plan for September is beginning to take shape for the whole parish. Following a trial with Sally Brashaw's dance classes last week, a plan is progressing for the wider re-opening of St Godwald's Hall and conversations are underway to try and achieve the same at All Saints. In these final weeks of August our schools are busy planning to welcome pupils back to school and our wider community projects – like The Listening Service - are busy working out how to continue in a COVID-compliant way. Our Annual District Church Council meetings are planned and we are now shortly expecting guidance on how to hold our Annual Church Council Meeting too.

There is a sense – perhaps – that the familiar is returning. We are not out of the woods by a long way, but we are determined to find a way to live as well as possible with this virus circulating in the community.

Much of our common life as church congregations has gone. Some of it may have gone for ever or it will take time to re-emerge, taking different shapes and forms to the past. Many churchgoers need to continue to self-isolate or express great caution in how they interact with others outside of their household.

At the same time, the future is ours to shape and build and we need to lose no time in doing this. Now is the time we need to think and plan for tomorrow.

So here are some practical suggestions and more serious challenges to consider. Engage one another in the discussion and let me know your thoughts too.

1. Who amongst the churchgoing community haven't you heard from for a while? Are there people you used to see from time to time in church who have, more or less, become invisible? Please make a list and get in touch with them. Don't be embarrassed that you haven't talked for a while (they haven't talked with you either remember!). Such informal contact is vital if some of our churchgoing community are going to feel able to come back to church.

2. Worship in church is back; worship on zoom continues. But before we've lost summer completely, is now the time to have a church picnic (socially distanced of course!) behind St Godwald's or in the churchyard of All Saints? Is this something you could lead on and make happen?
3. September 1<sup>st</sup> is just around the corner and with it comes the dying days of summer and the slow onset of Autumn. What traditions and themes do you value over the last four months of each year? I have my list, but what would be on yours? Which of these must we re-invent so that we can continue to celebrate them in these COVID-times? How might you contribute to shaping them? Which ones might we not miss after all?
4. Our ministry amongst children and families (Open the Book, school assemblies, baptisms, welcoming school groups into church, our own all age worship) ceased with COVID19. Now is the time to think through which of these is so important that it must find a way to continue. What can you do to help breathe new life into these vital ministries that have taken such a back seat since March?
5. Social events are vital for our sense of communal well-being and also for our finances. Can you think of a way to hold a socially distanced, fun event that can help restore our spirits? Can you take a lead on this?
6. We need to build our community too and attract new faces to our churches. There are no easy answers to this. Our churches need to look open and busy and our communications need to reach out deep into our communities. There are still roads I haven't been down yet after over a year in Bromsgrove so I don't pretend this is easy! Perhaps we can make some small steps in the streets immediately close to our church buildings?

Much of this is really challenging and the obstacles are huge. But it is also our calling as Christians. This is what we are called to do because we want everyone to experience God's love. And it is a task in which we are all involved in ways appropriate to our situation. Please don't think all you can do is pray; for prayer may be the very calling we need most.

I pray that this week is a positive time for you: positive conversations, enriching relationships, exciting plans. Let's think ahead for a future we want others to share with us.

With every blessing:  
David Ford, Rector