

Monday 19th July 2021

Lifting of COVID Restrictions

Dear Friends

I am writing to explain to you how we will be responding to the government's decision to lift almost all COVID related restrictions.

Now that legal restrictions no longer apply, it is up to individual incumbents – me – as to what restrictions, if any, should apply in churches for which they are responsible. Having consulted with various people in our congregations and read the latest advice from the national church, I have decided on the following approach.

It is very important that our churches remain safe places for everyone to worship, regardless of age, vulnerability or the number of vaccinations they have received.

In order to encourage as many people as possible to return to church, we need to be very cautious in lifting restrictions. If we move too quickly, some who have already returned will, understandably, wish to stay at home.

The best way we can continue to protect one another is to continue to sanitise our hands on arriving and leaving church, and to continue to wear face coverings. On the understanding that this continues to be our practice, the use of hymn books and service booklets and congregational singing will return from this coming Sunday. But masks must be worn please whilst we sing. We will no longer be enforcing social distancing but feel free to keep a space empty between you and the next person out of mutual respect.

We will no longer collect names and contact details of worshippers, but we will leave the QR code in place for smartphone users to record their attendance if they wish.

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Most other changes that we have become accustomed to over the past year will remain for now. The peace will not be shared by physical contact; the plate will remain at the back of church in place of a collected offertory; communion remains in one kind only (but we will use the altar rail again, standing if preferred); processing will return where applicable. For now, after service refreshments will not return though I hope these can be back by the end of August.

Please be assured that I am very keen that all the changes we have made during the pandemic will be reversed at some point. Different churches, even within the town, may adapt to this new environment in different ways. It is quite possible that you might travel to another church in a different part of the country and discover, for example, that communion is available in two kinds.

My judgement is that the time is not right for dramatic reversals of practice. We must wait, see how the general public respond to the lifting of restrictions, and, most importantly, see how the virus responds.

The physical, mental and spiritual health of our congregations remains my primary concern. I hope you will support such a cautious approach.

As always, be assured of my love and prayers:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Ford', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

David Ford, Rector