

An update on the easing of Covid restrictions

14th September 2021

Following the letter to the congregations in mid July, the Churchwardens and Staff Team committed to meeting in mid-September to review the gradual easing of restrictions in light of the current context.

The picture across our nation, town and churches continues to be very mixed, with understandably varying responses from those who would like to go much quicker in easing and those much more hesitant. Overall the desire is towards a continuation of gradual easing of restrictions and increasing the flexibility to apply guidance for our many different contexts (with each Parish continuing to write and implement its own risk assessments and mitigations), whilst holding some broad Team-wide principles. These principles and some thoughts on our Christian call of responsibilities to others over asserting our personal rights were explored at length in our July letter to congregations so we won't repeat now but it is still available on the website or from the Team Office. We have been very encouraged at how congregations have risen to this call, taking so many steps which we would not personally like for the sake of others. In more detail the changes as they apply to all services and events in church, including weddings, funerals and baptisms are:

- **Masks** - Our expectation is that worshippers will normally continue to wear masks at the highest risk moments such as moving around church buildings or singing, but this will be up to each person to decide for themselves whether to wear all the time or just some of the time and will also increasingly vary depending on our contexts. For example, a service with a few people spread well around a large building maybe different from a packed service in a small building, or a building with lots of ventilation maybe different from a limited ventilation side chapel. Leaders in each Parish will give more steers specific to each context as part of services;
- **Communal Singing** - the return of communal singing will continue (and important to note guidance and mitigations for choirs or music groups wearing masks are different from the congregation as a whole – please check each parish's risk assessment for more details);
- **Social Distancing** – this will continue to vary place to place with each Parish deciding what is right in its building and context given other mitigations and size of service/event. We continue to extend the offer in each place for a safe space where masks must be worn and social distancing adhered to. Speak to your Churchwarden for more information if you would like this so it can be arranged as best on a case by case basis;
- **Food & drink** – more services are feeling more able to offer refreshments. This continues to vary based on context & each venue is subject to that parish's risk assessment to be able to sufficiently mitigate risk;
- **Eucharist in both kinds** – for the reasons explained in the July letter this remains both high risk and one of the most challenging areas to reduce risk and so for now we reluctantly have concluded that Eucharist in both kinds for all congregations will not normally be possible. Bread will continue to be distributed by the celebrant, wearing a mask, but now offering words (i.e. 'The Bread of Christ') but the Chalice is not yet normally possible (we continue to keep this under review). Other arrangements for the Eucharist remain unchanged.
- **Testing** - We continue to encourage worshippers to take the freely available twice weekly at home tests (given 30% of cases are without symptoms and people are often most contagious before symptoms appear).
- **Track and Trace** – we continue to provide QR codes or sign in sheets for each church building and request all worshippers continue to sign in as per government regulations. Booking is no longer required for any services;
- **Livestreaming** – we continue to livestream services as possible for those more comfortable to worship from home and are working to further develop this capability. Volunteers to help with live streaming remains our biggest limit on our ability to do this, so please say if you would be up for being trained.