



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Implementation of Covid-19 Guidance for Churches

Last Friday, the Church of England issued its guidance for churches for Step 4 of the Government's Covid-19 roadmap. It covers a range of areas but significantly leaves a much greater emphasis on local decision-making.

The Bishop of London, who has been chairing the Church of England Recovery Group has encouraged churches and individuals to take a cautious approach to the lifting of restrictions in her letter [here](#)

I have taken soundings and met with our wardens, Justin Greig and Chris Brindley. I've also sought to remove my own health situation from the decision-making process.

We need to be conscious that, as I write, the number of local cases on the BBC news website for Sevenoaks is 422 per 100,000. We are also aware of many people needing to self-isolate having come into contact with someone with Covid-19. As we seek to serve our parish, we need to take into account this local context.

Face Masks

Since the Government "expects and recommends" that people wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed settings to protect themselves and others, I think we should continue to practise this policy across all our Sunday services. It is an act of love designed to protect one another.

Singing with Face Masks

Though of course we would love to see the return of unhindered congregational singing, the distribution of Covid-19 via aerosol is recognised as a significant factor. We have therefore come to the conclusion, along with other organisations such as the Keswick Convention, that for the time being congregational singing can only occur if people are wearing an appropriate face mask. We will continue to encourage outdoor congregational singing before or after services without masks, which I know has been much appreciated. Many of us have longed to lift our voices together in worship and we hope now that being able to sing in church will be a great blessing.

Summary

Through these ways of implementing the guidance, we trust that we have added an important factor to our congregational Sunday worship by enabling singing. However, we have done so in such a way that it will enable everyone to feel safe and protected by expecting and recommending the wearing



of masks within the buildings. We will continue to observe social distancing through our current practices and seating arrangements. Further, we will continue to arrange for cleaning of all touch points within the buildings. Though we will no longer be required to record names for “Track and Trace”, we will continue to leave the QR code in place for people to scan in on arrival.

Romans 14,15

Perhaps it would be appropriate to add a brief reflection from the Scriptures. The church in Rome found itself divided into various groupings on a number of issues described in Romans 14. Though we face different issues, the principles established by Paul in this message are very applicable to our situation. He concludes his arguments in Romans 15:1 ff. by saying, “We are who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself...” As we apply all this to our context, we need to hold together through seeking to please our neighbours. We trust that the policy set out above fulfils this mandate.

Finally I would add that this an interim policy and we will certainly revisit this decision in order to assess what is happening by the end of August.

I do pray that the Lord would preserve and watch over us and that our gatherings, even with the continuing restrictions, would be marked by the presence of the Lord among his people, enabling us to worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Warmly in Christ,

Angus