

TRINITY

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28 Feb 2021

Reopening for onsite worship – Update

Dear church family

As you will undoubtedly know, the government has this week laid out plans for coming out of the Covid restrictions. With this in mind the leadership (PCC, Operations Team, and staff team) have begun working on a plan for restarting on site worship and ministries. At this stage I'd like to lay out our suggested plan for restarting on site worship - information will follow at a later date on ministries, once further official guidance has been received.

In January, in response to the Covid situation at the time, and the closure of schools specifically we agreed to suspend on site worship for the time being. Following the latest government guidance and plan to come out of restrictions, and alongside the local situation we have now reviewed this decision.

Having prayerfully considered the current situation and latest guidance, the PCC has agreed that it would be sensible to delay opening **for on site worship until Easter Sunday (4 April)**. We are all really encouraged to hear of the vaccine roll out and a big drop in cases locally which points hopefully towards a safer and freer future, but we feel strongly that to wait just a few more weeks would be the wisest solution. The reasons are as follows:

- **The 'stay at home' rule will remain in place until March 29th**. As schools reopen, mass and regular testing will be put in place in order to stem and outbreaks within school

communities and therefore families of those with school age children. Allowing a few weeks after they open, before we start on site worship will hopefully add a layer of safety as those in schools are tested and highlighted when positive.

- From 29th March the 'stay at home' rule will be lifted and restrictions slowly become less restrictive, however they still remain focussed on people not meeting in groups indoors. There is an argument to say we could wait until these restrictions are lifted further but taking into account the drop in infections locally, the increased vaccinations and that we voluntarily stopped on site meeting in January, it would seem perhaps heavy handed to wait until late April or May to meet on site.
- The staff team are under pressure with Steve's departure and planning for the appointment process alongside the realities of Covid life. A few weeks extra grace as we enter vacancy and form a new pattern of working together would both give enough time to safely plan to restart onsite worship and help the team not to be overwhelmed.
- **We have therefore agreed that we will reopen for on site worship on, the first Sunday after 29th March which is Sun 4 April, Easter Sunday.**

As a first Sunday back this is also hugely symbolic of new life and resurrection hope. This initial stage will take us back to an on site service at both South Malling and Southover at 10.30 am (in addition to an online service at the same time) with restrictions and bookings as we had in Tier 4. Further development of services will continue from this point and information on restarting ministries and activities will be forthcoming as restrictions allow.

- However **children's and youth provision** on site is not allowed **until after 12th April.** Dave and Emma will communicate information on this once details are finalised.

- Some questions have been raised around how we mark **Holy Week** and Good Friday. The staff team will be making plans for Holy Week in the next few weeks and information on this will be communicated separately.

I am sure we are all keen to reopen as soon as possible and waiting a few more weeks may feel uncomfortable to some, but I do hope you can understand the reasons this decision has been made and will continue to support the church leadership during this difficult time.

With every blessing,

Jules

Rev Jules Middleton

Associate Vicar