

## **Re-opening for 'Covid-safe' Public Worship**

Permission has been given for 'Covid-safe' public worship to resume from Saturday 4 July 2020.

The full government guidance issued on Monday 29 June 2020 makes clear that the public worship that will be permitted will be very unfamiliar.

'Covid-safe' arrangements, including social distancing, will mean that we cannot greet one another, cannot sit together, cannot sing, cannot take communion without intrusive additional hygiene measures, cannot have refreshments after the service, and cannot chat after the service. Social distancing will also limit the numbers that can attend. Advance booking and ticket-only entrance may be required at some stage.

In addition, many of our regular attenders may be advised, or may choose, to continue to avoid social gatherings such as church services, for the sake of their health, until the virus is fully eliminated, or a vaccine is available. This could leave a substantial proportion of our regular attenders choosing to stay at home.

The regulations require that a register of attenders is taken at each service, and if anyone who was at the service later tests positive for the virus, the entire congregation (including the vicar) will be contacted by NHS test-and-trace, and ordered to self-isolate for two weeks. Because of this, some may choose not to attend, as they will not wish to risk the possibility of being ordered to self-isolate for two weeks as a consequence of attending church.

Also, if the vicar is told to self-isolate, further services may be impractical.

I am therefore proposing that we should proceed with extreme caution.

At present, an average of sixty households are gathering each Sunday for our live online broadcast service. A dozen people are contributing to the service each week, and dozens across each month. A 'Covid-safe' service in church may be a poor replacement for this, especially if attendance is low.

My proposal, therefore, is that for 'Stage one' of the easing of the lockdown, we retain the current Sunday service arrangement unchanged, and trial 'Covid-safe' services in our four churches on weekdays.

After just one week, we will have an initial impression of how many people wish to participate in 'Covid-safe' public worship in our church buildings, in the current stage of the pandemic and under the current regulations. If the number is very high, we can move to 'stage two'; if the number is low, we can continue stage one.

Stage two would be the resumption of public worship in one or more of our churches each Sunday; the 10.45am service would be broadcast live online from inside one of the churches, and would continue to include the opportunity for those who are self-isolating to take part via pre-recorded inserts, which would be shown on a screen in church as well as being included in the live online broadcast.

Stage three will be when the pandemic is over, and all Covid-19-related self-isolation has ended. Sunday worship will have resumed without restriction, and a simple online live broadcast of the service from church can be continued indefinitely for the housebound, the physically distant, and any others who may appreciate the opportunity that it presents.

To initiate Stage one, I am proposing that there will be Covid-safe services in all four churches on Wednesday 8 July. These may have to be ticket-only services, based on the Covid-safe numbers for each building (which I will assess as soon as possible – details later). Welcome teams, communion assistants, and refreshments, are not currently permitted; wardens are welcome but not required. The service times will be: Hornby 10am; Gressingham 11.30am; Arkholme 2pm; Whittington 7.30pm.

## **Diocesan Guidance, Wednesday 24 June 2020**

“Churches may open for worship from Saturday 4 July 2020 as long as they are COVID safe.”

“There is no restriction on numbers attending other than the restrictions needed to maintain safe social distancing.” *This will reduce the capacity of our churches, and I will need to visit each church in turn to assess socially-distanced seating arrangements and consequent maximum capacity.*

“People must maintain social distance. This should be 2 metres where possible. If it can only be one metre (plus) then consideration should be given to asking people to wear face masks or other such measures to mitigate the increased risk of transmission.” *I will plan initially for 2-metre social distancing on the basis that ‘one metre (plus)’ means face-masks; we can review after the first week.*

“Where possible there should be different ways in and ways out of the church building.” *I do not consider this necessary, as the entrance will be one-way inwards before the service, and one-way outwards after the service.*

“There should be hand hygiene points at the entrance and the exit with clear signs to ask people to use it.” *This is already adequately in place. I will look at improving signage. We will also offer hand-sanitizer at some convenient location for use immediately before receiving communion.*

“Books and re-usable Orders of Service should not be handed out. Single use service sheets may be given out as long as they are then taken away by the person using it. They must NOT be given out by a sidesperson but collected by each individual as they enter.” *Note: no welcome teams. The rule about service books and orders of service seems over-the-top, as they will be sterile if they have not been used for 72 hours, but the risk is that they would be handled by one person and then by another person, so I suppose we should follow this rule. More important is that there can be no collection plate and no offertory procession.*

“There cannot be any congregational or choral singing. It is permissible to have a single cantor and organist. There may be instrumentalists but no wind or brass instruments. Please watch out for more advice on music as this may be updated over the next few weeks.”

“There is to be no food or drink, ‘except that which is central to worship.’”

“The Government will give guidance on Holy Communion which is likely to say: There should be no common cup and no exchanging of the Peace. The celebrant should wear a facemask ‘when speaking or singing over food’ – ie during the Eucharistic Prayer. Hands should be washed carefully at the offertory and again before the administration of communion. Communion should be received in the hands with arms outstretched.” *See my own proposals below for Holy Communion.*

“Cash poses a risk of infection. Ideally as many people as possible would switch to standing order, but if cash collections are taken they should be left somewhere secure for 72 hours in a sealed bag or box before counting.”

“The advice will be that services should be kept short and the people should be discouraged from remaining in the building for any significant time afterwards.”

“If you are holding multiple services on the same day, there will need to be cleaning after each one. If you have a number of spaces, chapels or halls an option might be to have different acts of worship in different places.”

“Records of those who attend will need to be kept for test and trace purposes. Good practice suggests that this will also include people who come into the church to clean etc. We are awaiting guidance on the GDPR implications of this.”

## **Proposals for Holy Communion**

Any arrangements for Holy Communion will be a compromise between two priorities:

- we want as many as possible of those who attend to feel confident to receive Holy Communion – this means ensuring that the arrangements are not only ‘Covid safe’, but are seen to be Covid safe;
- we also want to maintain the dignity of Holy Communion.

My proposal for the first week – which can then be reviewed – is as follows.

One person – MH – will take responsibility for both ensuring and demonstrating that the arrangements are Covid-safe.

Communion wafers (individual broken pieces of larger communion wafers) will be placed on specially-obtained long thin platters, a single line of wafers of each.

Individual disposable/recyclable communion cups will be used for communion wine, and placed in a communion-cup tray.

After the eucharistic prayer, the communion-wafer platters, and the communion-cup trays, will be set out on the altar, or on a convenient table forward of the altar, in such a way as to allow communicants to pick up a communion wafer, and a communion cup, without having to approach the priest, and without having to touch any surface that has been touched by any other person.

Before the service, and right up to the offertory, wafers, and disposable/recyclable individual communion cups, will be kept in sealed containers.

In front of the congregation, at the offertory, MH will (in order):

- 1 put on face mask
- 2 open the sealed containers of wafers and individual communion cups without touching the items inside
- 3 sanitise hands
- 4 wipe the platters for communion wafers with disinfectant wipes
- 5 remove the wafers from their container without touching the container, break the wafers, and set out the pieces ready for communion
- 6 wipe the trays for individual communion cups, and the communion wine dispenser, with disinfectant wipes
- 7 remove the individual communion cups from their container without touching the container, set them out ready for communion, and fill them from the communion wine dispenser
- 8 cover up all the items using communion linen or transparent covers/lids
- 9 remove face mask

At the end of the eucharistic prayer, MH will uncover the items, set them out for the distribution of communion, and retire to a safe distance.

Communicants can then approach the eucharistic elements and take bread and/or wine.

The ‘Prayer for a Spiritual Communion’ will be used, out of respect for those who nevertheless feel unable to receive communion.

These arrangements can be reviewed after the first week.

## **'Covid-safe' services begin in all four parishes on Wednesday 8 July**

Draft regulations have been issued for 'Covid-safe' public worship to begin from 4 July 2020.

### **Stage One – from 4 July 2020**

Sundays will continue as at present (including Sunday 5 July), with a 10.45am United Benefice service broadcast live online from a neutral venue (the chapel-studio at Station House), with the opportunity for dozens of people to contribute through pre-recorded inserts, as at present.

In addition, 'Covid-safe' services will be held in all four churches, beginning with these four services on Wednesday 8 July 2020:

**10am** Hornby

**11.30am** Gressingham

**2pm** Arkholme

**7.30pm** Whittington

*Please note that at a 'Covid-safe' service, there can be no greeting on arrival, no singing, and no refreshments, and 2-metre social distancing must be observed throughout.*

*Extra hygiene measures will be prominent in the celebration and distribution of holy communion.*

*People are welcome to attend whether or not they choose to receive communion.*

*The Prayer for a Spiritual Communion will be said for those who choose not to receive communion.*

*Regulations require that a register of attenders is taken at each service. If anyone at the service later tests positive for the virus, the entire congregation will be contacted by NHS test-and-trace, and ordered to self-isolate for two weeks.*

*If the vicar is told to self-isolate, further 'Covid-safe' services may be impractical for the following two weeks.*

*The arrangements will be reviewed weekly, in particular in relation to the numbers attending.*

### **Stage Two**

The start date for Stage Two will depend on the number choosing to attend 'Covid-safe' services in Stage One. In Stage Two, 'Covid-safe' services will be held in one or more of our churches each Sunday. The 10.45am service will be broadcast live online from inside one of the churches. The continuing use of pre-recorded inserts will ensure that those who are choosing (or required) not to attend will still have the opportunity to take part. These will be shown on a screen in church, as well as being included in the live online broadcast, so that everyone can continue to feel fully involved in the worship life of the four parishes.

### **Stage Three**

We will move to Stage Three when all Covid-19-related self-isolation has ended. In Stage Three, Sunday worship will resume without restriction. The live online broadcast of at least one service each Sunday, from inside church, can be continued indefinitely, for the benefit of the housebound, and any others who may appreciate the opportunity that it provides.

26 June 2020

## **Update 29 June 2020**

As well as providing hand-sanitiser, we will provide disinfectant wipes to everyone on arrival. Socially-distanced seating will be organised by signage indicating the seats which are to be used. These posters will be displayed at the Welcome Desk in each building:

 <p><b>1. Use hand sanitiser</b></p> <p><b>2. Pick up a disinfectant wipe</b></p>	<p><b>3. Sit where you see the logo to maintain social distance</b></p> <p><b>4. At your seat, <u>wipe</u> anything you might touch eg pew ends and the pew in front</b></p>	<p><b>If you have</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a temperature or</li><li>• a new persistent cough or</li><li>• loss of sense of taste or smell</li></ul> <p>please do not stay for the service. Return home, self-isolate, and seek medical advice.</p> <p><b>Please note that a register has to be taken at the service for use by NHS test-and-trace</b></p> <p><small>The data in the register will not be used for any other purpose and will be deleted once the pandemic is over and in any case within three months</small></p>
--	--	--

For the first local Covid-safe services on Wednesday 8 July, ticketing will not be used. If maximum safe capacity is reached, a notice will be placed on the church door advising any further people arriving to return for a subsequent service which will be held, if required, 30 minutes later. The departure of the first congregation will be managed to ensure safety. This will be done by directly the first congregation out through an external door other than the main entrance where one is available.

From past experience of short services, it is not expected that anyone will require the toilet. If it is required, it is unlikely to have been used for at least 72 hours. Hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes will be provided to the person going to use the toilet.

The children's corner will not be available for use.

Extra assistance will be given to anyone who requires it, without compromising Covid security or safeguarding procedures.