

## Easing the lockdown – second weekly review, Monday 20 July

**Executive summary: we move to Stage Two this coming Sunday 26 July, with social distancing of one-metre-plus (ie compulsory face coverings, as required in retail from Friday 24 July).**

*“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. The pre-recorded inserts 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.”*

### **Reflections on the second week of Stage One**

Two covid-safe services have been held in the last seven days.

Numbers were up slightly, to thirteen, at the covid-safe Wednesday service. Feedback about the service has been positive.

In contrast, the numbers choosing to attend the covid-safe Sunday service, in Station House Garden (on a bright, warm, sunny Sunday morning), indicate very clearly that there is not a large demand for what I had briefly hoped might become a summer series of open-air services in different venues. Only three people came. In contrast, 38 households watched live online, but chose not to attend in person.

And finally – the number of households watching online has continued to fall, as the end of lockdown sees other weekend opportunities open up, including travel and leisure.

24 May (64)

31 May (57)

7 June (54)

14 June (50)

21 June (53)

5 July (47)

12 July (43)

19 July (38)

One of my concerns previously about moving to Stage Two was that we might ‘break’ something precious – namely an average of sixty households joining us live online each Sunday with a profound sense of unity and extensive participation. It seems that this experience is coming naturally to an end, as lockdown eases, and an attempt to preserve it in precisely its current form, at the cost of not moving to Stage Two, is no longer appropriate. The challenge now is to retain the many positives experienced and learned during lockdown and Stage One whilst moving to incorporate the benefits of Stage Two.

### **Issues in moving to Stage Two**

Only Hornby and Arkholme churches currently have B4RN internet available.

The number attending in Arkholme yesterday, compared to the numbers attending on Wednesdays in Hornby, suggest that Hornby is the more appropriate venue at which to begin the Stage Two Sunday services. The now-established covid-safe Wednesday congregation should form the foundation for the covid-safe Sunday congregation.

There is a strong BAC consensus that there should be only one service each Sunday at present, so four-parish unity will be maintained by deliberately and conspicuously highlighting the participation of the northern parishes both in pre-recorded inserts and in the building.

Unity between those participating online and those in the building will be maintained by the ongoing use of pre-recorded inserts from those who are not attending in person, which will be shown both in the building and online.

It should be noted that the technical challenges of Stage Two are not insignificant. Setting up this system in our own garden yesterday took more than two hours – and involved a significant amount of valuable, vulnerable, and largely privately-owned, equipment. Stage Three (broadcasting online a service from a single venue without pre-recorded inserts) will be a far smaller technical challenge, when it becomes appropriate to move to that stage.

Discussions with other ministers suggest that attendance at this stage in the easing of the lockdown is likely to be in the region of 50% of pre-lockdown levels. This could not be accommodated comfortably at two-metre social distancing, but could be accommodated comfortably at one-metre-plus social distancing (ie one metre plus a face covering, and also taking account of the fact that people are not generally face-to-face or talking to each other). Face-coverings become compulsory in retail settings this coming Friday, so people will be increasingly familiar with them. The alternative is insufficient capacity, with many of those who are admitted being seated behind pillars, or flung apart to the perimeter walls in strange locations including behind the server, in the children's corner, in the castle pews and in the sanctuary. Neither option is particularly attractive, but one-metre-plus avoids the need for ticketing, avoids having to turn people away, and allows us to be in closer proximity to each other and to the altar. The seating markers in Saint Margaret's will therefore be reorganised during the week this week for one-metre distancing, and the signs updated to make clear that face coverings are compulsory. I will seek to obtain a supply of disposable face masks before Sunday, so that we do not have to turn people away. People with speaking parts in the service will, while speaking, use two-metre-plus distancing without a face-mask, so that there is no inhibition on clear communication. Note that singing is still not permitted.

### **Additional options for the northern parishes**

There is due to be a United Benefice Service in Whittington for Saint Michael's Day on the last Sunday in September. This is technically possible, but would require a stable broadband connection inside Whittington church. The B4RN fibre-optic cable is already installed; when I last checked with B4RN, connection would cost £150 (with free use of the service thereafter). This is a matter for Whittington PCC to consider in due course.

Options more generally for the northern parishes – once a sustainable number of people is committed to attending – include not only separate services, but also simultaneous participation in a single United Benefice Service from multiple venues using Zoom, with live contributions from each participating location audible, and visible on screen, in every participating location. The technical challenge of this is significant for the Zoom 'host', but not particularly for the individual participating churches, and a mobile-phone internet connection would be sufficient.

### **Slightly longer term**

It is possible that singing may still be outlawed when it is time for carol services to take place; some alternative event (or series of socially-distanced events) might need to be considered.

The observation of Remembrance Sunday should be possible in each parish, using a significantly larger open space, and sound amplification.

*Michael Hampson, 20 July 2020*