

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

### **Reflections on the first ‘hybrid’ / Stage Two Sunday**

Yesterday we ran our first covid-safe Sunday service since lockdown, at Saint Margaret’s, Hornby, with social distancing of one-metre plus a face-covering. The service was broadcast live online.

Pre-recorded inserts were included in the live broadcast; on this occasion, two readings, and a total of twelve musical items. The pre-recorded inserts were spliced into the live broadcast, and shown at the same time on a screen in church.

This ‘hybrid’ service is Stage Two of our plan for the easing of the lockdown. It is designed to maintain the maximum possible unity between those who are choosing to return to the church building, and those who are continuing to join the service online from home.

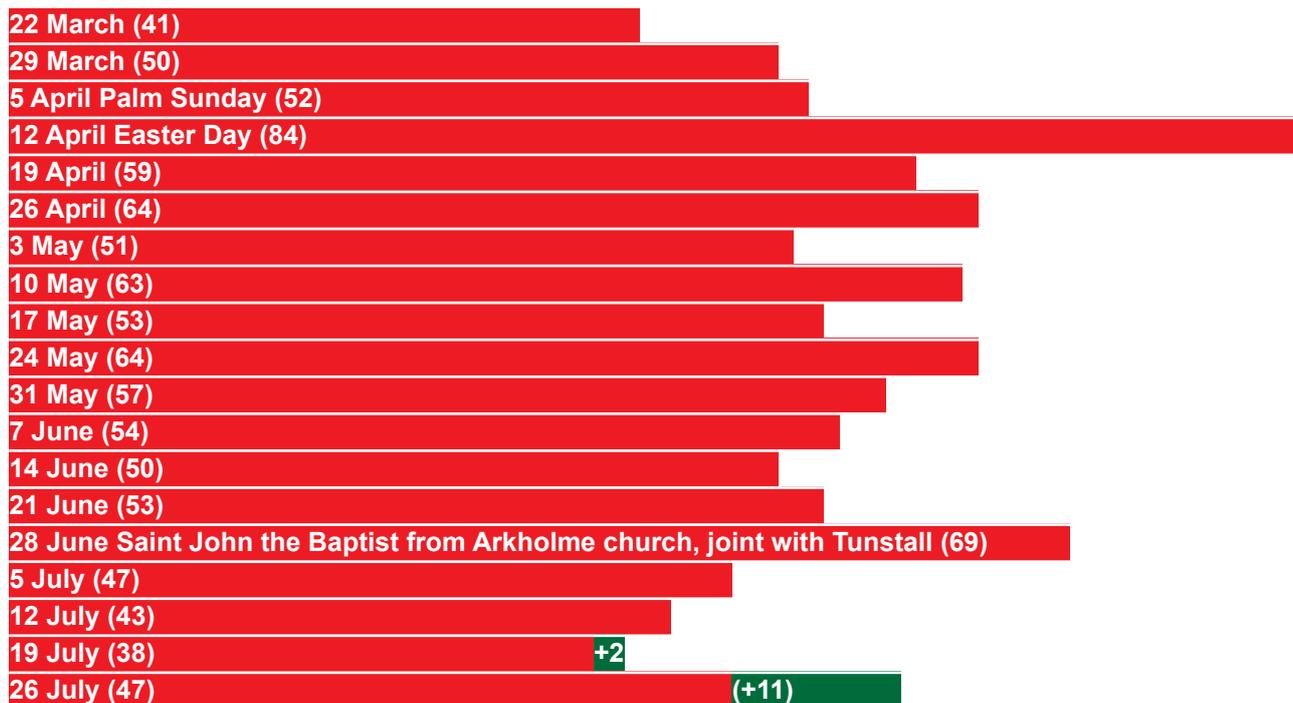
The great unknown before Sunday was how many would make each choice: how many would choose to return to the church building, and how many would continue to join the service online from home.

In the event, 47 households watched live online from home, and 13 individuals (from 11 households) chose to come to church.

There are two important pieces of new information here:

- firstly, our total congregation, at 58 households, is back up to full-lockdown levels, having suffered over the previous three Sundays; apart from the joint service with Tunstall, this is the best attendance since 24 May, which was exactly half-way through the lockdown;
- secondly, just 20% of our total congregation has chosen to return to the church building, whilst 80% of our total congregation has chosen to follow the service live online.

This is the complete record of our 19 online Sunday services to date:



So before anything else, this is very good news in terms of total attendance, and very good news in terms of ongoing engagement live online, from those who are continuing to choose not to attend an indoor public gathering.

The 20% figure for attendance in the building is interesting. Other churches (anecdotally at the moment) have reported figures for returning to the church building of between 50% and 75% of pre-lockdown levels. Factors which may have affected Sunday's total here include:

- wet weather early in the day;
- the news overnight of a spike in cases in Spain, directly affecting British travellers (adding to a general sense of caution); and
- the high level of engagement with our weekly online offering during lockdown, compared to other churches.

But the main reflections on yesterday are the twin positives that:

- the experience in church was joyful and positive; and
- online engagement remains high.

I would suggest, therefore, that the transition to Stage Two has been successful, and should now be maintained.

*“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 continuing Stage Two**

Over the coming weeks, I shall make a very deliberate effort, week by week, to involve people from the three northern parishes, and to highlight their participation.

I need to reflect further on the options for holding services in the three northern churches, and the experience of the next few Sundays (and any feedback) may contribute to these reflections. (I set out various options in the review a week ago.)

### **General notes**

Everyone attending yesterday brought their own face-covering.

I was able, during the week, to obtain a pack of 50 face masks for about £30, and these were offered yesterday for a suggested donation of £1, but none was required. They can continue to be offered Sunday by Sunday for anyone who forgets to bring anything suitable.

I am following the full procedure for covid-safe holy communion set out previously, but I am completing the setting-up process before the service begins, as I am better able to give it my full attention then. People seem to be engaging positively with the arrangements.

I will only do a further review next Monday if there is significant new information; otherwise I will review again in two or three weeks time.

*Michael Hampson, 27 July 2020*