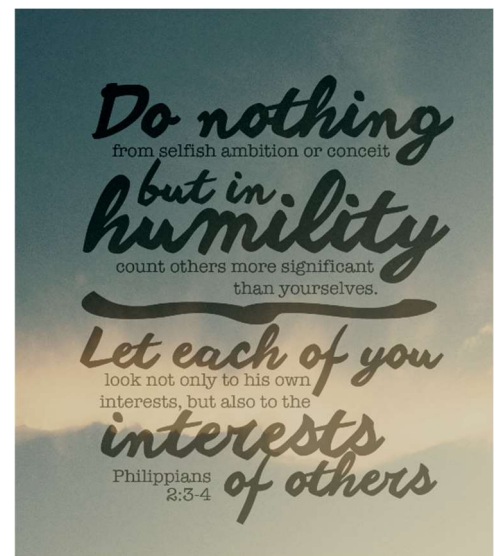


You will be aware that on 19th July the UK Government removed the vast majority of legal restrictions surrounding Covid-19, but have asked us all to **'proceed with caution'**. Churches, along with many businesses and organisations, have been given autonomy to work out what that should look like in practical terms.

At St Mary's, the Leadership Team, on behalf of the PCC, have prayerfully taken the decisions outlined here. **We have all become used to change being implemented in phases, and so another review is planned for the end of August.** At that point the number of Covid-19 cases nationally and locally will be taken into account, and the Leadership Team will decide whether any further easing of restrictions is appropriate as September begins.

In his letter to the Philippian church, St Paul urges Christians to *in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. This summer, and beyond, is a time when we need to continue to hear and apply this teaching. **Finding the right approach when some people are eager to see a full easing of restrictions, and others feel that more measures should be added rather than less, has been complex.** Anxiety levels differ significantly between individuals. **Whether you feel pleased, disappointed or indifferent to what follows here, let's together heed Paul's words and seek to put our own needs and interests behind the needs of others.** Let's be respectful for the range of views held, and to continue to pray for each other, especially those who are isolated through fear or other circumstances. In keeping with many Government documents, the decisions taken have been set out as a series of FAQs. **As always you are very welcome to contact one of the Leadership Team for more detail about how decisions were reached.**



Is it still possible to join in with worship online?

Yes! For the foreseeable future all of the Sunday morning services will be both onsite and online. This will continue to be offered for as long as there is a need for it. Sermon recordings are available via the St Mary's YouTube channel for those unable to join in live via Zoom.

What about Track and Trace?

This is no longer a legal requirement but we are still encouraging people to use the app or the paper slip to 'check in' until the Government brings this system to an end.

What sanitising and cleaning procedures will be in place?

Nothing is changing in this area. We will continue to encourage people to use hand sanitiser as they arrive, and the church will continue to be cleaned appropriately in line with our risk assessment. We will continue to ensure that the church is as well ventilated as possible during services.

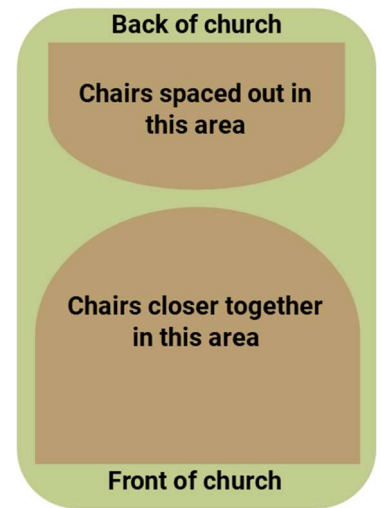
Will people be wearing facemasks?

This is no longer a legal requirement but **the continued use of facemasks whilst in church is strongly encouraged**, unless you are exempt from doing so.

Will there be social distancing?

The Church of England has encouraged the use of 'zoning' where possible, so that those who want to continue social distancing can do so. **In the back half of the church (where ventilation is better) chairs will be spaced out singly or in pairs.** Towards the front of the church, the chairs will be closer together, for those who feel more comfortable being in proximity to others. **As a general rule, we would encourage those who feel least anxious to sit nearer to the front, leaving the spaces towards the back for others.**

When you arrive at church you will be handed a yellow card with **Please keep this seat free** printed on it. People can choose to use their card to maintain space between themselves and others by placing it on an empty chair next to them. These cards can be used in either of the zones. When mixing with each other after the service, conversations will ideally take place outside. **Everyone needs to be respectful of others in relation to physical contact. Please do not assume that someone will be comfortable to receive a hug or a handshake.** When the Peace is shared, service leaders will encourage people to continue to do so in a non-contact form.



Will there be singing in church?

The Leadership Team are very aware that singing is an important part of worship for many people, and we have all been deprived of doing so for a long time. However, singing is also deemed to be an activity which significantly increases aerosol distribution, with facemasks not being a 100% effective barrier to this, and so could be a key factor in spreading Covid-19 in a church setting. **Having weighed all the options, singing will be permitted behind facemasks during this phase.** At the next review this may change. As has been the case for many months, the summer services will not contain a large number of hymns or songs in order to reduce the amount of aerosol distribution.

What will happen at Communion?

Nothing is changing at the moment. It will continue to be distributed in 'one kind' (just the bread) and we will stay in our places as the service leaders distribute, all receiving together at the end.

Will there be refreshments served after the services?

Not yet. But detailed consideration of this will be part of the next review at the end of August.

What else will be different?

The Bibles have been returned to the backs of the chairs, and the carpeted area with books for children has been set up again. At the moment this will just be for books, not for toys, and parents will be encouraged to use the wipes provided to sanitise the books which have been used.

What about at funerals or weddings?

Funerals and weddings are one-off services, and so service leaders will consult closely with the families concerned regarding their preferences concerning facemasks and social distancing at those services. If you attend a funeral or a wedding at St Mary's and the approach seems to be a little different to what is outlined here, that's why.

And finally

Throughout August there will be one Sunday service of Holy Communion at 10am each week. You can join others in person for Morning Prayer in the James Chapel at 9am Tues-Thurs. To read the full guidance for churches issued by the Church of England visit: <https://tinyurl.com/aef44682>

Thank you for continuing to show respect and care for others when worshipping onsite.

Revd Jema Ball, Vicar of St Mary's