



 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

An Open Letter from S. Matthias & S. George Parish Church, Astwood Bank

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Fr Glenn & Mthr Victoria pray that this letter finds you safe and well.

A lot of time has passed and there has been much disruption to our daily lives since the measures to control Covid-19 came into place. As we write those restrictions are beginning to be lifted. As the restrictions are slowly lifted we are making plans to take small and simple steps here at Church to re-open our buildings. I know this will come as good news to many people who have missed the opportunity to come and pray and worship.

The quarantine measures saw our church buildings close very quickly and a lot of our public worship and ministry also stopped. What didn't stop during that time was the work of the church. The Church continued to work hard, praying for our church family and our communities. The clergy and church family were and are engaged in active works of love and service uninterrupted by our doors being closed.

We wanted to say 'thank you' to our church family that have prayed for the us and that have supported the ongoing ministry and mission of the Church, and to those who were able to increase their financial contribution to the church.

We wanted to write and outline the plans we are making so you are fully informed of what will happen in the next few days and weeks.

The clergy and lay leaders have formed a Recovery Group that is working hard to re-start aspects of our Ministry. A phased plan has been created and is outlined below.

It is important to know that not all our previous groups and activities will be coming back and things will be coming back incrementally as it is safe to do so and if they are needed.

The First Stage of the plan is to open the Church Building for quiet, individual prayer. We will open initially for quiet prayer on Wednesday 22nd July at 10am The church will be open for two hours and people can come and pray quietly.

The Church will then be open for quiet prayer every **Wednesday 10am -12am** and every **Sunday 2pm – 4pm**

We have completed a rigorous Risk Assessment and we will be maintaining all the requirements and recommendations from the Government and the NHS.

When you come for private prayer what will you find?

When people come to pray they will find the Church looks different. Seating has been laid out to maintain a 2 meters of Social Distancing at all times and we have seating for 10 people at any one time.

On arrival you will enter the church through the main doors (at the back of the church) and you will be met by a Prayer Steward who will provide you with all the information you will need.

The Second Stage will be to resume public worship on a Sunday morning. The intention is that public worship will restart at **4pm on the 6th September**. To begin with there will be **one** Sunday service. Please note this time!

The Clergy are looking hard at how we can offer increased consistency and support to the parish of Astwood Bank as we move into an uncertain future. We want to explore the possibility moving the time of the main Sunday Service to 4pm permanently. Moving the time of the main Sunday Service to 4pm will allow the clergy the opportunity to offer more time and attention to developing the ministry and pastoral needs of the parish and strengthen the parishes position when change comes, whatever that maybe. We would like to start a discussion about the feasibility of this proposal.

The Third Stage will look at the mid-week services, groups and activities of the Church, and to work out what we want to bring back and how this may be achieved. No date has been set for this third stage but we are most likely looking to early 2021.

Half way through 2020, many are beginning to realise that the Pandemic has changed things significantly and those changes will be felt for a long while to come. For the Church the future is one of challenge and change. As we emerge from the pandemic, the Mission and Ministry of the Church will change to reflect the needs of our community. People are beginning to talk of lament and loss, and of trauma. Into that we as the Church speak words of Hope and we offer God's Grace. We too, will need to hear afresh the Gospel message of Jesus, that brings Grace and Hope. We will not be immune from challenge and change.

The Diocese of Worcester was already facing financial challenges that were re-shaping the look and work of the diocese and the pandemic has deepened that challenge and accelerated the changes that are coming. At the local level we will look and feel different for we are not immune to the challenges of the Diocese.

Our future is also one of huge potential and possibility, we stand on a vista and we look out onto a new landscape and we whisper the question to God, where will you lead us? During their time in exile, (a time of wandering, doubt and hardship) Israel, was lead by God and they came to a land of milk and honey, a land promised by God. God will lead us, we just need to listen and discern that still small voice and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are coming through a time of pain and loss, but there is hope for the future. As the psalmist writes "Heaviness may spend the night, but joy cometh in the morning". We trust in God and hope for the future as we walk through an uncertain time and all the time we claim the promises of Jesus.

May God bless you and walk with you in the days and weeks ahead and be assured of our constant prayer for you and those you love.

God Bless. Fr Glenn and Mthr Victoria