



St Helen's Church

Loving God, loving others, loving the world

Returning to worship in our buildings: a phased approach

My Dear Friends

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of last night's St Helen's PCC meeting, when we considered a phased return to worship in our buildings.

In this Pew Sheet, I will set out our plan and the reasoning behind it and try to anticipate some questions you might have.

'Think team'

As you are aware, the Government gave permission for this to happen from 4th July, and we have been working hard to assess how to do this in a way that is safe, worshipful and inclusive - both of those who continue to shield, and of all the churches of our Flagstaff Family as now, more than ever, we must 'think team'. The questionnaires you filled in have been an important part of our thinking and praying. Thank you.

As our online worship has been throughout lock-down, so our phased return to public worship has, at its heart, a team approach. This means that the services we offer will not just be 'for St Helen's' but for any from any of our congregations and communities who would like to come along.

Returning to worship in our buildings: phase 1

In the first phase of our return to public worship we will live-stream all our services so that those who continue to shield, or who are

cautious about a return to our building, can still take a full part in worship.

From this Sunday we will offer the following pattern:

- a Sunday 10.30am service, streamed live on the St Helen's Facebook page from the homes of our worship leaders
- a Sunday 4pm service of Evening Prayer (alternating between *Common Worship* and the *Book of Common Prayer*) at St Helen's, with a congregation in the building, streamed live on the St Helen's Facebook page for the online congregation
- the continuation of the pattern of daily prayer, with the exception that we will no longer have Compline at 9pm on Wednesdays.

Returning to worship in our buildings: phase 2

We will review this after four weeks. Depending on our learning from this first phase, and depending on the public health position at the time, we may then move to Phase 2 which might look like:

- a Sunday 10.30am service of Holy Communion at St

Helen's, with a congregation in the building, streamed live to the St Helen's Facebook page for the online congregation

- a Sunday 4pm service of Holy Communion in a village church each week, so that each village church able to open has one service of Holy Communion a month (for technical reasons these services will not be live-streamed)
- a Wednesday 10.00am service of Holy Communion at St Helen's, with a congregation present, streamed live to the St Helen's Facebook page for the online congregation.

I am still in conversation with the village churches about this second phase, exploring if this will be possible for them. Please pray for them as they decide what they can offer.

Returning to worship in our buildings: phases 3, 4, 5....?

There will be other phases to our return to worship in our buildings, but at the moment it is not possible to foresee what these will be: so much depends on how the virus tracks and on how Government and Church of England advice changes that it would not be a good use of our time to try and plan too far ahead. Suffice it to say that we will keep our plans under close review, with a hope that we can move towards a fuller programme of worship in our buildings ***whilst continuing to include those who will need to carry on worshipping from home.***

Why St Helen's in phase 1?

I think it might be important, especially for our sisters and brothers who usually worship in our village churches to understand why we are leading phase 1 of public worship from St Helen's. The reasons are purely practical:

- because of its opening for solitary prayer, St Helen's is already set up for social distancing, with appropriate signage in place, and the seating marked out at 2 meter intervals;
- we have gained experience of how to sensitively manage social distancing at our solitary prayer sessions; experience we can now apply to worship;
- St Helen's has the greatest capacity both in terms of seating and of volunteer-base;
- St Helen's is the most straightforward to set up with WiFi for live-streaming.

Why are we not having Holy Communion in our buildings in phase 1?

Again, the reasons behind this are practical. My Mum is due to have major surgery towards the end of August, and she has to shield very strictly for two weeks before the surgery and one week afterwards. As she is living with me at present, I will have to do the same. This means that whilst I will be available for leading online worship, I will not be able to lead worship in our buildings for the three weeks surrounding her surgery. This would leave Stewart, alone, to preside each Sunday and I

am not prepared to place this entire responsibility on his shoulders, especially at this time of transition and challenge.

Why are we not simply returning to our pre-Covid-19 service pattern?

There are two key reasons:

- worship leaders are not permitted to move from church to church in a single session. In our former service pattern I would lead an 8.30am service in one church, and then move on to a 10.30am service in another church. This is not now permitted.
- because some of our worship leaders are aged 70 or over, and others are shielding due to health conditions, our team of those able to lead worship in our buildings has, for the time being, reduced by over 50%. We simply cannot 'staff' our former pattern.

Who will be able to come to our services?

Anyone from any of our churches and communities are very welcome indeed to come to our services. We hope that they will have a real Flagstaff Family feel about them. Just as welcome will be those who will join us online.

The Government position remains that those who are aged 70 or over are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with those outside their families. Whether those who are aged 70 or over choose to come to

worship in our buildings is a matter for them. If they do, a warm welcome awaits them!

Will we have to 'book'?

Yes - we will need to operate a simple booking system to ensure that the numbers attending do not exceed our capacity to seat people at a safe social distance.

How do we book?

Simply by contacting Jill, our administrator, by emailing her at sthelensashby@gmail.com or ringing her on 07725 519453 before Saturday evening.

Jill will need to know:

- how many people from your household you are booking for;
- a contact telephone number so that, if needed, we can support the NHS Test and Trace system (these details will be destroyed after 21 days).

If we have more bookings than we have seats available, anyone not accommodated one week will be given priority the next week.

What will happen when I get to church?

You will be greeted by a steward, wearing a mask for your safety, who will ask you to sanitise your hands on entry. A second steward will then show you to your seat where you will find your order of service already set out for you.

Because seating people in this way will take a little more time than usual, you are asked to get to church 20 minutes before the service and, if

there is a queue in the grounds, to stand 2 meters from others in the queue.

Can I sit in my normal seat?

I am really sorry that this won't necessarily be possible. When Jill takes bookings she will need to allocate people to particular seats (rather like a theatre booking) to ensure that we can fit everyone in safely. This means that stewards will show you to 'named' seats.

What will the service be like?

We hope that it will be very beautiful, despite the restrictions that surround it. For example, although we cannot sing hymns, Andrew will be able to play the organ or the piano for us, and he is also recruiting other instrumentalists who can play for us. (Sadly, we are not allowed to have woodwind or brass instruments playing in the service.)

We also hope to have a single cantor singing to us from behind a perspex screen once the screen has arrived from our suppliers. This is in line with Government guidance.

What will happen at the end of the service?

The service leader will go to the back of the church and stand by the font so that they can say goodbye to people as they leave at a social distance. We won't be able to shake hands or to stand in groups to talk.

The stewards will then invite people to leave church, starting with those seated at the back to minimise people walking past others. Please leave your orders of service on your seats.

What if I want to speak to the service leader because I have a particular need?

In that case, you will simply remain in your seat. Once everyone else has left, the service leader will bring a plastic chair and sit in the aisle adjacent to your pew so that you can have a conversation.

Can I make a cash donation?

If possible, please make any donation online or through your bank. If you are unable to do this, please place any cash donation in the wall safe as you come into church.

Will the toilets in the Heritage Centre be available?

Yes. If you need to use the facilities, you will be asked to sanitise your hands as you leave church. The steward will open the front door for you, and the internal corridor door will be propped open. You will be asked to wash your hands thoroughly after using the facilities. Toilets will be cleaned between each Sunday service.

Can I come to church if I am showing any symptoms of Covid-19?

You are asked not to come to church if you are showing any symptoms which might be Covid-19, or if you have been asked to self-isolate because you have been contacted by the NHS Test and Trace, or because a member of your household is showing symptoms which might be Covid-19.

Do I need to wear a face mask?

The Church of England are still considering their guidance on this. I will let you know as soon as they give us any definitive advice. In the meantime, please can I encourage you to wear a face mask as you are entering church, and until you are seated, and as you leave

church. This means we are protecting our sisters and brothers in whom we might come into closer contact.

How can I help?

You can help by:

- praying for this new stage in our pandemic journey together, that we would manage this safely and compassionately and that none feel excluded;
- offering to become part of our team of stewards for these services. To do this, you can be a worshiper at any of our Flagstaff Family Churches. You do need, however, to be under 70 years of age. If you can help with this, please email Jill at sthelensashby@gmail.com

I hope that this information has been helpful to you, and that you feel encouraged that we have worked hard to keep you safe as we return to worship in our buildings. Later today, I am going to make a short film to put on our Facebook page and on our website which will show you what coming to worship in our buildings might feel like.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions you might have or listen to your concerns.

With love in Christ,

Mary

The Revd Mary Gregory

Team Rector of the Flagstaff Family of Churches