

St Paul's Church, Wokingham

Bearing with one another: stepping together into Step 4

It is almost as if St Paul was writing his Letter to the Romans with this moment in mind. He urges the Church in Rome (and hence the whole Church) to bear with one another and not just to think about what we want, what we accept, what we ourselves are comfortable with. (Chapter 15).

Different Churches are trying different ways of doing this. I have received over a dozen emails from people expressing their preferences around how we organise things, we have discussed things among Standing Committee and the Clergy Team and also at PCC and a natural way forward is emerging for St Paul's which will be right, I hope and pray, for us.

Because different people are in such different places around social distancing and risk management and the wearing of masks it is not easy to meet everyone's preferences. As you know, all of this conversation is taking place in the context of high and rising infection rates in Wokingham and across the country. I would stress that we are making these decisions for the next month or so and will need to keep reviewing things on a regular basis as the world and the risk and the rate of hospitalisation change.

What is not changing at St Paul's from Sunday the 25th of July

- 1) People will still be invited to use the handgel on the way in and the way out
- 2) The North and South doors will be kept open as much as possible to maintain ventilation across the West End of the Church
- 3) You will still be invited to scan the QR Code as you come into the Church (preferably) or to give your name and address to the sidesperson so we could contact you if we find out that someone who sat near you has tested positive.
- 4) We will not be sharing the peace with a physical touch but rather with a smile and a wave
- 5) We will receive communion in the same way, with people coming up the central aisle to receive the bread only and then returning down the side aisles to their seats, and the priest wearing a facemask
- 6) The Livestream will continue so that people, whether in Church or at home, are all still able to worship together
- 7) Some aspects of the service will continue to be simplified, e.g. the proclamation of the Gospel will be from the legilium and not the middle of the aisle
- 8) We will continue to follow a one-way system so people come in from the North side of the Church and leave through the South (railway side).
(Please do use the North door to leave the building if you find the steps on the South side difficult).

What is changing at St Paul's from Sunday the 25th of July

- 1) Any seat which does not have a flowery pew end on is one you can sit in
- 2) The seats towards the back will be for those who want to continue to socially distance, and the pew ends will mark the pews we are leaving empty. We have chosen to use the West End of the Church for social distancing so that nobody will be sat behind those who want to maintain distance, and because the airflow and ventilation is best there since it is near to the North and South Doors. We will also clean this area after each service.
- 3) We will encourage people to continue to wear a facemask out of concern and love for others but it will not be obligatory in the way it was
- 4) We will sing four hymns and everyone will be able to sing
- 5) A small party of servers and clergy will process in at the start of the service, down the central aisle to the altar
- 6) There will be refreshments in the Parish Rooms after the service, to which everyone is invited- you're welcome to stay in the Rooms or to use the Garden area if the weather is kind.

Let me stress again that we are making these decisions for the month of August and will keep reviewing them as things develop. The key thing is that we make a plan which makes it clear that everyone is welcome and that no one is excluded as a result of their concern or their underlying health issues. We believe that this plan allows everyone to feel able to come to Church and is an expression of our commitment to be one Church, one community, one family, gathered around the altar, united in bread, called and then sent out by Jesus Christ himself.

It will be easier for people to socially distance throughout the Church building at 8am, given the numbers. The conversation at St Nick's is more complex because of the size of the building and because so much else happens in Emmbrook Village Hall- there was a congregational meeting earlier this week for St Nick's and Liz and Fiona will be writing to the whole congregation at St Nick's in the next couple of days.

We have come through the last 16 months as one by looking out for each other and thinking of each other and loving each other. We have learnt a huge amount about how to be one Church, one people, one family since the pandemic began, showing compassion and understanding for those who see the world as you do and for those with different thoughts around physical proximity and personal and communal safety. I don't think that those lessons will let us down now.

Yours in Christ,

Richard Lamey

for the Standing Committee and the Clergy Team

July the 22nd 2021