

Notes on the Open Forum to discuss re-opening of the Church buildings.

Via Zoom, 10.00.6.6.2020, 28 participants as at 10.00. 32 max

Derwyn welcomed everyone to the meeting and ran through some technical rules for engagement, the opened the meeting proper with a time of prayer.

What's been good and encouraging?

John commented that at a distance people seem to be more sociable.

Angela said that the Zoom services have been appreciated – and people that may not normally participate have been joining in. Also that the daily materials have been appreciated.

Steve added that the use of Zoom and spiritual guidance has been good – and daily prayers and analysis of psalms have provided good support

Derek has been impressed with how adaptable everyone has been – and that everyone seems to be using Zoom quite efficiently. It has been good to become more conscious of those who are able to access via the web – and make additional effort for those unable to gain access.

Graham felt that it had made it possible to talk to more people than would be the norm.

Rob said that the regular contact has been very positive and congratulated Derwyn for his mastery of the tech.

Heather agreed with all previous comments and mentioned that as a newcomer to Zoom found it very helpful to be able to contact the Team directly – and felt that the support provided was excellent.

Derwyn noted that it has been very encouraging that so many have continued to “show up” for the Zoom services and that it had overcome his initial concerns that it might rapidly dwindle.

What's been hard and testing?

Derek noted that he missed the physical aspects - passing the Peace and the Communion had been hard to live without.

Steve commented that he is looking forward to when the church will be open again and that a reopened 8 AM service, typically attended by fewer congregants, may be a way forward.

Roger added that Zoom is great but has been frustrating when it goes wrong and muting / unmuting has been an issue. With average 80 participants for Sunday 10.00AM, conscious that there are many regulars that are unable to attend that we seem to be missing.

Margaret commented that she misses the spiritual encompassing of being in the church building – Zoom is unable to replace the presence of being in the building.

Joy noted that as it has been four months since she buried Richard, the lockdown has been very difficult and would have been intolerable without the Zoom activities.

Derwyn added that he has frequently felt very tired by the situation – that it has been exhausting managing the separation.

Any lessons from our experiences to take into the future?

June said that it has been a challenge to minister to the elderly and those without access to Zoom.

Roger added that he hopes we will be able to continue to use Zoom or other means to maintain contact – to reach out to and share with those unable to be physically present - that it will provide an opportunity for outreach, and that being more organised about maintaining contact has been good – if we can take the determination forward it will be beneficial.

Pauline spoke in support of the above.

Derwyn added that he has discovered a greater willingness to join in and assist – a greater desire to help that was always present but is now more explicit.

What are our hopes and longings?

Rob felt that crucially there will be a hesitancy to meet up – for fear of infection – and that we will have to provide reassurance and encouragement as well as practical measures – it will be a slow process.

John Steward really missed the physical activities within the church and being able to participate in Worship.

Derwyn is longing to be able to administer the sacrament, shake hands, read our body language. To be more human than is possible via a screen.

Peter Rixson is longing to be able to get back into the building – it is too sterile being at home. The time restrictions of Zoom do not allow for the time to contemplate adequately.

Roger added that the music has been great via electronically – but it will be wonderful to be able to hear the organ and sing together.

Do we have anxieties and fears?

Graham felt that the ability to distance will be a challenge.

Roger added that it will be very difficult to go back to the way things were and we must take forward some of the new habits.

Margaret welcomed the track and trace system and hopes that it will reduce the need for two weeks of total isolation.

June added that it will be very difficult to have services without access to toilet facilities.

Heather noted that as we have a big congregation it will be more difficult to manage distancing. Cleaning and sterilising after services will be a challenge – any physical contact may be a route to infection so sanitisation will be an issue.

Derek added whatever protections we may put in place may not be trusted – especially by young families. There may be anxiety around whether it may be safe – therefore we may lose some of the younger members of the congregation.

John suggested that the pew cushions could be removed to allow easier cleaning.

Roger noted that the other activities – house groups and other community activities must not be forgotten.

Bill Macdonald said that we must manage both the risk AND the anxiety around the risks – there will be varying rates at which people's fears will be overcome.

What will we need to pay attention to?

Derwyn invited Rosemary to share her thoughts and noted that nothing will be set in stone as a result of this.

Rosemary suggested that initially we open the church every day from 12 – 2PM for people to visit the building – entry via N exit via S, open Lady Chapel and have votive candles available, ensure distancing, keep kitchen closed and set up a rota for there to be monitors present, but it may support the rebuilding of trust and confidence in attending the building.

PR added that it is a good idea but will need to be manned (personed?) and police the following of protocols. This may be a challenge if there are many visitors and keyholders may need to bring additional personnel to manage crowd control.

Angela agreed it is a great idea. When it does happen, there should be plenty of local publicity. We should keep a record of attendees so that, in the event of an infection, tracing can be facilitated.

Rob added that we need to start somewhere that maybe more than two hours would be necessary, but it is a great way to start to reopen the church. Furthermore, advertising opening times locally as there is a desperate need for advertisers.

Pauline commented that it would be wonderful if the weather gets hot again as it a wonderful place to be in hot weather.

Roger felt that we may need to have controls in place in case too many people come.

(PB – a well-publicised crowd – (with good control of distancing measures) would be great PR and a way to build confidence – local TV news? National TV news?)

Rosemary felt that it may be the best way to assist the most nervous.

Steve Dale felt that the marshals may need PPE as they may be present for a sufficiently long time to require additional protection.

John Steward asked if we are expecting any guidance from the Diocese?

John Emmett added that we will definitely need more than one person, on the door, marshalling inside, and for cleaning.

Derwyn closed that we must go forward without fear – Jesus said repeatedly “do not fear, be not afraid”... let us not be crippled with anxiety.

What are our priorities as we re-establish church life?

PB – I so desperately miss Communion – how can we get back to receiving the sacrament!!

Roger – how can we get back to the Eucharist.

Rosemary expressed concern that we do not lose the young people and the appointment of a families minister – this will be even more important going forward, and a very high priority.

John Emmett added that Weddings are a priority – how can they be facilitated.

PR added that the WCC should not be forgotten – we need to find a way to be able to use the WCC to facilitate activities.

Christine asked whether house groups have been meeting via zoom – as we have a bit more time now it would be a way to join in.

Bill Macdonald had a discussion with (a Methodist minister) who is planning to start having services with just the clergy – broadcast via Zoom and to which we could participate.

Rob noted that the Tuesday evening meeting is continuing via Zoom – and this Tuesday there is a special event which was inaudibly described??? 20.00 on Rob's zoom code – he invited anyone interested to join.

Carol added that it would be wonderful to have the organ played if the church is to be open? Derwyn supported this as he is passionate about bringing music back to our worship.

How might we renew and foster Relationships?

June offered the use of her five acres for a big picnic (I was going to suggest a barbecue) to bring people together.

Rob reiterated that it is going to take a long time, but lunchtime music will be a way to allow people back.

Roger added that Zoom does work well, albeit for a short period. Could there be a half-hour Zoom welcome meeting to support newcomers?

Derwyn expressed a strong wish that we don't leave anyone behind – we must keep an eye out for a friends that we don't lose anyone.

What should our financial approach and priorities be?

Graham Savage asked what the latest position is, without the APCM, we are unsure what our finances are like, and do we have an updated budget for the rest of the year.

Rob stated that the Friends has postponed its AGM until October and has a budget prepared, which has been difficult...

Peter Rixson commented that it is a fluid situation and we may not be able to anticipate the nuances of our finances as they develop.

Graziana pointed out that the accounts for last year have been prepared and audited and circulated to the PCC – she would welcome any comments. This year's numbers have been scrutinised and a budget suggested, but no decisions can yet be taken.

Graham asked whether the finance committee is meeting via Zoom, and Derwyn responded that it has not been possible for a variety of reasons, but that we are moving ahead in the best way we can until we can get back to some degree of normality.

Derwyn made a final request for any further comments - and he will collate the ideas and thoughts into a final submission, adding suggestions that have been sent in advance, to be circulated in due course. He added his thanks and closed with a time of prayer and the Grace.

Meeting closed at 11.30.

OTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED:

A.

Our church life in lockdown.

What's been good and encouraging?

Zoom services (and fellowship) - enables us to join services with a small baby! In some ways it is easier than it would be to attend a service at church (benefits of mute function and ability to tend to baby easily at home!)

What's been hard and testing?

Not being able to be in the physical space of the church, I miss the feeling of walking into the holy space and joining in prayer there with others.

Any lessons from our experiences to take into the future?

Would be good to carry on with more online offerings in the future, both services and fellowship. Increase options for people to join meetings (e.g. PCC etc.) online for those who find it difficult to be physically present (childcare, dark nights etc!)

As we look to return to in-person church.

What are our hopes and longings?

Singing hymns together, seeing people face to face, bells, physical effect of meeting in the church building, sharing communion and peace together.

Do we have anxieties and fears?

*Concerns about adapting to new way of doing things when people are together and resuming activities after the long time of isolation (especially for people who have been advised to shield, e.g. me during pregnancy/with new baby, others in our church community).
Infection risk of contact.*

What will we need to pay attention to?

Cleaning, distancing, toilets (baby changing?)

Challenges we face as we look to the future.

Mission and Ministry have been interrupted.

What are our priorities as we re-establish church life?

I agree with Derwyn's point about bringing everyone forward together.

Relationships have been interrupted.

How might we renew and foster these?

With different opportunities to continue new connections made during lockdown and re-establish personal links from face to face church services/activities.

Finance is challenged as income has diminished.

What should our financial approach and priorities be?

Online fundraisers such as zoom quizzes (tailored to age/interest groups),

Continue to discuss finance with the whole church.

B.

1. Carry out inspection of the Churchyard, Interment Area and the Church including The Boiler Room, Bell Tower, Office, Organ Loft, the Church Roof and Storage Room
2. Note any repairs, cleaning etc which may be needed
3. Flush the basins, toilets, and water systems to expel 'stale' water
4. Check all lights including sockets, and distribution boards
5. Make an inventory of any consumables which may need replacement/topping up – toilet rolls, clean towels, soap, candles, cleaning fluids, coffee, tea, sugar etc.
6. Install facilities for hand sanitising at all entrances/exits
7. Discuss arrangements for social distancing including the Office, Vestry etc.
8. Re-establish rotas for opening up, locking up, Office duties, Morning and Evening Prayer, Service duties, Choir Practice, Flower arranging, cleaning, Interment Area duties.
9. Notify the Police and the Roof Alarm Company of our reoccupation.
10. Check that the Boiler still operates and that the radiators and pipes are air-free.
11. Clear/update notice boards, as necessary.
12. Notify our Parishioners/the Town of our reopening and update our website.
13. Consider a 'Service of Re-dedication' to formalise the new way forward?

Some of the above items may also apply to the Church Centre but should obviously be discussed and implemented as a joint programme with St Joseph's. It may be opportune to check with the occupiers of Cowell House if there are any issues which need to be addressed.

C.

- What will Church music look like post-Covid19?
- What changes could be implemented to modify the previous role/activities of Church music post-Covid19 if desired?
- How do we approach the return of the choir (if at all) in July? How do we do this safely while not putting any choir members (and members of the congregation) at risk? There is very little scientific evidence on this at the moment, but there is unfortunately clear evidence that choral activity has the potential to be harmful if not carefully managed.
- Can we rely on actually having a choir for services in July? If we assume that a significant number of choir members will not be attending (age/health/personal reasons), can we run a choir at services? Should we run a choir at services in July?
- Could services from July feature an organist to provide worship music, with potential congregational singing? Or even a solo chorister to provide vocal music within worship, alongside the organ (with no further congregation singing)? This would significantly reduce the amount of pressure on the choir before the summer break, and avoid putting choristers at risk until more concrete scientific information is available.
- Could technology be further utilised to replace the 'live' choir in July? For example, anthems and hymns being performed through the Church sound system, with the addition of 'live' organ for gathering/final voluntary if desired?
- Can the Church re-open for organ practice/lessons? I would assume that this might be possible, providing that social distancing takes place and the organ keys/bench are wiped down before/after use.

D.

Herewith response for open forum

With church life in lockdown it is good and encouraging to receive the daily worship by prayers and readings. It is hard and testing not being able to frequent the church building and atmosphere.

The hopes and longings are to return to church normality by a reintroduction of services subject to social distancing which will require limited numbers within the building possibly by allocation of seat reservation. A small choir consisting of about 6 singers might be possible.

The priority is to establish church normality at St Michael's and the WCC before embarking on ministry elsewhere initially living within our means financially until the situation improves.

E.

Comments:

Good: excellent continuing daily contact Zoom services for those who wished.

Hard: Missing physical church and real contact with others there. However well done, screens are no replacement for actual presence.

Hopes: that the church will re-open soon even if not yet for services

Need: to recognize others' anxiety over re-entering church even if we do not feel it ourselves

However "spacing" is effected, some will not feel comfortable about returning.

Priorities: to understand how peoples' lives may have been damaged either by loss of family or friend or by isolation and loneliness

Encourage social contact while recognizing that this may not in all cases be what an individual wants, so be adaptable to their needs

Finance: well, those of us who can afford to pay more must do so!

I have been very surprised at the number of people, not church goers, who have expressed distress at not being able to enter the church and simply sit quietly there. This seems to be something that would have been a great help to many who were finding life very difficult and would have welcomed that space.

I believe the decision to lock the churches was a great mistake and showed lack of recognition of the place they hold in peoples' lives, even if no services could be held. I am sure the clergy are making this point very strongly!

F.

I really don't know what the answer is for re-opening St Michael's. I have a feeling that those among us who are elderly are going to be more circumspect about returning than we ever were about coming immediately before the doors had to be closed permanently. I'm also concerned about the 'feel' were St Michael's to be full, as far as social distancing allows for spacing. I wouldn't have a problem with Wednesday mornings but singing will likely be out for quite a while.

To put the cat among the pigeons, maybe churches which have chairs rather than pews can turn the body of people around to fit into the church building better, which makes it easier for social distancing. This can then provide some sense of community, with people being more able to at least see each other and feel a degree of connection, which is something I'm aware of on Zoom.

All you can do is go with the consensus of opinion, and we must return when we feel it is the right time for us as individuals, risk aversion notwithstanding.

Many, many thanks for all that has been done, and that will be done, to make us all feel included during this extraordinary episode in the life of the St Michael's family.

G.

It covered a lot, but not much on the practicalities and problems. It seems that the first opening will not be services, but just allowing people in, and maybe have some music.

What I suggest, is for all to wear masks and gloves. This will get round the impossible task, of cleaning most of the church, every day.

Maybe we can have two doors open, and have "one-way aisles". Removing the cushions was suggested.

There would have to be a lot of signage, to tell people what they can do, and about covering-up. There may only be one key-holder present, each day, the church is open.

A daily time of 12 to 2PM, has been suggested.

One important thing, despite the reduction in church revenue, would be to buy a lot of disposable masks and gloves, to give/sell at the door.