

We are absolutely delighted that we can now hold services in the church building again.

There is something uniquely wonderful about gathering as God's people to worship him on his day. It's not just that we get to see one another or to learn from the Bible (although those things are, of course, both wonderful too). The Lord is very clear that, when we gather as church on Sundays, we actually get to meet with him in a way that almost defies description and simply isn't replicated elsewhere (see how Hebrews 12:22-24 describes it if you think that's over the top). Meeting together is also the best way we can encourage one another to keep going, and growing, in faith. So no wonder the Lord warns us so clearly not to neglect meeting in these ways (Heb 10:23-25).

So, while it is right to have followed Government guidance and paused our meetings for the last few months, and while we completely understand that concerns about health mean some in the church family will need to continue to stay away for now, it is wonderful that we can now begin to gather again. We long to welcome back as many people as possible!

The latest guidance from the Government places some significant limits on what we are able to do, so things are going to look and feel rather different for a while. [This is a long message, but please read the rest of it carefully to find out more about what you can expect and what you need to do \(including booking\) if you're planning to come along.](#)

- **No singing.** With appropriate measures in place we can gather, pray, and read and hear God's word preached together, but sadly won't be able to sing together. We are, however, planning to include songs to listen to as part of our services (but no-one must sing along to them!) We'll work out the exact shape of our services week-by-week, but they're likely to go something like: welcome, listen to a song, confession, prayers, say a Psalm, reading, sermon (also aiming to engage the children in the morning), listen to a song, final prayers. We doubt that many of our services will be longer than 50 minutes, although that may change if and when we can begin to share the Lord's Supper too (hopefully soon).
- **Hand-sanitising.** Alcohol gel will be available at the door into the church, and we will require everyone to use this to clean their hands on entry to and exit from the building.
- **Face masks.** Everyone will be required to wear a mask while in the building (the only exceptions will be for under-11s and those who cannot wear them for the health reasons). [Please bring your own masks.](#) (Those leading, reading, leading prayers, and preaching will remove their masks to do these things, but from safely behind a protective screen in the pulpit).
- **Social-distancing.** Once inside the building we will social distance at 1 metre+ (since we can't realistically manage 2m distancing inside Barkham Church). This means we can only use every other pew. In order to maximise seating capacity you will be directed where to sit, and will need to remain in those seats until directed to leave.

- **Register of attendance.** We will take a register to assist with 'track & trace' in the event that anyone who has come to church tests positive with the virus. This information will be kept for 21 days before being destroyed.
- **Got symptoms?** If you have any of the symptoms of Covid-19 (high temperature, continuous cough, or loss of/change to senses of taste and smell), quite simply please don't come to church. And please don't come if you have had these symptoms in the previous 14 days, unless you have been tested for the virus and had a negative result.
- **Over-70 and/or shielding?** The Government and the Church of England advise that, while anyone who wishes to attend is welcome to do so, those over the age of 70 and those who have previously been advised to shield are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.
- **On-line service.** We completely understand that some will have good reason to remain at home for the time being, so we will continue to make an audio version of the service available ahead of each Sunday too. Please note, however, that the shape of this audio service will change to match what happens in church.
- **No toilets.** For now, at least, we aren't able to access the Village Hall, which means that toilets won't be available for use. (We hope the fact that the services will be shorter than normal means this won't put off as many as might have been the case.)
- **Children welcome, but no children's groups.** Nor will we be able to run separate children's activities (creche, Sunday Club, and Lasers) on Sunday mornings, at least for now. But we would love still to see children joining us, especially in our morning services, and are delighted that some with young children have already said they're planning to come. Children will be required to stay with their parents at all times and must also adhere to 1m+ social distancing while inside the building. Parents are encouraged, if necessary, to come with supplies of snacks, toys and books. If things are a little noisier than normal, we'll manage. We're a family, after all!
- **No refreshments.** Obviously we won't be able to serve refreshments after the services either. Instead, we'll be asking people to leave the building straight away, but in an orderly fashion, as directed by the welcomers, in order to maintain distancing.
- **Cleaning.** The building will be cleaned after the morning service so that it is safe for those joining in the evening. It will also be cleaned during the week. We will need to recruit people to help with cleaning after the morning services, and will provide detailed instructions on what needs to be done.
- **Ventilation.** All the doors will be opened before the service begins and will remain open for the duration of the service, in order to ensure maximum ventilation. This may mean it is a bit colder or breezier than some would prefer. But hey – it's Barkham. We're used to that...
- **Bring your own Bible (and cushion).** All Bibles, cushions and kneelers have been removed from the pews, in order to reduce the possibility of cross-contamination. So please bring your own Bible and (if need be) cushion from home. The passages will be included in the service sheets, which will be made available in the pews before the service. Please make sure you take these away with you afterwards.

- **Booking.** The restrictions on seating means there will now be a limit to how many can come along (c55 in the morning, when we anticipate more families coming along, and c40 in the evenings). So, like many other churches, we will now have to operate a booking system to keep a control on these numbers. If you would like to book in for any of our Sunday services, please use the booking system that has been set up on the church website. (If we find two services doesn't give us sufficient capacity for all those who want to come along, we should quickly be able to add in a second morning service. We don't currently anticipate having to do this before the beginning of September, but can do if need be.)
- **Please be patient!** Clearly things are going to be very different, and we will be learning lots of lessons about how to do things better, both in terms of the shape of our services and also in terms of the logistics involved in making them happen. Please bear with things that don't work so well, pray that we'd learn lessons quickly, and let Julian or David know if you think of helpful ways in which we might do things better.
- **Questions?** There's no way a message of even this length could answer every question people might have. Please do drop David or Julian an e-mail if there's anything else you need to know.