

The Parish of Christchurch



The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell

for Sunday 14th June, 2020 – First Sunday after Trinity

Dear Friends,

As with so many other pieces of information at various stages of the Covid-19 lockdown, there has been some confusion as to when churches might be allowed to open for private prayer. This is something I know many of you have looked forward to keenly: some of you have described how you have gone to the Priory just to walk round the outside – though that isn't the same as being inside this beloved house of prayer.

It gives me great joy, therefore, to be able to confirm that **the Priory Church will be open for private prayer from Saturday morning, June 13th at 10.00am.**

We are intending to keep the Priory Church open for personal prayer every day from 10.00am-4.00pm, though this may not always be possible. The weekly exception will be on Fridays, when the church will be open for prayer from 1.00pm; this is to enable us to record the online services.

A great deal of careful preparation has taken place to enable this to happen. This is how it is going to work:

- Entrance will be via the North Porch only.
- Doors at the North Porch and Cloister Way will normally be kept open.
- Once in the Priory a one-way system will be in force, with everybody leaving via Cloister Way only.
- NB If you intend to park in the Priory House Car Park, please go through the double gate to the West End and enter via the North Porch. There is no entry to the Car Park from the West End.
- Everyone **must** use the sanitizing gel on entering and leaving the building.
- Social distancing must be observed at all times
- Only the Nave will be used for personal prayer. To ensure social distancing, rows have been roped off and pairs of seats in alternate rows marked with a green tick to indicate that you may sit there.
- If more than two people from a single household are praying, they may sit in the same row. Anyone praying on their own will have a double seat to themselves. Regular cleaning will take place.

I hope this may reassure you that we have been diligent in working to ensure your safety and wellbeing as you come to pray. Welcome back into the Priory!

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This happy prospect has reminded me that the relationship between the historic and cultural aspects of a Grade I Listed church and the life of faith is not always straightforward. Different people often bring subtly different, and potentially competing, interests, claims, loyalties and priorities to bear on how we think of such a special church. In the coming weeks, however, certainly until we are permitted to resume public worship, welcome visitors or hold concerts or other cultural events, it is our prayer (and the stillness that sustains it) that will hold sway.

This called to mind some famous words from 'Little Gidding', the last of the 'Four Quartets' by T. S. Eliot, which seem especially apt for these days of prayerful return to the Priory. Eliot writes:

You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.

That seems to me to catch it perfectly, even if for the time being we won't be able to kneel (to comply with national guidance all the hassocks have been removed temporarily). When we find ourselves back in the Priory, we shall indeed sit, be still and pray "Where prayer has been valid" for centuries.

In some churches, this sense of 'valid prayer' is palpable: there is a 'warmth' which has nothing to do with physical temperature, but everything to do with a spiritual atmosphere that welcomes, settles and draws one in, and makes possible an encounter with God. I sensed that Christchurch Priory was such a prayed-in place from my very first visit. My hope and prayer is that, in the coming days and weeks, many of us will feel able to come to the Priory to pray and so "to be with God with the people on our hearts" (Archbishop Michael Ramsey).

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This week the Church celebrated one of the great saints. June 11 is the Feast of St Barnabas. Reading the Acts of the Apostles, Barnabas emerges as one of the leading figures in the story; and although he is never included in the lists of the twelve apostles or evangelists, nevertheless he became one of the most important of the apostolic leaders.

He was certainly generous: he sold a field that belonged to him and gave the money to the apostles, laying it at their feet. Barnabas is described in Acts 4 as 'a Levite, a native of Cyprus', which means that, like Paul, he came from the Greek world rather than that of Palestine. It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. Later he became one of Paul's companions in mission, and a friend. Although Barnabas and Paul fell out (sooner or later most people had a row with Paul), the part he played in the spread of the Christian faith was significant. After he left Paul, he went to Cyprus, where he is thought to have been martyred in 61AD.

The name that has come to us down the Christian centuries wasn't his given name. His real name was Joseph; it was the apostles who called him Barnabas, which means 'son of encouragement.' This suggests that, notwithstanding his generosity and faithfulness, his most notable characteristic was his generosity.

We could do with more of that in the Church today (we could also do with more generosity, but that's for another time). Barnabas' habit of encouraging others changed lives: encouragement always does.

Few things are more transformative of a Christian community than persistent encouragement. By taking the time on a regular basis to encourage people – to affirm them, perhaps to thank them, or show your appreciation for something they've done – what we are actually doing is creating a culture of blessing and further encouragement that reflects the character of God's Kingdom.

Thank you for reading this, for your prayers, and for your encouragement. With every blessing,



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May I remind us all about **Daily Hope**, a free national phone line launched by the Archbishop, is still accessible by anyone with a phone. The free phone line, available 24 hours a day on 0800 804 8044, was set up particularly for anyone who is unable to join online church services during the lockdown. Callers will hear a special greeting from the Archbishop before being able to choose from a range of options, including hymns, prayers, reflections and advice on COVID-19.