

The Parish of Christchurch



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

for Sunday 28th June, 2020 – Third Sunday after Trinity

Dear Friends,

Writing this as the national news is full of pictures of people on Bournemouth beaches, paying little or no attention to the latest guidance on social distancing, I want to begin by expressing the hope that you are all well and staying safe!

As you will have picked up from the Prime Minister's statement last Tuesday, the next stage of easing the lockdown includes the possibility of holding services again in church. I know many of you have been looking forward to this. As yet, there has been very little clarity as to what this might mean in practice, but we shall continue to take notice of the latest guidance.

Precisely because we want to ensure your well-being when you come back to church, we are taking seriously the House of Bishops' statement that: 'Churches that are not fully ready by July 4th should not feel any obligation to rush to restart public worship.' Taking our time to ensure that all necessary and prudent preparations are made for your safety means that, provisionally, we are looking to:

- Open for a Sunday morning service not before July 19th, time tbc. We can only hold one because of the need to leave (currently) three days between using the same liturgical space; it also needs to be thoroughly cleaned.
- Hold a midweek service from Wednesday July 8th; this will be in the Lady Chapel at 11.00am
- Continue to hold Morning Prayer on Zoom from our homes until further notice; joining details are available from conference@christchurchpriory.org;
- Begin to hold Evening Prayer again in the Great Quire at some point in July (date to be confirmed).

Social distancing will apply to all these services. As I say, all this is provisional and may change in the light of further clarification. Please check next week's pastoral letter or the parish website for up-to-date information.

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It is just over three months since the lockdown was announced. We have experienced many restrictions and changes to our normal patterns of life. What a lot we have had to process!

In these weeks we have come to see the Covid-19 pandemic as a once-in-a-generation event (possibly even once in a century), whose impact on individuals, families, businesses, organisations and churches is only beginning to be understood. Six of our staff have been on furlough, which has helped a little. The easing of lockdown is a good time to take stock.

There is no easy way to say this: since our churches had to close at the start of the lockdown, our income has fallen by £100,000 compared to last year, through circumstances entirely beyond our control. This total is the result of: no plate collections at Sunday services; no donations by yellow Gift Aid envelopes; no visitor donations, which is a major part of our income; no dividend from the café or shop; no fees for weddings or funerals; no receipts from concerts or organ recitals; the list could go on.

I cannot emphasise strongly enough two things: first, this is entirely attributable to the impact of Covid-19; second, a fall in income of £100,000 will inevitably have serious consequences for our ministry and mission.

Unless we do something about it. We could, of course, do nothing except wring our hands and give way to hopelessness or fatalism: that might even be the easy option. But, as St Paul taught, everything we do as a Christian community is rooted and grounded in three abiding things: 'faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love' (1 Corinthians 13.13).

We also follow a Lord who said: 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you' (Luke 11.9, the NT reading at Morning Prayer on 10 June).

So that is what I am doing in this letter: I am asking for your help. Many of you responded to an earlier request for help, in order to 'redeem' our curate, the Revd Jonathan Evans, from being furloughed by the Diocese. I know also that a number of other financial gifts have been received in recent weeks.

Now I am asking us all to respond even more generously to address a yet greater issue. It boils down to this: **Covid-19 is a one-off crisis – we need a 'one-off ask' to mitigate its financial impact.**

In other words, as our income has fallen by £100,000, I am asking us to try to make good that shortfall and so avoid damaging cuts to our core mission. This is not about the balance sheet: this is about ministry.

For sake of clarity, this request is different from our normal Planned Giving. Planned Giving relates to how we fund the ministry and mission to which God has called us: it pays our stipends and salaries and covers the cost of utilities; we shall, no doubt, need to return to it at some stage. But Planned Giving is not the best way to address the unparalleled, one-off ramifications of Covid-19. For that we need a one-off ask.

How can you help? This letter will be read by around 400 households, by post or email. If each of us were to give a one-off gift of £250, the £100,000 shortfall would be made good and our ministry and mission secured.

Some of us may not be able to afford £250; that's absolutely understandable – please give what you can. As St Paul wrote, 'the gift is acceptable according to what one has' (2 Corinthians 8.12). Others reading this will be able to give more than £250; may I encourage you to do the same – please give what you can.

- a) If you decide to give by bank transfer, please pay whatever you have decided to give to the PCC of Christchurch General Account: sort code 52-21-34, account number 52427900; and in the space for the reference, please type ONE OFF ASK. If you are able to apply Gift Aid to your donation, please also send Ian Penny an email at prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org
- b) If you would prefer to give by cheque, please make it payable to PCC of Christchurch General Account: send your donation to: the Administrator, Priory House, Quay Road, Christchurch, BH23 1BX, again indicating whether Gift Aid may be applied.

Whichever method you prefer, may I encourage you to make your donation in the coming days, if possible by St Swithun's Day, July 15th. Rather than a shower of rain on that day, it would be wonderful if we received a shower of blessing through your generosity.

I know this is a huge thing to ask of us all. Nevertheless, in faith, with hope, and relying always on Christ-like love, this is what I am asking. If you would like to discuss this with me, please send me an email. I shall respond as soon as I can.

Whatever your decision, what matters above all is the spirit in which we are giving. St Paul had something to say about that as well: 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.' (2 Corinthians 9.7)

Thank you for reading this, for your prayers, and for your consideration. Wishing you all God's blessing,

Charles Stewart