

The Parish of Christchurch

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



December 30th, 2020

Dear Friends,

Not for the first time, our plans have been overtaken by events, specifically by the announcement this afternoon that by the time you read this, Christchurch, as part of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, will be subject to Tier 4 restrictions.

The fundamental aspect of Tier 4 is that we “must not leave or be outside your home or garden except where you have a reasonable excuse”. The government website includes a list of ‘reasonable excuses’, which include leaving home for work purposes, where working from home is not possible, and for essential activities like shopping for food or collecting medicines. (The whole list can be found on www.gov.uk).

At a Zoom meeting earlier today with my clergy colleagues, the churchwardens and Ian Penny, the parish administrator, the question of whether we should continue to offer public services was discussed at length. We were aware that attending “a place of worship for communal worship” is currently permitted in Tier 4. Alongside this, the Church of England has written: “We urge everyone to take precautions and, especially for those in Tier 4, to be exceptionally careful.” This we have tried to do ever since our churches were allowed to open again back in early July. At the time, the CofE emphasised that there was no requirement to open and that churches should open only if we considered it safe to do so.

The events of recent days – the news that today there were over 50,000 new infections and, tragically, 981 reported deaths from Covid-19 related illness, the rampant spread of the new variant virus, the serious rise in the number of infections per 100,000 in BCP, the Tier 4 announcement, and the fact that many of our regular members are elderly, in vulnerable categories or are currently isolating – have led us to conclude that safety of our members, visitors, volunteers and staff is at greater risk than at almost any time during the pandemic.

With great regret, therefore, I have concluded that, at this stage of the pandemic and in light of local circumstances, we should suspend public services for the time being and revert to streaming a pre-recorded service at 10.00am every Sunday. This will begin with immediate effect, i.e. from this Sunday, January 3rd.

I realise that this news will come as disappointment to many of you – worshipping together in church is greatly valued by us all. Nevertheless, I hope you will understand the reasons for this decision. None of us should be placed in the position of having to choose between keeping ourselves safe and well, and our loyalty to coming to church. We shall review this decision in three weeks’ time.

The Church of England website also says: “We acknowledge and share the sadness many are feeling at not being able to meet together as we used to do. We prayerfully and confidently look forward to the day when we can all meet together again.” To which one can only add, ‘Amen’. May that day come soon. It is to be hoped that the roll-out of the vaccines may bring that longed-for day forward.

With every good wish for the New Year and for God’s blessing in 2021,

Charles Stewart