

# The Parish of Christchurch

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



*for Sunday 25 April, 2021*

Dear Friends,

Little by little, and with caution, the stages of the gradual release from lockdown continue. We are less than four weeks from May 17<sup>th</sup>, when “the government will look to continue easing limits on seeing friends and family wherever possible” (government website). According to the roadmap, we shall also be able to welcome family and friends indoors, meet a friend for a coffee or have a meal in a restaurant – what the roadmap calls “indoor hospitality” – go to the cinema and stay in a B&B or an hotel. Something to look forward to!

For us as a parish, “indoor hospitality” also means that from May 17<sup>th</sup> we shall be able to welcome visitors to the Priory again and open up the café and shop. This, too, is something to look forward to greatly. This important milestone suggests that this may be a good time to consider afresh what Christian hospitality looks like. We have to be more than a expression of comparable values to the National Trust, only in a church.

This week, the Dean of Winchester, the Very Revd Catherine Ogle, reminded the wider cathedral community about one a key passage in the Rule of St Benedict where, in chapter 53, he writes:

“Any guest who happens to arrive at the monastery should be received just as we would receive Christ himself, because he promised that on the last day he will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Proper respect should be shown to everyone while a special welcome is reserved for those who are of the household of our Christian faith and for pilgrims.”

This is the root of what is often described as “Benedictine hospitality”. Interestingly, Dean Catherine applied this centuries-old exhortation to hospitality in a way that relates to the unfolding of the coming weeks:

“... welcoming visitors is deeply embedded in the cathedral’s Benedictine tradition. Benedict teaches monastics to welcome guests as though welcoming Christ himself, and by welcoming them, to receive God’s blessing. This is in our DNA and so when we are unable to welcome guests, we can’t really be ourselves.”

That resonates with our heritage, Although the Priory’s history is Augustinian rather than Benedictine, nevertheless the same principle applies here: for most of the past year or so, we have – in this sense – been unable to be ourselves. So, as we prepare to start welcoming visitors and pilgrims back, it’s good to reflect on this aspect of our corporate, spiritual DNA.

We know what it is to be welcomed warmly and to be made to feel at home. As we prepare to offer hospitality once more, what do we think it means for us to be ‘hosts’ to those who come to us? Do we think of them as God’s guests, or primarily as a source of income? How can we think avoid thinking of them as an intrusion, or, on occasion, even a nuisance? As many of us look forward to return to normal patterns of life and to our volunteering roles, how can we maintain a sense of joy in offering hospitality?

It would be tempting to leave it there, but neither St Benedict nor Jesus himself will let us. Chapter 53 of the Rule of St Benedict goes on to say:

“The greatest care should be taken to give a warm reception to the poor and to pilgrims, because it is in them above all others that Christ is welcomed.”

Jesus puts it even more directly in a famous passage from St Luke’s gospel. The setting is a Sabbath meal to which Jesus had been invited, at which some of the other guests were jostling to get the best seats. After telling them all a famous parable about humility, Jesus then says to the host:

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you ...” (Luke 14.12-14a).

Our call to offer hospitality doesn't run to giving banquets, but it does include giving hospitality to those who have nothing to offer us. To live this way is to imitate Jesus, who, as Dean Catherine writes, “is also himself a loving host, most famously at the Last Supper, and later in a resurrection appearance where the disciples come ashore and find that he has cooked them breakfast on the beach.”

There's something else here. Offering hospitality is not limited to our welcomers and stewards, nor to those who volunteer in the café or the shop. There's a sense in which each of us can have a role in offering a particular kind of hospitality.

One of the unexpected discoveries during lockdown, experienced particularly by those of you who have come to our online Morning Prayer or who joined the Lent Course, is that – despite the physical separation – we have come to know one another better. Many of you have said that people you once recognised or nodded to on Sunday are now known as friends.

So when you come next to church and see someone that you recognise, but don't know – or perhaps don't know their name – or have never spoken to, why not introduce yourself (in a socially distanced way, at least until June 21<sup>st</sup>) and start a conversation. The benefit across all our congregations from this expression of hospitality would be immense, not least in developing an even greater sense of fellowship and mutual understanding.

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### Services in the parish

From this Sunday, the provision of services in the parish expands again. Until further notice, the pattern is:

Sundays	8.00am BCP Eucharist
	10.00am Eucharist in the Priory <i>streamed live</i>
	9.30pm Eucharist (St George's)
	6.30pm Said BCP Evensong (Priory)
Wednesdays	11.00am at the Priory
Thursdays	10.00am at St George's
	11.00am BCP Communion at the Priory

*Please note, from now on we shall not be ticketing the Priory Sunday 10.00am Eucharist. If there is an exception to this for a particular service, we shall let you know in good time.*

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### Parish Summer Fayre

A date for your diaries: if all continues to go well with the relaxation of lockdown, the intention is to hold the Summer Fayre on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, from 10.30 – 4.30pm. Having been unable to hold last year's Summer Fayre and Advent Fayre, we should be very grateful for your support on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Thank you.

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As we look forward to making the most of the next phase of the easing of lockdown, may we also resolve to use the opportunities it provides for use to welcome one another and the stranger who comes to our church door.

With every blessing,

