

The Parish of Christchurch



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

for Sunday 18 July, 2021

Dear Friends,

In last week's letter I outlined how we propose to navigate these coming weeks, in the light of post-July 19th changes to Covid rules and guidance. Thank you for the positive responses received from many of you.

Last Monday evening, the Church of England issued this statement: "We have already been considering our guidance to churches and are awaiting updated Government guidance for places of worship. We will also be seeking further clarification through the Government's Places of Worship Taskforce, which meets later this week, on a range of areas affecting public worship and places of worship."

Sadly, updated Government guidance for places of worship has not yet appeared. What has emerged, beginning last weekend, is a change in emphasis from Government sources. Then in Monday's Downing Street briefing, the Prime Minister said: "it is absolutely that we proceed now with caution – and I cannot say this powerfully or emphatically enough. This pandemic is not over ... We cannot simply revert instantly from Monday 19th of July to life as it was before Covid."

The Prime Minister said two other things which are pertinent: "We will stick to our plan to lift legal restrictions and to lift social distancing. But we expect and recommend that people wear a face-covering in crowded and enclosed spaces where you come into contact with those you don't normally meet." So while Monday 19th has been hailed as "freedom day", now we are being told that the Government "expects and recommends" that we wear a face-covering in certain circumstances. This would appear to include the Priory and St George's, where we come into contact with people that we normally see once a week.

He also said, "I generally urge everyone to keep thinking of others and to consider the risks." While there are a number of possible responses to that statement (let's try to avoid cynicism), this resonates with important strands of Christian theology; while few of us would claim competence in epidemiology and the like, we can reflect on the coming weeks from the perspective of Christian life, faith and experience.

First, as Christians we are used to taking personal responsibility for our decisions and actions. Though in the past, behaviour was sometimes regulated by fear (think of those mediaeval doom paintings on church walls, to terrify the faithful), those days are long gone. Instead, we are to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2.12). This doesn't mean we have to work out how we can be saved, or whether we are: rather that, trusting in the salvation which is God's gift to us in Christ, we are to work out what that means in daily living, in the choices we make and the actions that flow from them.

In any case, fear is not the way to engender compliance. As Paul writes in I Corinthians, it is the way of love which is the "more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12.31), and 'perfect love casts out fear' (I John 4.18).

A couple of chapters earlier, Paul introduced another important strand of his teaching for the Corinthians, and for us all: how as Christians we may balance the freedoms we enjoy with the benefits of embracing voluntary constraints:

"Everything is permissible" — but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" — but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek their own good, but the good of others.' (I Corinthians 10.23-25)

Though our context is very different from first-century Corinth (none of us is under pressure to eat meat sacrificed to idols), the principle remains. There are many things which we are permitted, indeed perfectly free, to do, but which may not be beneficial, either for ourselves or for others; and so we may refrain from

doing them. The choice is ours. Paul also wants us to understand that it is 'the good of others' that we are to seek, not our own. Our actions are not to be based solely on what is best for us.

This, in turn, brings us back to passage is one which I wrote about last year in one of our early weekly pastoral letters, and which is also of timely relevance now:

'...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.' (Galatians 5.22-23)

These nine, core qualities which make up the fruit of the Spirit, taken in their totality, are the foundation of all Christian living, thinking, decision-making and action. None of these can be compelled; none is a legal requirement; but "against these things there is no law". All are the slow, patient fruit of the Spirit within us, and (importantly) we don't have to co-operate. The Spirit develops these in us only with our consent.

Where does this leave us? I am not going to prescribe the decision you 'should' reach, as regards wearing a face-covering, or social distancing; that would be to infantilize you in a way that runs contrary to the New Testament encouragement to come to maturity of faith. With the lifting of legal requirements, those decisions are up to you. By extension, no visitors entering our churches will be required to wear a face covering; that legal requirement ends on Monday.

All I ask is that when we make our own decisions about our choices in the post-July 19 world, we bear in mind the well-established principles for Christian living outlined above, among others. And may we respect those whose decisions are different from our own.

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Confirmation 2021 A reminder that there will be a Confirmation Service in the Priory on Sunday 17 October, at 2.00pm. If you are interested in joining the Confirmation Course, or want a 'refresher', please write to me on vicar@christchurchpriory.org, or talk either to me or to Fr Richard.

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Priory Choir This Sunday evening we aim (weather permitting) to hold Choral Evensong at 6.30pm outside on the monastic lawns.

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Barry Beesley writes: **RIDE AND STRIDE – THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT**

As a result of Christchurch now being incorporated in BCP, the Trustees of Dorset Historic Churches Trust regrettably took the decision earlier this year to exclude Christchurch from their coverage. For more than ten years Christchurch has taken part in the DHCT Ride and Stride Event each September. However, this year we will not be included. Our contribution record has been excellent, usually within the top five contributors out of some 184 churches, raising on average £2000 each year, of which the Trust return half back to Priory funds. This wonderful record of achievement cannot pass without expressing sincere thanks to Les Hiley for encouraging the participants to take part, to the Riders and Striders themselves, as well as the generous way in which so many of you have sponsored and supported the event. Last September we raised £1760, given the Covid restrictions it was an amazing result to go out on. (A number of DHCT Annual Reports are available in the rack near the font.)

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Finally, a reminder of the encouragement to be Covid-considerate: please may we "consider other people's well-being, consider keeping a safe distance, and consider wearing a mask." The choice is ours. God go with you through the coming days.

With every blessing,

