

*"The Rector's Letter" July 2020*

Now that the Government has given permission for Church services to resume this month, I am pleased to announce that there will be a simple celebration of Holy Communion at St. James the Great, Gawsworth, at 10.00am on Sundays, beginning on Sunday 19th July. As we are all aware, Coronavirus has not gone away and the Government has issued restrictions that we must observe. Social distancing measures have reduced our seating capacity by more than 50%. Therefore in order to reserve a place, please contact our Churchwardens, preferably via our Church website, or by calling John Nettleton (0758 0262487) or Peter Clampett (0784 1432175). A note of those attending services will be kept for 21 days just in case someone is subsequently found to be Covid-19 positive.

While we are now able to meet inside the building for worship, the reality is that we will not be returning to things as they were. For the time being, there will be no servers or robed choir, congregational singing is not permitted and Holy Communion will be offered in one kind (bread only). Wearing of face masks is being encouraged but remains optional, and everyone must use the hand-sanitiser on entry and exit from the Church. People may sit in family groups, but please only sit in the pews and seats that are made available. We are also being asked to leave the Church when the service ends and not to linger. Some members of our Church family are still self-isolating and will be anxious to protect their own health. Everyone must consider their own particular situation as we cautiously begin to take a few steps back to normality in the coming months.

There has been much debate in Church circles about the pluses and minuses of worship without Church buildings. Some have argued that the experience is a liberation, others hold the view that the Church is not a Church without a building. The physical building does provide a space for the people of God to meet together in praise and worship as one body. Buildings also provide something that is difficult to describe. When I wrote on Facebook that St. James' Church was to re-open for individual private prayer, the message was received and liked by a lot of people within the space of 48 hours. And yet few of those who welcomed this news have actually been in to pray. Perhaps an imperfect analogy would be folk wanting their local hospital to be there, come what may, even if they don't often use it.

Clearly the physical presence of the Church in the heart of the community, a reliable and unchanging rock in an uncertain world, is something many people still feel is of deep importance. Our wonderful building is a visible sign of the body of Christ in a way that on-line Church cannot replicate. In the words of the poet T.S. Eliot, we will, at last, be returning to an ancient sacred place "where prayer has been valid." And whatever the "new normal" may look like, we may be confident that the Church will emerge from the lockdown ready to embrace the goodness of both traditional and new ways of being Church and of witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Yours ever,

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