

Stoke Minster

Reopening of Church for Public Worship

The Government has now confirmed that places of worship may reopen for services from 4th July. The Minster has already been open for a couple of weeks for private prayer in line with the published guidance. We are now preparing to reopen the church for services.

Although some churches are reopening as soon as this coming Sunday (5th), the Minster will only be open for private prayer on that day (from 10.00 am to 11.30 am). We are instead preparing to open for the first time for a service on Wednesday 8th July with the first Sunday service commencing on 12th July.

The service times from next Wednesday will be as follows:

- Wednesday at 1.00 pm (note the later time)
- Sunday at 10.30 am.

These service times allow us to maintain a 72 hour period in advance of opening when the church can be rendered effectively sterile as we seek to comply with the public health guidance. It's why we're not going to be resuming the 8 o'clock service or any evening services for the time being.

The church doors will open for half an hour in advance of the service beginning. If you are planning on attending I would encourage you to arrive at least ten minutes before the service starts as it is going to take longer potentially for everyone to be seated than normal.

On arrival, the church will look and feel significantly different. To ensure social distancing, we have blocked off many pews so that we can maintain a distance of at least 2 metres between each individual or household group. If you are used therefore to sitting in a particular regular pew, please be ready to sit in a different location. Those on duty at the door and vergers will be ready to help and advise you accordingly.

There is hand sanitiser on arrival. You may also be asked for contact information for track and trace purposes should it prove necessary. The toilets will be available if necessary with appropriate queuing.

Signs around the church will guide you. We are asking that on arrival you enter the church itself by the side aisles. To exit the church we're using the central aisle. The one way system is clearly marked around the church. This means that if you're among the first to arrive you may be asked to walk up the side aisle and then back down the central aisle to fill up seats in the body of the church at the back first. Those who enter the church will accordingly be invited to leave first at the end of the service. Once you've chosen to sit on a chair or pew please don't move to another location.



For the time being we're asking that children sit with their parents/carers as we cannot reopen our Young Seekers group at the present time. Nor can we supply books, colouring materials, etc. for children as we seek to minimise transmission. We encourage suitable books or items to be brought from home for the time being.

There is no singing permissible during the service and we won't be handing out hymn books. Instead, when you arrive at your seat you'll find a pre-printed single use service sheet available for you. This will be safe to use having been placed on the seat several days in advance. We'll also make the service sheet available online and if you would like to print your own copy at home and bring it with you then you are of course most welcome. Please take the service leaflet away with you for your own private use rather than leave it on the pews. This is all about minimising any unnecessary forms of contact.

The service itself will be a Service of the Word for the time being (i.e. readings and prayers but no celebration of Holy Communion). We are keeping this under review but my judgement is that we cannot readily administer communion with sufficient safety for all concerned at this time. Other churches and clergy will be making a different judgement about this. Please bear with us. As soon as we feel the administration of the sacrament can safely be restored we will do so.

There is in any case no sharing of the Peace, nor is there a collection taken at this time. An offering basket will be available as you leave the church (not on entry). Therefore if you have cash donations please place them in the basket on departure. No refreshments can be served currently. Whilst I know that naturally many of us would want to meet and greet with one another and it may seem almost rude to leave without acknowledging others we need to disperse as well as arrive safely. I estimate that the service will be around 30 minutes in length, possibly a little longer, but significantly shorter than our regular Sunday service.

During lockdown, there have been services and reflections made available via the website and social media (Facebook and YouTube) as well as by dial up telephone call. I'm expecting to continue with this, aware that some will not be able to return to church for the time being.

Canon Andrew Wickens

3rd July 2020