

Dear Friends

I'm afraid in another week of changes to contemplate this is a rather long circular. Before you read on therefore, just a quick heads-up that we have our weekly live Thursday Evening Zoom service tonight at 7:30pm:

Evening Worship - 7:30pm 25 June:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/71784007120?pwd=enlWbXA0aWNUdkRqN2VOL3hpQ1g1dz09>

Meeting ID: 717 8400 7120

Password: twoshires

Pastoral Update

As I write to you today we might contemplate on the birth of John the Baptist, the feast day for which was celebrated yesterday. These verses from Isaiah are often read at this time:

A voice cries out, "in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway of our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all the people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Isaiah 40

I cannot help but be reminded of this as we work through the process of getting back into our church buildings. I have been deeply grateful for all the conversations I have had with a number of people over the past days and am constantly kept aware of what a balance we have on our hands. We are in very challenging times, and as we go through the gears of 'returning to church' in terms of use of the buildings again, there is a very delicate balance of what is right for the pastoral needs of those we know and don't know, what is safe when much is unknown, and what is necessary boldness in the inspiration of the words of prophets, such as Isaiah.

Many moons ago I used to do a lot of team hiking and a short spell in the TA. Something that is always drummed into you when trying to work together towards a common goal is to always go at the pace of the slowest person. It is not that that person is lesser or weaker, it is simply that none of us are the same and we all have different concerns and different ways of engaging with things.

The government announced this week that places of worship can, if they want, open for public worship from 4th July. This announcement came only a couple of weeks after the one allowing us to open buildings for individual private prayer. It is important to recognise that these are blanket announcements to pave the way for all places of worship in the country, in all places and of all religions. They are not directives, but permissions, which we can then implement in ways that are right for us and follow the accompanying guidance given. Below is a summary of where we are at in this Benefice:

Opening Churches

Private Prayer

As a Benefice we have been working hard to get our churches ready to safely open for private prayer from next week. Thank you to all those who are helping make that happen. The timetable is below and you are welcome to use those churches at those times. When you do, please follow the instructions given and any advice of stewards there to welcome you. Although the government guidance on social distancing has reduced to 1m+, we will be maintaining a 2m distance at this time.

Monday – Cricket Malherbie & Winsham; 11am to 12 noon.

Tuesday – Chaffcombe & Tatworth; 11am to 12 noon.

Wednesday – Thorncombe; 11am to 12 noon.

Thursday – Winsham; 3pm to 4pm

Friday – Cricket Malherbie; 11am-12noon, & Tatworth; 3pm to 4pm

Saturday – Thorncombe & Chaffcombe; 11am to 12 noon.

Public Worship in churches

As I write this we have not yet received any detailed guidance on what may or may not be possible in opening churches for public worship, and so I am not in position to make any decision or have anything to discuss with PCC's. However, I am deeply conscious that in our context we have a significant population of vulnerable people, including a number of people who are clinically shielded, and there is a general level of nervousness over the pace of restriction easing.

It is right to hold all of that in balance, and whatever decision is made, there will be some for whom it is welcome and some for whom it is too soon or too late. We are in times when decisions are being made that have never been made before and everything we do is new exploration. And so my general position is to take care and to try and keep safe, and yes, to keep moving, but at a pace that is sustainable.

In the absence of further detail at this time my rationale is for the churches to use July for private prayer only, as per the timetable above, and with a view to commencing public worship with a Benefice Service at the beginning of August. As soon as more information is available I will let you know.

User feedback on current worship

We are hugely appreciative of the feedback we get from the various acts of worship we have provided over the past months. Thank you. All of us, i.e. those leading worship and those receiving worship, have had to learn and adapt to new ways of doing things, which like all new things, has been a journey of discovery of things that are good and things that you learn not to do again! It has been, and continues to be, a big learning curve all round.

It takes a significant amount of time to put together and deliver worship in these new ways, and as we start to get ready for recommencing worship in buildings again, we need to carefully think through how we balance the resources available. It will be necessary to continue with some forms of what we are doing already as it will not be possible for all people to suddenly come to church again, and we are also reaching people now that we didn't reach before.

Therefore, in reading this circular, before closing the document, please would you press 'reply' on your email server and simply answer the following questions honestly:

1. What has been your regular source of worship during lockdown?
2. How often do you use it?
3. What is of most value to you?
4. If we are not doing the above, what would you like to see available?
5. Any general thoughts and comments...

Upcoming Worship

Thursday Evening Zoom:

Tonight we have our regular live evening prayer on Zoom. Tonight I will be leading Compline again (Night Prayer). ALL welcome:

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Sunday Worship:

Thank you to all those who attended the Zoom live Sunday service last week. Really good to see you all, and for those unable to attend I hope you found the video and / or text afterwards.

This Sunday Rev'd Judith is leading us in worship. It will be a pre-recorded service that will be available on the link below:

<https://twoshires.wordpress.com/sunday-service>

Other News:

Parish Magazines

The Link magazine will recommence from August under the new editorship of Anne Perez. Current guidelines still recommend that that is as an 'e' magazine rather than printed. As soon as it is advisable to do so we will move to recommence physical publication.

The JPM magazine is also starting again from next month and I understand that The Drift starts again from August.

Finance:

There will be a separate circular on 'giving' in due course, and further information will be available as soon as it is ready in the churches when they are open for private prayer and beyond. These times have put great pressure on parishes and the wider church and we will need to think about how to appropriately engage with that.

Related to finance, if you have a head for figures and are in a position to volunteer, **we are in need of a treasurer for St John's Church, Tatworth**. It does not need to be someone necessarily from Tatworth, or indeed an attendee of that church, but an appreciation of church matters would be helpful!

Prayers & Readings

For your prayers:

- The Sick - All those you know who are ill or struggling in any way. The following are also included by name:

Hannah Knott; Rob Allen; Lynne Applegarth; Phyllis Baker; Margaret Bandy; Sue Bennett; Sue Cheese; Terry Conway; Nick Frankau; Paul Glazier; David Goodwill; Mike Heywood; Joy Howard; Ann Jarvis; Val Joslin; Mark Lindsey; Frank Long; Peter McHugh; Diana Rowlands; Ann Ricketts; Jim Tucker; Rosemary Walley; Rosemary Walton; Vivien Wheaton; Alan Wills, Anna Woodward; Pamala Young ; Hannah (Dennis Hunt's granddaughter); Milly granddaughter of Jane & Alan Rudkin; Gillian Muggeridge

- For the Bereaved - The family & friends of: Hubert Hutchinson; Roy Frecknell; Dave Woodland; Winifred Bale; Frank Down; Rene Wheadon; Mary Ferris

Collect Prayer for the week ahead from the Book of Common Prayer (3rd Sunday after Trinity): O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture for the week

Thursday 25 June -	2 Kings 24:8-17; Matt 7:21-end
Friday 26 June -	2 Kings 26:1-12; Matt 8:1-4
Saturday 27 June -	Lam 2:2, 10-14, 18-19; Matt 8:5-17
Sunday 28 June -	Gen 22:1-14; Matt 10:40-end
Monday 29 June -	Acts 12:1-11; Matt 16:13-19 (Peter and Paul)
Tuesday 30 June -	Amos 3:1-8, 4:11-12; Matt 8:23-27
Wednesday 1 July -	Amos 5:14-15, 21-24; Matt 8:28-end

The meditation for today from the Northumbria Celtic Community:

A Christian is one who points at Christ and says, 'I can't prove a thing, but there's something about His eyes and His voice. There's something about the way He carries His head, His hands, the way He carries His cross - the way He carries me.' Frederick Buechner

With every blessing for the week ahead,
Kind regards

Philip

The Reverend Philip Butcher
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