

Dear Fellow Parishioner

As we hope to reopen for services shortly, we felt it was an opportune time to report to the Church community.

We set out below the background, our views of the challenges we face, and our plans and hopes for the coming months.

Background

We are still in an interregnum and the Covid crisis has done nothing to expedite matters - indeed the approach of the Diocese is that funding for new appointments may be limited and such appointments may be further delayed.

This church community, in common with many others, is therefore ever more reliant on its own resources, human as well as financial, not just to keep things 'ticking over', but to fulfil our mission to our people and the wider Balderstone community of providing Christian witness and worship in the parish.

Challenges

Covid and its ramifications provide major challenges to church life, albeit there is advice (plenty!) from the diocese and the Church of England. Reopening will require adherence to new rules and systems - see below for further service details.

Our finances have been affected by a reduced income from having no services. We are blessed that many of you contribute by standing order, but we know that we regularly use our capital resources to pay our way and top up the annual shortfall between income and expenditure; we also know that this is not a sustainable financial strategy.

Our demographical picture is a congregation that is in one part very young and in the other somewhat more elderly. This means that some members who have given fantastic service over many years are less able to do some jobs or only able to do fewer jobs; we have many wonderful volunteers to act as replacements but are in danger of asking fewer and fewer people to do more and more.

The delay in appointing a new vicar means that our pastoral provision is not as it should be, which in turn affects attendance and finance and resource.

Government restrictions are likely to mean that the usual Autumn/Winter activities will not happen, including Harvest evensong and supper; Christmas brass band concert; Christmas fair; and carol service. The loss of these will impact us all both socially and, again, financially.

Plans

We intend to reopen for a weekly, said, communion service on 6th September at 9.30am. We attach details of how this will work below (Appendix 1).

We have applied for permission to extend the chancel area and, in conjunction with school, to install an audio-visual system. This project is ongoing.

We are intending to instigate a Stewardship campaign to encourage giving to enable us to cover our expenditure from regular income, including weekly giving.

The United Benefice is intending to keep the 'Zoom' services going on a regular - perhaps monthly - basis.

Hope

One of the great Christian virtues and we can, and should, be full of it!

We have had great success with the zoom services and the worshipping community has kept together in a time of real challenge.

We have a wonderfully supportive and talented congregation and wider network who have our church at the heart of their daily lives and who use and need it in times of joy and of sorrow.

We are well founded and our financial challenge is not a crisis, and never will be if we take proper actions at this time.

We would ask for your continued prayers for the church and support for its work in Balderstone.

With every blessing

Eric and Peter

Arrangements for Public Worship - Communion during Covid

Background

The procedures outlined below have been formulated following discussions with our Area Dean, Jonathan Carmyllie, and take account of Anglican and Diocesan advice

Services will be different from what we are used to. The services will be shorter, lasting approximately 30 minutes. This will be a said service - using the form of the old 8.30am service. There will be no singing. You will not be able to shake hands in the peace. Communion will be given in one kind (bread) only. There will be limited numbers allowed in church. Some pews will therefore be blocked off - you may not be able to sit in your usual place. Only three people may sit in any one pew - apart from household groups.

Contact details will also be taken in case they are needed for tracking and tracing should a case of Covid 19 occur. A record of those attending is to be made and retained for 21 days. The name of the person (or lead person if in a group) is to be recorded together with a contact phone number.

If weather conditions are favourable doors will be open and remain open throughout the service, so as to provide some ventilation.

No refreshments will be served after the service.

This pattern of worship will continue until the end of September when it will be reviewed and changes may be made.

Limited Numbers

An audit of our seating in the light of the guidelines indicates that we can seat a **maximum of 42 people**.

We are considering how best to restrict the numbers attending services (the irony is immense!) in the light of the rules.

We think it unlikely that families with children will attend a said communion; some people have expressed concern about going into a social situation; normal weekly attendances are around 40; accordingly it is possible that the problem may not exist.

We are reviewing possible procedures and will advise but it is likely that a 'first come first served' system will be best, albeit at the risk of disappointment to some.

If anyone has a bright practical solution we would be glad to hear!

Arrival and preparation

Church will open 15 minutes before services start. Entry is to be via the main door, through the porch of the bell tower

You are encouraged to bring your own hand gel sanitiser, but church will have sanitiser located as you come in and you will be asked to use them upon entering and exiting. **Face coverings are mandatory** inside the building.

Access to pews can be via the central aisle or the side aisles.

Appropriate numbers of service sheets will be placed in the pews prior to the start of the service, **indicating suitable seating positions**, so as to help with social distancing. Please leave them in the pew after the service.

People are asked not to engage in conversation with other worshipers but to take their seats quietly.

Communion

A one way system will operate for communion.

Wafers will be distributed by the clergy at the chancel steps - not at the altar rail.

Access to take communion will therefore be **to the chancel step down the central aisle only**, one row at a time, **please remain seated** until the central aisle is clear.

Walk up and stay in same order as in the pew so that on **returning to the pew via the side aisle** you will be in the correct order to retake your seat and use the same service sheet. Keep 2m apart.

Departure

At the end of the service please exit promptly via the main door in single file maintaining 2m social distancing. We would request that the people seated at the **back pews leave first** so those at the front will be last to exit.

Please leave the service sheets in the pews.

Please do not congregate at the back of church. Please leave in a quiet and orderly manner. As you leave please sanitise your hands

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP AND UNDERSTANDING