



**THE PARISH CHURCH OF
ST MARY THE VIRGIN & ALL SAINTS
POTTERS BAR**

**The Walk, Potters Bar
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To the Parish and community of St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar.

Dear friends in Christ,

I have written this letter as a response to heightened Government measures that continue to affect our life together in various ways. The Church authorities to which I am responsible have asked clergy to make clear what applies when, and to ensure good practice. Although not a lot of what I will say below is new, please do read the following carefully and adhere to these guidelines.

The “Rule of Six” during public worship and private prayer

The Government has made clear that public worship in a church building or its immediate outside grounds is exempt from the rules on max gatherings, which is why we can have more than six people in church both for services and during our open hours in the week. **However**, we are required not to gather in groups of more than six while attending church, unless the group constitutes one household. Our socially distanced seating measures prohibit us from sitting together as a group of more than six at the moment anyway, so what this primarily means for us is that when we are outside in the car park following the service, you will have to choose your group of people to talk to, ensure there is no more than six people in that group, and not move from one group to another. Social distancing from others even within that group is still required, except among those who are in the same household.

Face coverings

It is still mandatory to wear face masks for the duration of your time inside the church building, and the fine for not doing so has now been doubled to £200 in the first instance. There continues to be exemptions on certain medical grounds, and these exemptions and other guidance notes can be found on the following Government website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>. The person leading the service continues to be exempt due to the frequency with which they address the congregation, as do those who are reading, leading intercessions or singing, but only for the duration of that activity, after which they must immediately resume wearing their mask.

Please note that the guidance clearly states that the face mask must cover both your mouth and your nose. The science is clear that covering one’s mouth while leaving one’s nostrils free achieves next to nothing, and I have had several people this week reach out to me to express their concern that a number of people at St Mary’s are not wearing their masks correctly. In the interest of keeping us all safe, please ensure your mouth and nose are covered.

NHS Test and Trace

Some have sought clarity from us as to how we are complying with the Government's Test and Trace scheme, as our method has not been as obvious as in some places where people are filling in forms, or even pre-registering their church attendance over the internet ahead of time. Richard has been keeping a register of who has been attending each service on Sunday and during the week, and for those who have been regulars at St Mary's for some time and have given us their contact details nothing more has been needed from you, as we already have whatever information the NHS would need if there is a confirmed case of Covid-19 at St Mary's. When it comes to one-off visitors or those who have joined us more recently, Richard has spoken directly to those involved in order to retrieve the necessary contact details.

A point has been made about GDPR, and how the collection of personal data such as phone numbers and addresses for Test and Trace interfaces with the privacy regulations that GDPR enforces. With regard to that, I think we have to remember that the exceptional circumstances we are in were unforeseen when GDPR came into force, and the need to be able to provide the NHS with our contact details so that they can inform those who may have come into contact with someone who has Covid-19 of this fact is a public health matter which trumps the more restrictive attitude to personal data of GDPR. You may feel this is a dangerous precedent for Government to set, and that is your prerogative, but we are expected by Church and Government leadership to comply.

You will see that a QR code is now available to be scanned near the entrance to the church for those who have downloaded the new NHS Test and Trace App. Doing so is required for those who are present in the church or church hall for reasons other than worship (e.g. hirers of either space), but is optional for our worship, for which Richard will continue to operate a register.

If you feel unwell

Finally, it is perhaps an obvious thing to say, but if you feel unwell please do not physically attend church until you are feeling better. We will be continuing to livestream the 10am Parish Eucharist on Facebook for the foreseeable future, and while I fully appreciate that worshipping from home is not the same as doing so in church together, I am required to encourage people who feel they may either present a risk themselves or are at risk to remain at home.

Given all we have heard this week about a second wave of the virus beginning, this is the time for us to ensure we are all complying with Government rules and best practice guidelines, so that we continue to keep each other safe as we worship and pray together.

God bless you all, and please continue to pray for me, as I pray for you.

Yours in Christ,

Fr Stefan Chrysostomou

Vicar of St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, 27th September 2020