



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

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

Re: Resumption of public worship

Dear friends in Christ,

I write to you with much joy in my heart, as I am now officially able to declare to you that, starting this coming Sunday 5th July, St Mary's will be open for public worship again. After this long and difficult period when we have had to keep the church building closed, and when God's people in this country have been denied the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time in eight hundred years, it must surely be a cause for great rejoicing that we will be able to gather together in praise and worship again, to be fed and nourished by the Lord at His table, as we feast on His Word and His Holy Sacrament.

I would like to say at this point that I have felt my primary role as your Vicar in this period has been to attempt to maintain our usual pattern of worship (albeit with some minor tweaking) as much as possible. The majority of human beings are, I believe, by nature creatures of habit. We like to be able to plan out our week, we like to be able to anticipate what may come our way, we like routine and a structured rhythm to our lives. Coming to church is a big part of that rhythm of life for us, and I know it has been very jarring and difficult, even painful, for some of us to be denied the opportunity to do that. Conversely, perhaps we may have learned a bit better how setting aside time for prayer and worship in our homes can help us to create a healthy daily pattern of life with and in Christ, which going to church can now again be a part of.

I will confess that at times I have found the task of "keeping the show on the road" to have been quite draining, given the solitary nature of this task. I am so very much looking forward to having a congregation to worship alongside again, and being able to welcome many of you back into St Mary's, and eventually into the many roles and ministries you perform as part of our common life together.

However, please understand this: **we will not be going back to normal.** Not yet. It is still not safe for us to conduct our services in the normal St Mary's fashion, and so I must ask you to begin managing your expectations. If you come through the door on Sunday morning expecting it to be just like it was before we had to leave, I am sorry to say you will end up being disappointed.

I will be producing a simple step by step summary of the new measures that we have to take, which I intend to have available for you to pick up as you arrive in church, and which I will also circulate via email ahead of Sunday, but the most salient points I will also briefly alight upon below.

- First of all, if you are feeling unwell, and especially if you have symptoms consistent with Covid-19, please do not come until you are better.
- Social distancing of at least 1m, ideally 2, must be maintained by all, except between those who are of the same household. This applies both inside and outside the church building.
- Wearing face masks is not required but you are welcome to do so.
- As you enter, your presence will be recorded in a register, in accordance with the Government's track and trace scheme.
- You will not be handed any books or news sheets by the sidespeople, but expected to pick up your own, which you must not let anyone else handle.
- Rows of seating has been spaced out to accommodate this need, but within a row there should be no more than three people maximum.
- Congregational singing is currently prohibited, so there will be no hymns and no choir, however the organ will still be played at the 10am service, at which some parts of the service may be sung by a single voice in a cantor capacity.
- You will be required to sanitise your hands as you enter and again as you leave, and are also encouraged to do so before receiving Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion will be in one kind only, the bread, and will be distributed solely by me, after copious amounts of hand sanitizing.
- There will be no refreshments served afterwards, and you will be strongly encouraged to leave the church swiftly after the end of the service.

Some of these measures I am sure you will have been expecting. Others may come as a shock to you. It is of course very disappointing that many of the things that help to make us St Mary's – our choral tradition and hearty hymn singing, our sharing of the body and blood of Christ in both forms, and our warm fellowship over tea and coffee, among other things – cannot yet be reintroduced. We are taking these steps at the express command of our Government and Church leadership, and although some of these measures may seem over the top, it is all with the express aim of keeping the level of risk as low as possible. Ultimately, this is about preserving life, and ensuring that our church is a place of sacred healing, a safe space to encounter Jesus Christ, as all churches should be.

Due to the lack of hymn singing at the 10am Parish Eucharist, it is worth saying that for the time being the 8am and 10am Sunday services will be much more similar, the main difference now being a stylistic one of traditional language liturgy vs contemporary. As the number of people who can attend each service will now be limited by social distancing measures, I would like to again ask whether some of you who habitually attend the 10am service may consider temporarily switching to the 8am, so that we are not at risk of having more people than we can accommodate seeking to attend the 10am.

Throughout the lockdown, many of you have been joining in with the worship that we have broadcast online via Facebook. While I am glad that many of us will be able and happy to come together in church again, I am aware that this will not be so for everyone.

It is therefore my full intention to continue streaming services over the Internet, so that those who will not be returning to us straight away will be able to participate from their homes as they have been up until now. The fact that we will be returning to a more normal way of doing things in the church will no doubt present us with some further technological challenges, but we are already taking steps to anticipate and resolve them, and I ask for your patient indulgence if it takes us a little while to get this right.

I wish to end by speaking directly to those who have either decided that you are not yet ready to return to church or who are undecided. Some of you will have received shielding letters from the Government and must follow those instructions. Some of you may wish to be able to attend, but because we cannot offer lifts in our cars at the moment due to being in a confined space with someone not of our household will therefore find it difficult to get here. And some of you know yourselves to be vulnerable or at risk, you might think that the relaxation of lockdown rules is going too quickly, and just don't feel like it is safe yet to come back into St Mary's for Sunday services.

To all of you who feel this way, please know that I hear you, and I understand. I want to make it very clear that no one should feel under any pressure to attend church physically at the moment. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1), including the freedom to know when it will feel right and safe for each one of us to return to the church building. In the meantime, know that although you may not be *inside* St Mary's Church with us, you are still St Mary's Church with us. I trust that by listening to the gentle prompting of God's Spirit, you will know when it is right for you to return. For "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love." (2 Timothy 1:7)

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on Sunday morning. How happy I will be to have you with me in church again!

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

Feast of St Thomas the Apostle, 3rd July 2020