



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

**The Walk, Potters Bar
Herts, EN6 1QQ**

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

Re: Re-opening of St Mary's Church

Dear friends in Christ,

You will have heard by now that the Government has declared that places of worship can now open for individual private prayer, and we have also been issued guidance by Bishop Alan and the Church of England generally as to how we should proceed to do this.

As a church that for a long time has had a policy of being open for several hours a week, and a generous and fruitful ministry of Watchers and Welcomers to facilitate this, the church being locked to all visitors for such a long period has been very sad. But it has also been necessary, and as we move towards opening up to visitors we need to remember that COVID-19 is still out there, that any one of us could catch it and that many of us can be classed as being "at risk". It is therefore essential that we operate in line with national Government and Church guidance.

A risk assessment has been carried out in line with said guidance, and I can now announce the following:

- This Thursday 18th June the church will be open as a "test run" between 10:30am-12pm.
- Providing there are no unforeseen issues or concerns, the aim is then for St Mary's to be open between 10:30am-12pm every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, in a fashion similar (but not the same as) our normal Watching and Welcoming hours.
- Entrance to church will be **via the North door coming in from The Walk only**, and only the Blessed Sacrament Chapel will be accessible. The main doors into the church from the car park will remain locked and the main body of the church will not be open. This is in order to limit the amount of cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces to only the relatively small area of the chapel, which will be the only part of the church open to parishioners and the general public.
- Having measured according to current social distancing guidelines, the maximum number of individual visitors allowed in the chapel at any one time is six. This does not include the two church volunteers who will need to be present at all times.

- All visitors will be required to use the hand sanitizer provided as they enter and exit the church. Chairs are provided for them to sit in to pray, and candles are available for them to light if they wish.
- Visitors will not be required to sign a visitors book.
- Sadly there is as yet no change to the ban on public worship, and therefore all church services must still be conducted solely by me, behind locked doors and with no congregation present.

A word on staffing the church for this ministry. Until the pandemic forced us to close, we have for many years had a flourishing Watching and Welcoming ministry staffed by volunteers who have enabled the church to be open for six hours a week. I remain deeply grateful to everyone who has served in this ministry, either recently or in the past, and I must give a special vote of thanks to the wonderful Heather Hawkes who has so graciously organised the rota for this ministry. Thank you to her and to all of you who have been a part of this outreach to our local community. When this pandemic began, Heather and I agreed that I should take on the enlisting of volunteers who may be able to continue to provide this service and who do not fall within a restricted age group (70 years or older) or have underlying health conditions. Consequently, to those who have been on the Watching and Welcoming rota, please do not be offended if you are not asked by me to volunteer to keep the church open at this phase. Government and church guidelines actively discourage people over 70 taking on a role such as this one at the moment, and it is only because of the utmost regard for your safety that we are for now having to unfortunately take this more exclusive approach.

Finally, please remember that we are opening in order to provide a sacred space in which people can **pray**. This is all that the Government allows us to do at this time. We may not resume social activities or fellowship groups, nor should you expect the opportunity to meet up with your friends from church for a nice long catch-up. As harsh as this may sound, we cannot be seen to be flouting the rules or acting like everything is normal again, because sadly things are not normal yet. Please do come into church for a visit, give a friendly hello to whoever welcomes you, and spend some time praying. But if you arrange to come with someone else, or you meet a friend you know on your visit, please understand that if you want to talk at length you will have to do so outside the church and away from other people. Not only is this essential from a health and safety perspective, but it serves to reinforce the fact that the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, over and above every other part of our church, is a place dedicated to quiet prayer, where sustained conversation should be avoided.

I hope that you will receive gladly this news that our beloved church is open for visitors again, and you will avail yourselves of the opportunity to enter this sacred space, to pray for an end to this pandemic and the healing of our nation and the world.

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

First Sunday after Trinity, 14th June 2020