



Registered Charity No. 1193766

Dear All

I am writing to inform you that the C of E have issued new guidelines concerning worship and the use of church buildings in the light of the new government guidelines (January 20th) relating to Covid 19 virus.

Background

The incidence of the virus is falling, though it remains high. Omicron is the dominant variant throughout the UK, and it is more transmissible. There have been cases in the parish, amongst congregation member's families and at places where different members of the congregation work. Most people have taken the opportunity to be fully vaccinated which is very effective in limiting serious illness. But the impact of long-Covid is an ongoing concern, even for those whose illness is initially mild. (Estimates suggest between 10% and 20% of those infected experience enduring health problems for three months or longer. We know that this is also the case for some of our congregation members.)

Harnham Churches have been operating under a risk assessment which has ensured good hand and respiratory hygiene, social distancing, face-coverings, and good ventilation – all important factors in lessening the spread of the disease.

Legal changes mean that face coverings are no longer mandatory in any setting- face coverings are mainly intended to protect others, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) they are not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing. Churches can open as a visitor attraction; Singing can take place -choirs and worship groups can 'perform'; Bellringing is no longer limited by social distancing rules; there are no longer limits to the number of people in a building, people in a choir or performance group; no covid pass is required. The C of E has stated that communion is permitted in two kinds dependent on the context.

In every situation there is likely to be a range of feeling about risk, both to ourselves and to others, that will need to be accommodated by our churches in a way appropriate to each of them. The responsibility for making decisions about how to proceed regarding acts of worship and events lies with the incumbent however in order to move forward in a united way we discussed the many options now open at PCC. The PCC considered the new guidelines carefully and we would like you to note some changes which will take place as of this Sunday 6th February.

New practices

1. Harnham continues to recommend face coverings are worn by adults but recognises this is not mandatory.
2. Cards will be available at the entrance of each church which state PLEASE RESPECT THIS SPACE for anyone who wishes to maintain social distance in their pew. The size of our churches are small. Social distancing can be maintained, and we will try to ensure this happens. Please respect the distances if you see someone using the sign.
3. The offertory of bread and wine and money will be brought forward by wardens in St George's Church. The monetary offering will be brought forward in All Saints Church.
4. Communion will continue to be provided in one kind, bread only. The congregation can kneel at the altar rail together and will be invited forward by the wardens in groups of approx. 8 people. A server will wipe altar rail in between groups of people. Distance can be maintained.
5. Children and youth can continue to meet and face covering are no longer mandatory for them. Books and toys will be returned to our churches and will be wiped down by wardens after usage.

We will review the situation again at the next PCC meeting on 23rd March. Please do come back to members of the PCC with your views. If you would like to see the full guidelines, please visit the Church of England Website.

Thank you.

Revd Becky Roberts, Chair of Harnham PCC. February 3rd 2022.