

STATEMENT GIVEN BY THE BISHOPS OF BOLTON AND MIDDLETON AT THE WEBINAR FOR CHURCHWARDENS AND CLERGY – 2 JULY 2020

As you will have heard by now, the Government has announced that from 4 July we will be permitted to re-open our churches for public worship - something we have longed and prayed for. We know that many of you will be really excited about this, eager to get going and ready with your detailed plans to open for worship this Sunday. However, we are also aware that some of you will be feeling quite apprehensive and concerned that your parishes are not yet or indeed far from ready.

Worship is fundamental to the life of the church, it renews our fellowship with God and with one another and strengthens us for our life as Christians. It is a precious gift, our duty and our joy to be able to worship God. Online worship has been wonderful and will continue to be provided no doubt; but it is now time for us to plan together to offer worship in our buildings

This is about making our buildings 'Covid-19 Secure' (this is the official terminology the government are using) and for some parishes this will be more difficult than others because of the nature of the building and/or the number of people available to make all the necessary preparations. We are grateful to Archdeacon David, Alison Moore and the team who have been going through the detail of exactly what needs to be in place to open our buildings safely for public worship – so that you have the information, advice, guidance and support available. You are not alone. For now we note that

1. Initially we only need to open **one** church building for public worship in each benefice.
2. Remember that worship will look, sound and feel different. It will probably be fairly short, minimal, with social distancing, no singing etc.
3. The requirements for Holy Communion are quite detailed and it may be that not every service will be Eucharistic
4. The important thing is to plan well, start small and build up to a place where everyone feels confident that we can worship together safely.

Bishop David is happy to extend the period of preparation for a short period (probably one measured in weeks, rather than in days or months) until you are satisfied that it is safe and practical to re-open your building.

We are conscious that clergy, wardens and other lay people all have different health needs that impact your plans and availability; there may be others in the community who might help out, for example with cleaning the church or doing some duties if we ask them. We have also asked clergy chapters to undertake a quick audit of available clergy and Readers who can lead worship and may need to help out in other benefices.

Many have been running on adrenaline for 3 months and are probably feeling exhausted; and we are very mindful that you will be in real need of rest and recuperation. It is vital therefore that everyone considers their health and well-being and that they plan for and take much-needed and well-deserved breaks.

But we all need to start on the journey back into church and our webinar is designed to help you make those first steps and give you the opportunity to raise questions. In the meantime, we will continue to support you and Bishop David's Leadership team will be praying with you and offering our practical support in the days to come.

SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ST. MARGARET'S AND ST. GEORGE'S?

The PCC met this week to discuss a whole range of issues, including the re-opening of church. It was decided that wardens and the ministry team, after receiving guidance from the diocese via a webinar, would look at the practical arrangements of re-opening our churches and keeping them COVID 19 secure. This will be done in the coming week and we will let you know the arrangements.

As I mentioned in the magazine, services are likely to be very different to those that we are used to. Safe distancing and hygiene will be essential. Singing will be restricted. A friendly handshake (much less a hug!) is not appropriate as we welcome one another. There will not be tea or coffee after worship. In terms of receiving communion, we will not be sharing the wine and the bread may be distributed in a different way. Once these practical arrangements have been put in place, we will let you know.

We will be starting slowly, opening St. Margaret's only at first for the 9.45am Sunday service and the 10.00am Wednesday service. For the immediate future at least, we will be having a mixture of services, both within church when we are open and by recorded and live streamed services, as we have been doing. We hope that we may be able to re-open on Sunday 12th July, but we will keep you informed of our progress.

Thank you for all your support.

Every blessing,

Deborah