

The Vicarage,  
2, St. Margaret's Road,  
Prestwich,  
Bury  
M252QB

Dear friends in Christ,

I hope that you are all well and coping with these challenging and everchanging times.

You will have heard on the news that churches and places of worship are able to re-open.

The government announced, on 6 June that from Monday 15 June 2020 places of worship can be open for private prayer. However, yesterday they announced that ' From 13 June, you will be able to attend your place of worship for the purposes of individual prayer.'

The stance of the diocese is

'For now, parishes should be reassured:

- While it will be permissible for churches to open for private prayer from 15 June 2020 it is not compulsory
- Individual PCCs can decide when and if they open for private prayer depending on local circumstances
- The diocese will support all parishes in the decisions that they make and offer practical advice as required.'

The agreed definition of individual prayer is: "Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act."

Our church wardens and I have met (electronically) to discuss the issues involved and the practicalities and have outlined a way forward to the PCC.

We are hoping to open for private prayer at St. Margaret's Church starting on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June, between 9.30 and 10.30am. This will give us time to put things in place to ensure everyone's health and safety. If this is successful and works well, we will also open church one evening a week, Mondays between 7.00pm and 8.00pm. We have delayed re-opening until

25<sup>th</sup> June so that measures can be put in place, risk assessments to be put on place and we can make sure that our church is as safe as it can be.

Our Wednesday and Sunday church services will still be recorded or live streamed, as will Peregrini morning prayer at 8.30am and Compline at 8.15pm. The Sunday dialling service that Sue co-ordinates will also continue.

There will need to be measures in place to keep us all safe.

- No one with coronavirus symptoms should be coming into church for any reason.
- Hand sanitiser should be used on entry and exit.
- We are coming into church for private prayer, so silence should be respected.
- Some areas of church will be cordoned off.
- Places to sit will be identified.
- Safe distancing needs to be ensured at all times.
- One of the narrowest areas in church is the entrance so care is needed to ensure that safe distancing takes place, waiting for someone to come in our go out.
- Surfaces and seats will be cleaned after the period of private prayer.
- The days have been chosen to ensure that any remnants of the virus are dead (72 hours).
- The toilets will only be accessible for emergencies as they will have to be cleaned after each person has been and safe distancing in the office is difficult.
- There may be the need to wait outside church if there are too many inside.
- Risk assessments will be in place.
- The choice to come and pray in church is up to you. There is no pressure or expectation from me or the wardens – after all, God hears our prayers wherever we are! The important thing is your safety and the safety of others.

I am sorry if this seems very prescriptive, but it is important that we all keep safe and prevent the transmission of COVID 19. It is also important in terms of our insurance policy. The diocese have advised that those who are clinically vulnerable category should be discouraged from opening or cleaning church for the above reasons.

It is really good to be able to return to church and pray as individuals, but we all need to be aware of our own safety and that of others.

Thank you, once again for all your support, for all that you have been doing to help, support and encourage others. It has been appreciated by all those that I have spoken to.

With regards our churches, I will keep you informed of updates from the government and the diocese, as and when they happen.

Every blessing,

Revd. Deborah