

**St. Mary's Church**

*A still point in a  
turning world.*  
T S Eliot

 THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

 Diocese of  
Rochester

The Parish Church of Riverhead with Dunton Green, Kent;  
now part of the West Sevenoaks Team Ministry

## **Opening the Church at Stage 4**

Dear friends,

This week sees another stage of restrictions being lifted. From Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July, in line with the guidance we have been provided, we will:

- a. Take the opportunity to further enrich our worship.
- b. Simplify some of our arrangements while maintaining our commitment to help protect and support our parish community, particularly those who are vulnerable or anxious.

As of Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July, the power to make decisions on appropriate arrangements has been given to incumbent priests. I will happily take this responsibility and will continue to do so in consultation across the Team and with our wonderful churchwardens.

Our arrangements will be kept under review, and we will proceed by careful steps for the coming weeks as the best way forward is discerned. My prayer is that circumstances will allow for a more settled pattern in the autumn.

The Bishop of London this week has said:

*"....This is a difficult point in the course of the pandemic. Despite vaccination rates, cases are up, hospital admissions are up and long covid remains an ongoing concern. Therefore our approach needs to be cautious and careful.*

*The government encourages us to take personal responsibility. But taking personal responsibility means responsibility for our neighbour, not just for ourselves, and taking precautions to protect those more vulnerable than we*

*consider ourselves to be.”*

Below is an indication of what we hope to reintroduce on 25<sup>th</sup> July, and a description of the things we shall do to lower risk in order to allow us to do this. This should be thought of as a careful balancing act between relaxations and protective measures. All this is done with a particular view to our children and younger adults who have not been vaccinated, and to those who were previously shielding who have been advised by the NHS to avoid contact with those who have not been double vaccinated (something extremely difficult for those who have school age children, for example).

To those who fall into those categories or who are vulnerable or anxious for any reason, I want to be clear that (1) for now masks will continue to be worn whilst moving or whilst singing in St Mary's (with the exception of those who are exempt), (2) that the zoom link to the 9:30am service will continue to be available for those who are particularly vulnerable.

From Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July:

- We will keep every other pew roped off for the moment but will allow worshippers to seat themselves where they see fit, and with due deference to those around them.
- We will keep the use of service booklets which we have been using. These will be individually picked up by worshippers on arrival, and then deposited at the exit when leaving.
- We will trial the congregational singing of hymns whilst wearing face coverings. We are also hoping to trial a choir to lead the sung worship in the near future, singing at a social distance.
- We will trial the use of hymnbooks, which individuals will be available as you come into church. Please leave the hymnbooks in your pews at the end of the service.
- We hope to trial the return of a crucifer in procession with the ministers from September onwards.

What we have put in place to help reduce the risk:

- Face coverings will be worn whilst moving around the building or whilst singing (unless exempt).
- Those presiding at Communion will continue to thoroughly sanitise their hands and wear face masks during the distribution.
- As much ventilation as possible, a one-way system, and hand sanitizing on entry and exit will continue.
- Social distancing measures will be maintained for Sunday Club sessions when they return after the summer break.
- We will continue to clean high contact surfaces (light switches, pew tops etc) around services.
- The Test & Trace QR code remains for scanning. You will be encouraged to either scan the code or write your name and contact details on the form by the door. You do not need to do both.
- The zoom link to the 9:30am service will remain for the most vulnerable.
- Holy Communion will continue to be received in one kind, or via intinction for now. Hand sanitiser is available for those who wish to use it during the distribution.

This will all be kept in careful review. You can find a copy of our risk assessment at the back of the church.

Although I have only been with you since January, can I thank you all as a Church community for the way in which you have maintained and continued your engagement with Church over this extraordinary time. As we take this next step forward, I pray that through a confident, respectful, and reflective approach we will move forward together, continuing to worship God and serve our community here in Riverhead with Dunton Green.

I am conscious that some may be frustrated by the way forward. I have made these decisions based upon conversations with the wardens and team members alongside the government and church guidance which I have received. Please do come back to me if you have any further concerns or questions.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Andy Finn  
Team Vicar

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