



ST. BARNABAS
CHURCH
keeping connected to God - being connected to our world

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Dear All

It has been 25 weeks since our last Sunday morning service in the Church building! I want to say a massive thank you to all those who have led, preached, played, prayed and technologically connected us online...and for all those who have shopped, phoned, texted, visited and encouraged one another along the way! We have had to adapt to being apart and yet have been buoyed with contact with each other and being blessed by God in surprising ways. I am writing to let you know of what is next, I know there is plenty here, but please do read to the end!

Our capacity and needs have of course been so varied, but I thank God so many have remained well despite concerns, and that those with work or family responsibilities have been sustained. Have you experienced God's presence at some point over the last 6 months? It might have been through reading the Bible, an interaction with someone or a striking moment...I would love to hear it, and perhaps something to be shared with others in Church this Sunday, even if it's only 30secs! Whilst we may not have been in the habit recently, but without feeling individually pressurised, the Bible encourages us to do so... **Brothers and sisters, what should we say then? When you come together, each of you brings something. You bring a hymn or a teaching or a message from God. You bring a message in another language or explain what was said in that language. Everything must be done to build up the church 1 Corinthians 14v26.**

Now that all of us in the congregation over 11 years old are expected to wear face covering's/masks like in many other enclosed spaces (unless medically unable), the PCC have agreed with the attached proposal that covers all the details of how we want to welcome you back for morning worship services from this Sunday 6th September. The diagram (by David Thomson) shows how we can enter or exit via any of the doors, but we will need to be appropriately distanced as we sanitize our hands immediately (and when exiting) and to go promptly to our seats when we arrive. Every other pew will be used, but we need to fill up from the centre of the pew as a single person or household, then whoever also sits in that pew to be 3 book-holder spaces away and with their household or "bubble". When that pew cannot hold more people, we will need to sit in another pew, or in chair/s under the balcony, or pews upstairs in the balconies. We will record attendance for track & trace purposes.

We are so blessed to have such a large capacity at St Barnabas that I am confident we can welcome as many of our regulars who want to come! Whilst you can choose how far forward or back you would like to sit downstairs if you arrive earlier, our Welcomer's & Wardens may need to guide you as to where it is best to sit. When we celebrate Holy Communion from Sunday 16th Sept, the diagram illustrates how we are to progress down the central aisle before returning to our seat round the outer aisle's. This has worked fairly easily in the two afternoon services we have held, with only distributing wafer bread individually whilst standing.

Our services will follow a similar format to regular Sunday's, but will be shorter to begin with at least, lasting only 45mins. This is to minimise risk, to keep all ages engaged and because we are unable to have full congregational singing. I am looking forward to once again be led in worship by our musicians in person, but for us to listen, pray, reflect or just gently join in...I am not going to try and police who might be humming or softly singing along if you would like to! Yet for now, we need to accept we cannot participate in worship in exactly the same way as in normal times until guidance is changed from proven studies of congregational singing.

Sunday morning services will be aimed for all age participation in the first month before exploring resuming children's and youth provision when appropriate. We are starting a new series on Prayer which would be great to be followed by in small groups too. This has free online videos for groups meeting online, and a book which you might like. The topic and group sessions on prayercourse.org is so easy to follow, but will really help us keep focused on our eternally loving God during these uncertain times. I hope you might be able to join a small group if you are not in one, if you are unsure please do contact me about which one/when might be good to try to start from 10 days' time. I will be restarting Morning Prayer from 9:30am next Wednesday 9th Sept, and from Weds 16th to run the Prayer Course in Church for a small group immediately afterward.

All that being said, if you are at extra risk and 'clinically extremely vulnerable' we do not want you to feel pressurised into attending the building until whenever it is right or you are happy to do so. Whilst I do not want any of us to be so "locked down" that you are isolated and prevented from being encouraged and to worship God, the decision to do so is yours alone. We want you to be able to remain connected from home, so Brian Sweatman is working very hard and has invested a great deal to enable those online to watch our services live via www.facebook.com/StBarnabasChurchStPaulsCray or later on in the day or week via www.facebook.com/StBarnabasChurchStPaulsCray/videos/ or via links on our website <http://st-barnabas-cray.org.uk/> At the moment you can still watch Sunday's service via Zoom, but this may change in following weeks, but do pray for him and us as this is a lot of change to manage! I am also aiming to stream Morning Prayer online for those unable to physically attend. All those participating up the front may therefore be seen online, but if you are in the congregation you will not. If you want to contribute in the future, but not to be seen online, please notify me ahead. This is important particularly regarding Safeguarding matters. Alice will be resuming regular hours shortly if you needed to speak to her.

This will be beneficial for our ministry in the long run and we look forward to developing different volunteers (of different ages) to help. As I have mentioned regularly, it is important for us to encourage and equip more of us to play different roles and learn new skills for us to flourish as a Church family in worship and to serve our community now and for generations to come. Our online reach has given many people encouragement to worship and connect, someone likened it to "*widening the doors*" of the Church, especially for the growing number of people who have never been to a Church service and do not know the good news of Jesus Christ. Our series on prayer will hopefully "*deepen our wells*" of enjoying time with God and growing our spiritual strength. So if you are able please do come, I and others would love to see you! If not, do keep connected,

Yours faithfully,



Revd Neil Coleman
Vicar of St Barnabas Church