

The Four Ways Mission Community

St James, Swimbridge | The Holy Name, Gunn | St Paul, Landkey | St Peter, West Buckland | St Michael, East Buckland

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23rd May 2020 for 24th May – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to our weekly update to the churches of our Mission Community. First of all, I hope you are all keeping safe and well, as lockdown is slowly unfolding before us.

Many of us are waiting for movement on opening our churches but we must be cautious and take our time as we have much to prepare for. Today (Friday 22nd), I received updates and suggestions from the Diocese of Exeter on how we are to prepare for this and, although it is a huge amount of information, with technical do's and don'ts held within it, I would like to give you all a flavour of what it contains. It proposes a phased reopening along the following lines:

Phase One: Clergy allowed back in church for personal prayer and broadcasting of recorded services. This has been allowed since 7th May.

Phase Two: As well as the above, permission will be given to reopen churches for personal prayer. The priest and PCC will need to decide whether and when to open their churches for private prayer. Anyone will be able to enter an open church, provided hygiene and social distancing measures are observed. This could happen from mid-June.

Phase Three: As well as the above, clergy will be allowed to take small Sunday services. National guidance will be issued about numbers in the congregation and social distancing requirements. The date for this is as yet unknown.

Phase Four: Larger services will be allowed in church but when this could be feasible is also not yet known.

It is likely that our churches will begin this process by the PCCs deciding if and when their buildings could open. There is no insistence for us to open if we do not feel able to. However, it would be good to start meetings to prepare for this possibility even if this will present some challenges as we cannot meet without social distancing and many within our churches fall into an-risk group.

Among matters that PCCs will have to consider will be whether we can provide adequate hygiene and the ability for social distancing. Roping or taping off parts of the building could be a means of limiting the area required to be maintained for worship, if that is feasible.

Churches will need to be cleaned regularly once opened for public private prayer and this will raise practical issues such as whether a cleaning rota can be set up. Protective equipment and knowing how to clean heritage items without damaging them will also need to be taken into account.

Later on, when services are permitted, ways will need to be found to avoid using order-of-service booklets. Hymn books will not be needed as singing will not be allowed until the risk of passing on the virus is negligible. Likewise, it will be some time before it will be possible to share the peace and to take Holy Communion. We are currently allowed to ring a single bell, though!

These measures may seem harsh, but we are responsible for public buildings and will have to comply with the new regulations while they are in place.

We have been asked to continue the new ways of worship that we are doing now, especially with providing services on the internet (e.g. Mission Prayer). One benefit of the lockdown is that people who are unable to attend church in person have suddenly felt themselves to be included as they can watch online! It has been suggested that church services could be recorded in future so that these valued congregation members do not feel excluded when things get back to normal. We are asked to look to the future to seek new ways to attract people again new and old.

The link to Mission Prayer is <https://www.facebook.com/mission.prayerprogramme>

These are just some highlights for you to digest. The most important thing is that we remember we are all in this together and we will return and will be stronger when this is behind us.

I long for the day we can gather together, worship, sing and ring our bells and be part of our church community and our communities we serve.

Thank you all for being patient. I pray that each of you keep healthy safe and blessed by God.

With prayer

Shaun