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St John's, Houghton with St Peter's, Kingmoor

To love Christ and make Him known

Wednesday 2nd September 2020

Dear Friends,

I hope and pray that you have enjoyed the past few weeks, and have been encouraged by God's word from 1Samuel – which I've appreciated very much. Thank you, as ever, for all your prayers and kind greetings on my return from family holiday.

You will have heard in Sunday's Church Family News that we are planning to start to take steps to re-open our buildings this week. I am writing to outline them, and hopefully answer some of the questions you may have. Please do be in touch with me, the Church Wardens, or Office Team if you have any concerns or confusions.

1 Church Buildings

We are reopening St John's, Houghton, for Sunday gathered worship from 6th September. Our plan is to show the online service at 10am, on a big screen. One reason we are doing this is to serve those who have been unable to see our services at home; another is so that some of us can start to enjoy meeting together again – since the word "church" means "gathering" in the Bible.

In opening the building up on Sundays we shall be carefully following all relevant advice. Most importantly, if anyone has potential symptoms (new persistent cough, raised temperature) then please stay at home and self-isolate. Other aspects we are now familiar with: facemasks should be worn (unless you have a clinical reason not to do so) and 2m social distancing must be observed for anyone outside your family/bubble; there will be no singing, though we will listen to the hymns and songs, and we are asked not to stay too long in the building after the formal gathering.

Please don't worry if you can't remember all of this; there will be greeters on hand to help out in the building, and spare masks in case some of us forget.

With the St Peter's site, we have reopened the Church Office, worked out how to welcome the Pre-School, and are willing to host indoor funerals there, should that be necessary.

2 Sunday Zoom

Because church is about us encouraging each other, we will be starting an 11.15am Zoom each Sunday from now on. You can get into Zoom either on the internet or by phoning in. Please contact the Church Office for details. Our church account can take up to 100 guests, so we hope that will be enough! When we have joined, there will be a chance to speak with a few others in what are called 'break out rooms' – but we can explain that all on Sunday.

If you cannot access the internet, it is possible to join this meeting via a telephone line, and there are a number of people at church who could help with this if you wish.



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3 Welcoming Others

One further way we can open things up a little is to invite someone else round to enjoy the online service together, now that two families are permitted to meet together in homes. Why not think of a person, a couple or even a family with whom you could share Sunday's 10am meeting – again, so that church is deliberately communal and not individual.

It may be that none of these work for you, or none seems right to you yet. If that's the case, please don't worry. We all have different fears and needs. I've found it helpful to remember that we cannot eliminate risk: I'm praying to be 'risk aware' not 'risk averse' as even crossing a road involves some danger. In the coming weeks we may be able to take further steps to open things up, whenever that's wise. Decisions are yet to be taken, but we may start showing the 10am service at St Peter's too; we could start live-streaming services; we might develop a mid-week service; we may be able to offer Communion on a Sunday after the live-stream, and there are other options too. But for now, these are our next prayerful steps, which we intend to keep in place until after the Church Family Weekend in October.

We have an exciting programme of teaching and fellowship time planned for our Church Family Weekend. It will be a bit different this year and we won't all be able to meet together physically but we pray that we'll still have lots of opportunities to encourage and enjoy time with one another. Mark Pickles (from the North West Gospel Partnership) will be helping us explore what the Bible says about 'The Love of God' and how we can experience and be transformed by God's love. Please do save the dates: Friday 2nd - Sunday 4th October.

If you are planning to come along on Sunday, or on any Sundays in September, it would be helpful for our planning if you could let the Office know by 3pm the Friday beforehand. We are not operating a booking system, but this will assist our planning. There is a legal limit for the building, as determined by our Risk Assessment, but of course there's plenty of space on the St John's site. I would encourage us please to arrive early so that we can queue, wash our hands and be seated ready for the 10am start.

As ever, this comes with love in the Lord, and gratefulness for our partnership together.

Andrew