

Dear Friends

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

Ecclesiastes 3.1-8

This is a time of changing and moving on and we want to highlight some of the ways that we are continuing to respond to the changing situation around us in the world and in the church as a result of Covid 19. One joy over the past month has been that funerals and weddings have been celebrated in several of our Churches. In this area we are fortunate that the virus is not escalating rapidly allowing us to find new joy in different ways of doing things. We are aware though that Reading, Swindon and indeed Cowley are seeing increasing numbers of cases and government advice continues to change. Some weeks we feel as if just keeping up is a job!!

In all our villages Newsletter deadlines for September are approaching and we are about to send – with a wing and a prayer - a firm pattern of services for publication. For us this feels like a landmark! The mid-morning Zoom service will continue through September (with Ordinations and a farewell to Bishop Colin amongst them) and every parish that wishes will have two regular services during the month as well as ‘specials’ for example harvest and Messy Church! This way we move forward with care – and with an active concern to strike a balance with the different paces that different people are comfortable with.

From this Sunday everyone attending a church service will be required to wear a mask. As your clergy we have been doing this for the past three weeks so we know that masks are uncomfortable, and make your glasses steam up! However this is a positive action and one which some people feel should have been introduced long ago. Perhaps most importantly wearing a mask is an outward and positive sign of our love towards friends and neighbours – a sign of our commitment to keep others safe. It’s very tempting to lift your mask to read a lesson for example but if you are using a microphone this significantly increases the risk to the next speaker. If you are asked to read and this is a problem for you please talk to the person responsible for the service. We don’t want this to be more difficult than it has to be and we want to keep you all as safe as we can.

Communion continues to be in one kind. Clergy are handling the elements and preparing for communion to minimise the risk for you – obviously they are hand sanitising scrupulously. There are different ways of organising congregations to receive communion in different churches – please listen to the notices at the beginning of the service and remember keep your distance if you are moving to a point of distribution. In particular please lift your mask from the bottom by the elastic to take communion allowing it to drop back.

We need to keep asking you to reserve your seat for church this helps us retain a three week record for track and trace purposes and to make sure that everyone who wants to come to a service can do so safely. Please register as early as you can to help us with this – we are absolutely committed to providing an additional service on any Sunday when demand exceeds the number of seats available!

Some of you may be thinking 'Enough of the nanny church' – but do remember that there is a long tradition of thinking of the Church as our mother and that physical and spiritual care are equally important in these times when we still do not know enough about the way this virus spreads. One view is that we should behave constantly as if we might be an asymptomatic carrier. It is certain that our progress will be too slow for some and frightening quick and risky for others. Whatever you think please remember Jesus' constant concern for the anxious the scared and the vulnerable and mirror that concern in your approach to your neighbour.

Time and again during this epidemic one expression of our faith –often called the new commandment springs to mind

Cling to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength – and love your neighbour as yourself. For many of us this is a rule of life and one we are needing to interpret in new ways as we move forward together.

All of us remain happy to talk about any concerns and requests and you can contact us via the office number 01865340007 as well as our various personal numbers.

God Bless

Your Clergy Team

The Diocese is collecting for a gift for Bishop Colin's retirement. If anyone wishes to contribute personally we will happily pass on the details.