

Letter to WSAM churches

2nd July 2020

Dear Friends

Hello - I hope you are all managing to keep in touch with your friends and family; and maybe now starting to see people in person for the first time for months. There is still a long way to go, but things are getting better, thankfully. It was great to see Kenneth able to attend the Billingshurst Street Pastors AGM this evening by Zoom.

Outdoors

Petworth friends managed to organise to meet up in a small group, outside in the fresh air, again last Sunday morning; and before the weather deteriorated a bit, several small groups had met up in similar circumstances in Billingshurst, as well as many people 'bumping into' one another in the village. I'm sure these meetings will continue.

I believe there are also people in Pulborough anxious to meet up now, although only one or two have spoken to me about it. For the elders to know whether it's worth organising something, they need to know that there is a demand, so let us know !!

At present it would need to be outdoors (maybe under the big copper beech tree in front of the church), and if meeting up for a chat and general catch-up (or, equally for a prayer meeting or Bible Study) it would have to be a maximum of six people, and taking care to stay at least 2 metres apart. But that could still be very worthwhile!

Until we re-open our buildings, the only exception to the six people rule is a formal service of worship in the church grounds (so this is a legal option only for Pulborough) - at which a slightly larger group could attend, although still at a 2 metre spacing. But I emphasise that legally it would have to be a formal service of worship. We could have prayers and readings and talks, but not music or singing. Government rules say:

"Activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided in worship". I think that sounds like a verse from a psalm! Also, at the end, the rules say, "Once completed, participants should be encouraged to move on promptly, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection." So sadly no socialising afterwards.

How do you feel - would this be worth doing, in such a restricted and potentially uncomfortable form, when we can share in worship online or join in with the TV or radio?

Let us know what you think - while we can't have Church Meetings, this is your chance to have your say! Would you like to meet for a chat? for a Bible Study or Prayer Meeting? or for a formal worship service? Please let me or an elder know.

Indoors

All three churches' Elders Meetings are working hard, trying to apply the government guidance to our own circumstances, so that eventually we can return to worship indoors in our own buildings. The possibility of opening for private prayer for short periods is also being considered. There are Risk Assessments to be completed and arrangements to be made. Each building (and each congregation) is very different, so things may well move at a different pace in each situation. Don't be surprised if some church buildings open before others. You also need to be aware that worship will continue to be very different - probably shorter, with no music, no coffee and chat afterwards, and with smaller congregations as some of our buildings won't fit the whole congregation at once with social distancing.

Some people, of course, won't feel ready to gather together with others yet anyway, and it is really important that both the Sunday Bulletin order of service, and some form of Zoom worship, will continue for the foreseeable future so that nobody is left out. Across the country as a whole, one of the positive aspects of worship during the lockdown has been the number of people, especially disabled people, who have been able to worship regularly online after being unable to get to worship physically for many years. We must try to ensure that we offer a wider range of options in the future.

The URC has produced what they call a Personal Risk Assessment - a way for each person to calculate their own risk, based on factors such as their age and health. It comes from work done by the British Medical Association, and can be downloaded from the URC website at:

https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/Personal_Risk_Assessment.pdf

I would encourage you to have a look at this, and reflect on what precautions you may need to take to keep yourself and others as safe as possible in the coming weeks.

Sunday Evening Zoom Worship

Will now take place every 'Sunday at Six'. If you haven't attended before and would like to give it a try, speak to Karen or me.

Please hold in your prayers this week all those in mourning for loved ones, those fearing for their jobs and their homes, and the churches and community of Leicester.

Have a good weekend, and stay in touch - with each other and with me.

Anne Lewitt

These letters and Bulletins, with some details removed for confidentiality, are now being added to our church websites so that they are more easily and widely accessible.