

Parish of Central Exeter

This is to update everyone on the current situation regarding opening of churches in the Parish of Central Exeter. It comes from Keith and Betsy as the Parish churchwardens, in discussion with Sheila as Parish Rector.

The Diocese has issued the attached document to help us all think about the issues surrounding re-opening our churches. We recommend that you read it to appreciate the present thinking and advice that we have.

At present all our churches are closed. Irrespective of when any government or Church of England permission is given for churches to re-open (with restrictions), any decision to reopen will be the responsibility of the PCC. The Diocesan advice is clear that no Parish should feel under any pressure to reopen. Given that our congregation is composed mainly of people in the most vulnerable age range, and that for the majority of people, walking to the Parish is not appropriate, and the problems of ensuring that infection control can be maintained within our church buildings, we feel that it is unlikely that we shall re-open our churches before the end of summer, and even when we do feel able to open, it should not be expected that it will be a return to the way things were.

We are therefore expecting to continue alternative methods of communal Christian activity within the Parish. These include:

The weekly 'at home' services emailed or posted to church members;

Pastoral care through phone calls, emails and some socially distanced visits;

PCC meetings conducted by online correspondence;

Virtual meetings via zoom for

Reflection on the weekly service

Prayer

French conversation classes

Poetry appreciation classes.

In addition the Diocese and cathedral offer weekly or regular newsletters and their websites contain links to online services. Nigel Walsh also shares a link to an online service with St David's church.

When the restrictions on the numbers of people who may gather relax a bit more, we hope to offer opportunities for getting together in small groups outside – say in someone's garden, with a range of activities whether picnics or prayers.

- Are there other ways in which we can help to maintain your spiritual life?

Looking further ahead:

We need to distinguish between opening the church building for public entry and opening it for a 'service'. The main issue for public entry will be infection control, which could include some means of restricting areas for entry. We should not feel under any sense of obligation to open the church for public entry if we are unable to maintain safe conditions.

To open for services, even if the practical considerations of infection control and safe distancing can be observed, it is unwise to assume that the present congregation will simply return. We are reliant as a Parish for the practical running of services on people who may well still wish to self-isolate so that any form of 'service' will have to be different from the present.

We should view all of this as an opportunity, rather than a threat.

So given that some form of restriction is likely to be in place for longer than we might hope for, there are two main questions to consider:

- How to we continue to support and maintain the spiritual and social life of the Parish when there will be restrictions on our ability to come together inside a building?
- How could we provide an opportunity for prayer and/or worship within a (church) building under whatever restrictions (seem likely) to be in place?

We welcome your comments and views, preferably by Friday 5 June. Please email or write to either ozkeith@aol.com or betsy.jane@icloud.com

Keep safe and well

Keith and Betsy
Churchwardens