



13th June 2020

Re-opening of Church

Dear Friends,

on 13th June 2020 we can now re-open churches for private prayer – and from 15th to conduct funerals. This of course must be done safely, and that means following the Government guidelines of personal hygiene, social distancing and cleaning after visits.

This week the Parochial Church Council of Keston Parish Church will meet remotely to discuss this, amongst other business. I have added links below to documents that help in decision making and also in making sure churches are opened safely. You probably won't want to read the whole thing as they are lengthy! There is also a 'Risk Assessment Form' available – I haven't included this.

I am writing this to you to gauge your interest, as a member of Keston congregation, in coming into church for private prayer. I need to say that we will not be able to gather in any way and that the guidance prohibits me from leading any form of prayer, even if we are socially distanced and keeping to all the other guidance.

The logistics of how we might keep safe in Keston Church will be discussed at the PCC Meeting – and it is obvious that, being such a small building, it will be a challenge to follow the guidance!

This is an excerpt from a letter from Bishop James:

Subject to any last minute change of mind in Downing Street, our church buildings may be opened for private prayer from next Monday, 15th June. The expectation is that such opening will be supervised and will follow strictly the guidance about numbers, social distancing, cleansing and removal of items which can carry infection. All of that detailed guidance, including a helpful risk assessment tool, is on our diocesan website and the national Church of England website.

Such opening could of course just be for short advertised periods. I do want to emphasise the use of the word *may*. Nowhere are ministers, lay officers or PCCs under any obligation to do this. Whether for individual reasons of shielding, or in the light of the resources needed to open buildings safely, there are places where this may not be possible or desirable. This does mean that there will be variety of practice and advice may be needed in relation to particular local settings.

Many will point out a clear inconsistency here: if small funerals in church buildings, why not small weddings, baptisms or other smaller services? This is under active discussion with government, but at the moment government is not giving that permission – indeed, as you will know, all wedding provision (whether religious or civil) remains suspended. The provision for small funerals is, therefore, an exception to the continuing norm; I think it may also be a way of government seeing how we handle things before authorising the next stage of re-opening.

For now, please let me know your thoughts –which I can put forward at the PCC Meeting, or log your interest in coming into the church.

Government Guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>

Church of England also have guidance:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Opening%20Churches%20for%20individual%20prayer%20and%20funerals%20v.2.pdf>

Every Blessing
Rev Carol