

6 January 2021

Dear friends and parishioners,

It was with heavy hearts, I suspect, that most of us listened to the Prime Minister's statement on Monday evening announcing a third national lockdown. The weeks ahead of us will be difficult ones as we once again have to adapt to increased isolation and more time at home. This year we have the glimmer of hope that life will return to normal as the vaccine is administered.

Public Worship

Unlike in the previous lockdowns churches are permitted to remain open for private prayer and public worship. I welcome this change of approach by the Government but consequently it does mean that the burden of responsibility to act in an appropriate manner lies with us.

The PCC met this evening to consider its response and, jointly with me, has reluctantly decided, under the provisions of Canon Law, to suspend public worship in the parish, with immediate effect. Our church buildings will also be closed. This is not a decision we have made lightly and certainly no priest or PCC wishes to stop people worshipping. Careful consideration has been given to the following factors:

- With the spread of the new mutation of COVID the risk of transmission is greatly increased meaning that the situation has significantly changed from last year. Furthermore, the number of local cases and hospital admissions has greatly risen and we need to do all we can as responsible citizens to reduce pressure on the NHS.
- Our decision should be viewed as a contribution to the Common Good of our community and nation, forgoing our own desire to worship together in person in order to play our role in reducing the spread of COVID.
- A recognition that it is incredibly difficult for people not to mingle in church before and after services and that this increases the possibility for transmission.
- We are mindful of our responsibilities towards our volunteers and employed staff and need to take action to reduce the possibility of transmission. Furthermore, we do not wish any volunteers to feel under an obligation to continue with their duties at this time.

- The need to protect the vulnerable in our society, recognising our responsibilities to one another.

We cannot yet say when public worship will start again; we will keep the situation under review and be guided by the local and national contexts and Diocesan advice. In the meantime, Fr Benji and I will continue to say Morning Prayer and offer Mass each day in church. Funerals will continue to be conducted at the Parish Church.

Pastoral Response

Opportunities for pastoral care will inevitably be curtailed at the moment and, except in cases of grave illness, will be limited to telephone and online forms of contact. I would encourage you to reach out to either me (762214) or Fr Benji (765196) if you would like some pastoral care or even just to have a chat. For more sustained contact please do remember that we have a number of individuals who are willing to contact you regularly by telephone. If you would like to take up this offer then please be in contact with the Parish Administrator (administrator@wantageparish.com or 764533).

In a new pastoral response, the clergy will be praying by name for all members of our congregations at Mass or Morning Prayer on a specific day and a day or two beforehand one of us will be in touch by telephone to see if you have any specific prayer requests. We hope in this way that you will feel connected to the celebration of the Eucharist in a specific way even if you are unable to be present in person.

A Sunday Mass will be live streamed from the Parish Church on Facebook at the new time of 10am and we will once again have the opportunity to meet on Zoom afterwards for coffee and chat. Details will be included in the usual weekly email. Do remember that there are opportunities to watch services produced by both the [Diocese](#) and [Church of England](#) and daily audio prayer services via the [Time to Pray app](#) and podcast, and the [Daily Hope telephone line](#) for any who are unable to access the internet.

Parish Office

The Parish Office is closed to visitors and contact with our Parish Administrator, Pamela Allen, should be made by email (administrator@wantageparish.com) or telephone (764533).

Thank you for your understanding and support as we make these difficult decisions. We look forward to a better 2021 and a time when we can once again meet together for worship.

Yours in Christ,



Fr Philip Wells
Vicar of Wantage