

8 July 2020



Dear Church Family at Great Meeting,

We haven't had a 'great meeting' for over three months now – well, not physically at least! And with the government guidance now allowing churches to reopen for public worship we are all wondering, and longing: when can we get back to Sunday worship in person?

THE DECISION

The elders met this week to carefully and prayerfully consider this question. We concluded that in order to reopen on Sundays, and do it safely and well, we should wait until the end of August or beginning of September (provided that the situation doesn't worsen before then) BUT that we can ease back into public worship and face to face fellowship in other ways before then.

To delay public worship on Sundays for a few more weeks was a difficult decision to make, but there are important reasons why we think this is the best course of action:

Give time to ensure we have implemented all the necessary measures. The Risk Assessment tool has helped us identify actions we need to take. It indicates that with the relevant safeguards in place we *can* significantly mitigate the risks associated with gathering for public worship. We have already attended to some of these; this has enabled us to open for private prayer. But we want to ensure that the measures and logistics involved in opening for Sunday worship are unrushed and properly handled. For example, the survey sent to you recently has shown that we are expecting 30+ people to return to public worship on a Sunday morning, which means we will need to provide for two 'sittings'.

Give time to see how infection rates are progressing. Even with all the relevant safeguards in place, a large proportion of our congregation is in the vulnerable bracket (70+) and some are considered highly at risk (70+ with certain health conditions). It was only a week ago that the further easing of lockdown was permitted and this is likely to have an impact on infection rates. For the safety of all, we believe it is wise to wait a few weeks to see how the situation will progress.

Worship and fellowship will be limited. By current government guidelines, our return to public worship will be markedly different from what we're used to: there will be strict social distancing, no congregational singing, a shorter service and no more than thirty people allowed at any one time. At this stage, there would be no refreshments after the service either, and people would need to leave the premises rather than congregate and chat. This means that the kind of worship and fellowship we most crave will actually be very limited. So, rather than rushing back to a format of service that, with all its restrictions, might feel inadequate or dissatisfying, we intend to facilitate worship and fellowship in other ways...

WHAT WE ARE PROVIDING

We will continue to have '**Socially Distant Sunday Worship**' every week – online, on CD or via paper copy. Thank you to all who completed the survey; we will take your feedback on board.

The church building will continue to be '**Open for Private Prayer**', every Wednesday 10am till noon, with all the relevant safeguards in place. To aid this time, there are written prayers posted on the partition boards and slides on the screen.

From Weds 15 July this period of prayer will include a short time of led worship and prayer (15-20 mins) – similar to 'Pause for Prayer' but a kind of '**Mid-week Service**', which will include some music, a Bible reading, a short reflection and prayers. Starts at 10:30am. In order to get an indication of numbers, **please let Bryn know if you plan to attend** – via email (minister@hadleighurc.org.uk), text (07510 311900) or landline (829197 – please leave a message if necessary).

As mentioned above, we see face-to-face fellowship as being one of the things that has been most missed during lockdown. We are keen to facilitate as much of that as possible – it is vital for our spiritual and mental wellbeing! Some of you have already had meetings with each other in your gardens, which is great. We are working on ways of facilitating more of these types of '**Fellowship Groups**', whether in gardens or down on the church premises. Such groups could also have the option of taking **Holy Communion** together, led by Bryn. More details about these groups will follow.

BEING CHURCH

As we continue to feel our way through these challenging times, it is important to remember what we've been saying all along: that even though the doors of 'the church' have been closed we've never stopped being church. And although we would all love to get together on a Sunday morning and worship 'like we used to', we need to recognise that this simply won't be possible for the foreseeable future – even when we do return to public worship on Sundays. Nevertheless, something else that we've said since lockdown began is that this time has afforded us an opportunity to take stock and try some new ways of being church.

And so I do encourage you, if it is safe for you, to participate as fully as possible in what is being provided over the next few weeks. If you've never been part of a church 'small group', this is a great time to start! If you've not previously used the opportunity of 'open church' for prayer, this is the time to give it a try! You might even find that these are more beneficial to your faith and discipleship than gathering on a Sunday?

It's been providential, prophetic, that over these last few weeks and months we have been looking at the letter of 1 Peter. We have been reminded that the church is not a physical building but a collection of 'living stones', birthed into a community of grace and love, scattered yet called to share God's kindness and light – even in the face of tough times.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ fill you with this living hope!

Bryn and the elders