**Chipping Congregational Church - Reopening for public worship**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is with excitement and not a little apprehension and trepidation that we have decided to reopen chapel for public worship from Sunday 12th July 2020.

We have carried out a risk assessment and put in place measures set out in the latest government guidance to minimise the risk to those who attend public worship at Chipping Congregational Church.

The risk assessment will be on the church website along with links to the latest government guidance which can also be accessed via the link at the bottom of this letter.

Some people will be excited and enthusiastic to return, others will be nervous, anxious and possibly fearful.

We must create an environment which is as safe as possible, but we must also act in a way that reassures people that we take the safety of all who attend public worship seriously.

We must also do all we can to avoid creating division between those who can and wish to attend and those who can’t or do not wish to; no one should ever be made to feel guilty or embarrassed if they do not wish to attend pubic worship and especially not in the current climate.

For those who do decide to attend chapel from this Sunday at 10:45am things will be very different.

We need to maintain physical or social distancing; 2 metres (6’ 6’’ or just over 2 yards) or 1 metre plus ‘mitigations’ where 2 metres is not possible.

We will endeavour to keep family groups, couples and individuals 2 metres apart at all times but, in addition, we will:

* keep the chapel doors open whenever possible to increase ventilation;
* ensure people do not face each other if they are less than 2 metres apart;
* have plenty of hand sanitiser and wipes available to remind people to wash or sanitise their hands on entering and leaving the building; and
* encourage people to wear face coverings if they wish to do so.

In accordance with government guidance we will:

* not sing or use wind instruments;
* not serve refreshments;
* hold shorter services;
* discourage people from social interaction with members of other households; and
* leave the building, grounds and car park as soon as possible at the end of public worship.

Although places of worship are not prohibited from celebrating the Lord’s Supper or from taking offerings, we will not for the time being:

* celebrate Holy Communion; and
* take an offering during worship (offering bags will be placed by the door for people to leave offerings on leaving the building).

On arrival please enter the building via the Sunday School entrance. We will also use this entrance when leaving chapel but if you need to leave the building during the service please do so via the door adjacent to the kitchen.

Children are welcome but should remain with their family at all times.

Those who are classed as vulnerable are strongly advised not to attend public worship for the time being. Those over 70, regardless of whether or not they have underlying health conditions are deemed to be at greater risk should they contract the virus and are still being advised to stay at home as much as possible and limit their social interaction. Whilst this does not mean they cannot attend public worship they should consider carefully the risks before doing so.

We intend to broadcast Sunday worship via Zoom so that those who cannot, or do not wish to, attend can join in virtually and messages/sermons will regularly be recorded and placed on the church YouTube channel. These can also be put on CD for those who do not have internet access (audio only).

This will be a new and strange experience for us and very alien to our usual close fellowshipping.

We may get used to it or it may feel strange for a considerable period.

In reality, however, this is unlikely to be a short-term change. Although the risk of catching the Covid-19 virus has reduced significantly and hopefully will continue to reduce, the impact for those who do catch the virus has not significantly reduced. The risks will continue unless and until a successful vaccine is developed and made widely available or until effective treatments are developed.

This will probably take months and possibly years.

As we move forward our thoughts will turn to how we do other things as a church but for now we will take time to see how these first tentative steps go.

Having said all this we should remind ourselves that we have a great God who is still on the throne and still working his purposes out. He will do that with or without our cooperation or consent but I’m sure you all wish to be part of God’s future which is exciting and which will culminate in the eventual renewal, remaking or recreation of all things.

Yours in Christ

Andy

Latest Government Guidance on places of worship:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july