

Bethlehem Chapel

Richmond
Surrey
TW10 6SE



COVID REOPENING PLAN

03.07.2020

Introduction –

As Christians we worship the Lord in all we do, we can pray to him everywhere, and we have personal access to his word in our language. These great truths must not blind us to the fact that there is nothing more important in the life of the church than our corporate gathering together to worship and receive from Him in the ordinary means of grace. This is the normal way that we are built up as Christians (personally and corporately). It also puts Christ on display to the world around. It has been a great tragedy that for a season churches have been closed and pulpits empty. Internet worship is no substitute.

While it is understandable that we will be nervous about gathering together, our great desire should be to do this at the earliest opportunity if it safe to do so. Everything we do in life involves an element of risk and coming to church is no exception. We should seek to eliminate all unnecessary risk to enable us to do all we have been commanded to do by the Lord.

Although the government do not ultimately have the right to restrict the worship of the church, and before God we are free to disobey if they do that (while accepting there will be consequences), our basic disposition towards human authorities should be submission and respect. This is particularly true in times such as these, as we recognise that in the instructions given the government are rightly seeking to preserve life.

As well as loving God, worship should also involve loving our neighbour. We have written these instructions to follow the government guidance and in so doing we are seeking to keep each other safe. It is also important to do all we can to show the watching world, and any visitors who come amongst us, that we are doing the right thing - while recognising that we cannot always satisfy those who are determined to oppose the gospel.

While we recognise that these instructions will change the way the services feel for a while, there is great opportunity here. It is a chance to focus on the essentials of gathering together - to receive the ordinary means of grace of the preaching of the word, and the sacraments, and to pray. It allows more opportunity for Scripture reading. It enables God's children to grow up Lord's day by Lord's day under the preached word of God. And we pray that in this difficult time, others will come in to hear and to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ.

These instructions will change as the government guidance changes.

What we are and aren't allowed to do: An Overview

We are, at all times, to be compliant to the government guidelines outlined within the introduction section which stipulates a number of things that we can and cannot do. We must therefore follow these guidelines at all times and much of the rest of the document will be based on these principles.

What we can do?

- Meet together to worship and conduct services / meetings for this purpose.
- Hold Communion Services

What we cannot do?

- Meet together when it is not possible to keep a 2m social distance without other measures being in place
- Have physical contact between different households or bubbles
- Sing/Chant
- Partake of food and drink apart from as part of a communion service

Who can attend Church?

Anyone who is showing signs of, or are suffering with, any of the following should not attend work or any services/activities held at Bethlehem Chapel.

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new or persistent cough – this means coughing a lot more for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough it may be worse than usual)
- a loss of change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you have noticed that you cannot smell or taste anything or things smell or taste different to normal
- Is a vulnerable person (until August 1st) (by virtue of their age, underlying health condition, clinical condition or are pregnant)

Provisions will be in place on an ongoing basis for anyone who is unable to attend due to the above – see below under “during services”

Under the guidance we are required to take details of those who enter the church and take part in the worship service to assist with the track and trace strategy. A Name and Contact Number will be taken as a minimum but where possible an address also. These will be kept for a minimum of 21 days as per the government guidance and following GDPR rules (These will not be shared with any other party, unless there is a confirmed case of Covid-19 amongst a particular meeting.) To do this we will be open to all, but we will need to know who is coming for each service in order that we can maintain these details and also to make sure that we can comply with government guidelines as to social distancing.

Personal Hygiene

One of the best forms of protection against COVID 19 is good personal hygiene at all times. Signs will be placed at key points around the building reminding people to follow the basic principles of personal hygiene. Below are some principles which should be adopted to reduce the spread of COVID19 and will be encouraged by the Minister and the Ushers.

- Washing your hands more often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; use hand sanitiser where soap and water is not available
- Use paper towels to dry hands; where sanitiser used allow sanitiser to dry naturally
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who have symptoms
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands or use hand sanitiser
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces – focus on door handles, toilets, pulpit area, entrances and exits, handrails

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/>

As hand washing facilities will not be easily available on entering the building we have provided an automatic hand sanitiser at the entrance point. This will be touch free to reduce the risk further. Along with soap in the toilet and washing facilities, additional hand sanitisers will be available at key points around the building eg Toilets, communal areas etc which should be further used where required.

On exiting the building, we ask that you use the hand sanitiser to aid with reducing further the risk of the spread of the virus.

Entering and Exiting the Building for Meetings or Services

As part of the government guidance we are expected to manage the flow of people into and out of the building to aid the principle of social distancing at all times. Where possible efforts will be made to ascertain who may be coming into the church at any given Sunday to check for potential issues with seating although this isn't always possible.

This will mean changes to the way everyone uses the building, where we sit or who we can sit near but the procedures below are to allow us to continue meeting as a church which is of vital importance. Please be patient especially over the first few weeks as we are guided through these changes. Much of the access and the seating arrangements will be controlled by the Ushers, who will assist in making sure everyone is aware of what's going on and where to go

Access for Services in the Main Church Building

1. Access into the main church building for meetings / services will be via the front doors of the church. Where those with specific needs / restrictions need access, this will be managed by the ushers who will accommodate this as required to ensure everyone can be accommodated.
2. Access into the building at the doors will be managed by the ushers who will help welcome and guide people into the building whilst maintaining social distancing. 2m markers will be placed on the floor to
3. aid people to remain 2m distant as they move through the building.
4. People will exit the church building from the rear pews to the front pews to assist with social distancing and where this is not possible it will be controlled by the ushers.
5. On exiting the building, it is important that we should not congregate around the exit and where people want to have conversations these should be in places where access ways are not blocked and 2m distancing is possible. We would also ask that people respect our neighbours and community by not blocking the footpath outside the chapel.

Seating Arrangements

Please be aware that changes to this may be made depending on numbers attending, government advice and how things work in practice. Where possible these changes will be communicated before they are carried out or communicated on the day by the ushers but below are the basic principles to be followed.

Main Church Building

- Only pews with cushioning should be used to ensure social distancing.
- Rows should be filled from the right hand side filling in household groups/bubbles leaving 2 vacant pews (equates to 2m between heads) between households/bubbles.
- In the event that someone in the middle of a row needs to move or leave during a service it is requested that those on the end of the row move out of the way to allow people to exit whilst remaining social distancing. We thank people for their understanding in advance if this happens.

Although open to the public we would prefer if you can give advance warning so that we can evaluate the maximum amount of people that we can cater for, whilst still maintaining and adhering to government guidelines.

You can advise this via email ministry@bethlehem-chapel.org or call/text 07956 862035 . In this way we will be able to control the numbers entering the church, and should the available seating be filled the 2m social distancing should not be compromised. Consideration at this point should be made to a 2nd service or other methods to manage the number of people within the space going forward. This will be managed on an as needed basis.

We are trying where possible to avoid overcrowding through finding out in advance who may be attending.

During Services / Meetings

Preaching

Preaching will be undertaken as normal and no additional restrictions will be placed on the preacher over and above what is already in place within this plan. The preacher should be a minimum of 2m from any other person at all times and should remain so throughout the meetings/services.

The services will be recorded and made available for those who are unable to attend for the duration of the restrictions. The best way to do this will be assessed by the leadership to be of the best benefit to those who are unable to attend.

Singing / Music

Singing/Chanting is not allowed during the service and should not be planned into the service at any point. However, it is possible within the guidelines to allow for speaking as a group so it is anticipated that the speaking of prayers (e.g. confession of sin, Lord's prayer) or the saying of Psalms/hymns will be allowable.

Bibles and Hymn books

Although it is allowed within the guidance to utilise books for a service we will encourage people to bring their own bibles, however we will provide Bible's and Hymn books in the pews, but we ask that these at the end of the service are placed on the back table as you leave so that they can be quarantined and cleaned appropriately.

Toilet and Washing Facilities

We are aware that one "bottle neck" will be the toilet and washing facilities due to being accessed down a narrow corridor. Where possible we would encourage people to use their own facilities before attending the church for meetings/services but we realise that use cannot be avoided in full.

Access to the toilets will be managed by the ushers limiting access. This will ensure that people can socially distance at all times whilst using the facilities. As there is currently no hot water within these facilities, you must use the hand sanitiser unit after using the facilities.

Communion

It is vital for the life of the church for Communion to be served however this adds risks due to the sharing of bread and "wine" in close contact. Communion services are allowed within the guidance and we hope to participate together in this as we return. The person conducting this part of the service shall thoroughly wash and dry their hands before this is undertaken. Gloves should be worn for the breaking of the bread, and the bread and the "wine" must not be spoken over by the person conducting.

Fellowship and Physical Contact

We are well aware that one of the struggles with the lockdown has been physical contact and fellowship with other believers.

We know that the temptation will be to go up to those who you may not have seen for a while, potentially give them a hug or shake their hands. We would ask you, as hard as it may be, to refrain from this as we need to ensure we keep to the 2m distancing rule wherever possible.

It is allowable within the guidance to still have conversations whilst remaining 2m distanced both inside and outside the church building but we ask that consideration is made to ensure this doesn't hinder anyone else in following the plan or block any access routes through the church.

Both of the above points are especially important around the outside of the church to ensure we show our community that we are doing our bit in the battle against Coronavirus.

Giving

As part of our worship, the back collection box will still be kept in position, but it is important that if you intend to give via this means, it would be helpful for you to place this in an envelope and place it through the slot without touching the actual box.

Cleaning

Apart from the general principles of personal hygiene set out above there are good cleaning principles to follow that will help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These will be followed at all times including:

- Frequent cleaning of commonly used areas and equipment between uses, using normal cleaning products
- Regular Cleaning of all used areas on a weekly basis wherever possible 3 days after a service / activity has taken place in that area.

A cleaning “checklist” will be put together in conjunction with the church cleaner along with a register of when key areas have been cleaned which will be displayed to show those areas have been cleaned.

Enhanced cleaning procedures must be in place particularly in common use areas and at ‘touch’ points which will form part of the cleaning checklist and this will include:

- Taps and washing facilities
- Toilet flush and seats
- Door handles and push plates
- Light switches
- Pews

Enhanced Cleaning should utilise Antibacterial Sprays or Wipes or suitable disinfectant to reduce the likelihood of COVID being passed around. When using antibacterial sprays to clean, paper towels should be used so these can be disposed of immediately.

Where services are to be held one after another (eg two morning services), a suitable period should be given between services to ensure common areas and touch points can be sufficiently cleaned. Where possible this should be avoided to reduce the risk but it may not be possible at all times.

Protective Equipment

Protective equipment (personal and otherwise) should be used as a last resort and where possible good social distancing and good hygiene arrangements should be the first priority. However, there are some circumstances where PPE or protective equipment will need to be used as outlined below.

To be worn in the following circumstances:

During Cleaning of the church building immediately following activities

- Wear Gloves and a face mask at all times. Where non disposable face masks are used ensure they are only used by one person and removed to their own house.
- Single use PPE must be disposed of so that it cannot be reused.
- Do not share your mask with anyone else

During General Cleaning of the church building 3 Days after a service

- Wear Gloves at all times.
- Single use PPE must be disposed of so that it cannot be reused.

When preparing or serving communion

What to do in the unlikely event you become ill during the service

Anyone who develops a high temperature, persistent cough or loss or partial loss of taste or smell while within the church building should:

- Leave the building and return home immediately but ensure that the minister or deacons are informed when you get home
- Avoid touching anything and remove themselves from the other people in the building whilst you are exiting the building
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and dispose of the tissue in a bin; if you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of their elbow
- Follow the current guidance on self-isolation and not return to the church building until their period of isolation is complete
- Ensure they contact the Track and Trace system as per government guidance and advice.

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