

Vicar's Letter #13: 12 June, 2020

Let's celebrate!

Dear Parishioners

We have so much to be thankful for. On Monday this week, our Prime Minister announced that we would move to Alert Level 1 the following day. Through the good leadership of our Prime Minister and Director-General of Health, the government's attention to the scientific advice of pandemic experts, a willingness to "go hard and go early", and the efforts of what our Prime Minister has called our country's "team of five million", we have been able to meet the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks be to God, to all who have worked particularly hard to achieve this success, and to everyone who has participated in it.

At the same time, we have to acknowledge the enormous cost of this national success in many people's lives. We think of those who have died, those who have been unable to be with loved ones at a critical time, those who have lost jobs and livelihoods, those who are anxious and in need, and those who are still displaced. We are also aware of the fact that the pandemic is continuing and even worsening in many parts of the world, and that there is potential for a second wave of the pandemic in many countries, as well as in our own. Yes, there are many uncertainties as we look around us, so there is a lot more to be achieved in our country and around the world. And yet, it is right to celebrate this wonderful milestone of our move to Alert Level 1. As I write we have no active cases in New Zealand and have had no new cases for the last three weeks.

I have consistently said that we would celebrate together when we can all meet together again, and that time has come. Our government, which has been cautious in its approach to the pandemic, has informed us that at Level 1 it is safe to meet as normal in our church buildings. It has asked, though, that we keep a record of those places we go to in public, so that contact tracing can be undertaken if necessary. So please keep your own personal diary note of where you go outside the home, or use QR scanning when you can.

I am aware that some people are very eager to return to worship. Others may still feel concerned about their level of risk from the pandemic and may still want to take a while to fully emerge from their 'bubble'. I assure you that there is absolutely no compulsion to come to worship if you feel that that would be overwhelming for you. Each person must decide what is best for them and their physical/emotional/mental/spiritual health. If you would prefer not to attend this service, you can attend the Diocesan live-stream service on Freeview Channel 200, or via <https://movementonline.org.nz>, for at least another month. Also, we are hoping to provide a video record of our 'back together' service this Sunday, which we hope to make available on our website later that same day.

As for me, I will be celebrating this milestone in the church building and I look forward to seeing as many of you again as are ready to come. We have been through this experience together, in the sense that we are all part of that team of five million, so let's celebrate together!

We are inviting people to come to this special parish service **this Sunday at 9am for 9.30am**. (Please note this unique meeting time!) Some will want to come early to greet friends and catch up with them before the service, but **the service itself will start at 9.30am**. St James' Church is a substantial building, and we will recognise at the service that some will still be wanting a degree of physical distance, so please feel welcome to come for the service and then slip away if you don't want to be caught up in social interaction. There will be baptisms (see last week's letter), stories of thanksgiving and hope, and communion (either just the bread or the bread and the wine) for those who want to receive it again. If you want to share in an extended 'catch-up' time after the service, please bring your own lunch and we will share together in the hall, where a BBQ and coffee, tea etc will be provided. We are hoping that the weather will be kind enough for there to be a bouncy castle operating outside on the hall lawn.

Thanksgiving offering

One aspect of our celebration and thanksgiving service will be our acknowledgment that others around the world are not doing as well as many of us are, in the midst of this pandemic. We have been asked by our Diocese to support needs in Fiji, Gaza, India and Mozambique. Further information about these needs is available here: <https://movementonline.org.nz/blog/global-response>. At our celebration service at 9.30am on Sunday we will offer **all cash donations** towards this appeal. If you do not have cash and plan to make a donation for this purpose by cheque, please put your cheque in an envelope marked 'Appeal'. Thank you for your generosity.

Going Forward

Next Sunday, 21 June, we plan to return to our normal pattern of three morning services (at 8am, 9am and 10am). We will also have an Evensong service that day at 5pm. But please remember what we have learned over the time of this pandemic – that the Church is the people of God who are at work outside the walls of the church building, as well as inside it. We are very keen NOT to forget this important insight, because our vision going forward is to serve God together in active discipleship, reaching out into our local community with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Next week we will also restart our midweek services – at 12.15pm on Wednesday and 10am on Thursday. The office will be open from 9am to 12 noon Tuesday to Friday. Hall bookings will start again next week, but some church activities will start at church a little later (e.g. the Waffles breakfast on Thursdays). Please see the Newslink for full details. We also intend to continue emailing Newslink to parishioners. That will allow us to save cost and the time taken in printing them. We will also have some print copies at church for those who need them on the day or who don't have email.

And FINALLY, this is my last Covid-19 Vicar's letter for now, and I fervently hope my last one for ever. Thank you to you all for your support of others and of the Church throughout this unprecedented time. I can't wait to see you again.

With my prayers and warm greetings in Christ.

Peter Bengé

Vicar
(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)