

Vicar's Letter #23: 24 September, 2021
Moving forward under Alert Level 2

Dear Parishioners

Many of us have been waiting for a time when we could return to worship in actual, rather than virtual, gatherings. Last night Vestry met and agreed that on 3 October we will take our first step back towards in-person gathering.

Because of the heightened concerns with the Delta variant of Covid-19, and the cleaning measures that we understand are required between two separate services under Alert Level 2, we have decided to start with a single service and see how we can build from that point. **From 3 October** we plan to hold a **10am service at St James' Church** with the appropriate social distancing and other requirements. We will give further information about this in next week's Newslink.

This means that **we will not hold an 8am service initially**. We plan for the 10am service to be live-streamed, so that those who would prefer not to attend in person can still connect with our worship via the internet. (Others who do not have access to a computer can still join the Diocesan service on Shine TV at 2.45pm on Sundays.)

We have judged that All Saints' Church is too small to hold a gathering of more than 8 people under the current requirements, and since that is only a small part of the regular congregation, **members of the All Saints congregation are invited to either gather at 9am on Sundays in a home**, or to join the 10am service in person or virtually. There is also a plan to have an outdoor service sometimes if the weather is kind. Those who are in the All Saints congregation will be advised about the location of home church gatherings or date of possible outdoor services via All Saints communication networks.

There will not be a Wednesday or Thursday service at St James' Church at this stage, but there may be occasional funerals or special services at the church, as the need arises.

We want to make sure that we have a clear and safe plan for staff before we open the office again. We will advise you about office opening hours when these have been arranged.

So **this Sunday, 26 September**, is the last time that we plan to **worship at 9.30am via Zoom** – at least for the time being! Jonathan Berkahn will preach the first sermon in our 8-week series on Prayer. His theme is Prayer for Healing. You can find a booklet introducing our sermon series "Prayer – God's Gift" attached to the same email as this letter. The booklet introduces each week's sermon theme, gives questions for personal reflection or to spark discussion in our small groups, and offers a Family Activity to help people of all ages to engage in prayer. I do hope that you will make use of this booklet and this sermon series to grow in your own practice, understanding and love of prayer, and to encourage those you live with to engage in prayer too.

Prayer is such a gift to us because it puts us in direct relationship with the living God, who offers us love, hope, peace and joy. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)." Prayer is a foundational spiritual practice for Christians. It leads us to God and helps us experience the abundant life that Jesus came to bring.

Blessings to you all.

Peter Bengel

Vicar
(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)