

## Emerging into the New Normal

The Church premises have been closed for all but regular security checks and essential maintenance since Sunday 22nd March as a direct result of the need to contain the spread of the Coronavirus.

Since the Government 'lockdown' was introduced the Elders have managed to meet regularly using the video conference facility provided by 'Zoom'. With a maximum of 10 participants this has proved to be a very successful way of meeting and thus assessing where we are and what the future might hold. In normal times we would have held Church Business Meetings in April and May with a further one scheduled for July. Clearly this will not now be possible.

Looking to the future, whilst there has been much debate as to whether Social Distancing remains at 2M or could be reduced to 1M plus mitigations, things simply cannot return to normal whilst there remains any formal requirement to maintain Social Distancing coupled with quite demanding rules in respect to hand hygiene and cleaning. The Government has been relaxing some of the restrictions in recent weeks and from Saturday 4th July gatherings of more than 30 people are allowed in Places of Worship. However, in order to resume Private Prayer, a form of Sunday Worship or mid-week activities comprehensive Risk Assessments are necessary backed up with tight rules to ensure that the premises remain Covid - 19 Secure at all times.

The Government and the URC have overwhelmed us with guidance documents but ultimately the Elders have had to decide what is practicable for Castle Hill Church. Collectively we are wanting to exercise caution particularly as many of our congregation are aged over 70 and thus deemed to be of considerable risk from Covid - 19. Clearly as the weeks pass by Government restrictions may vary and the Elders will constantly review what, if anything, might then change at Castle Hill.

If you have access to the internet and want to read the latest URC Guidance 'Emerging into the New Normal' then go to the main URC website.

**Church Roof Project** - The Church Roof Project was scheduled to start on 19th April but because of the uncertainty surrounding the 'lockdown' the Elders took the decision to defer the work. However, the Elders have now reviewed the situation and have decided that this project can now go ahead, and we await an early start date from the contractor. On balance we felt that this was preferable to carrying out the work after Easter 2021 when we would hope that all restrictions might have been lifted and hence Church life had returned to its more normal pattern. This unfortunately means that any use of the main Church is unlikely until December.

**Private Prayer** - We can now confirm that starting on Sunday 19th July the Church will be open for 30 minutes from 10.30 to 11.00 for private individual prayer in the Sports Hall. The seating plan will be based on 1 metre Social Distancing and thus require the wearing of face coverings.

On arrival at the Church you will be required to use a hand sanitizer and go directly to your seat taking note of any floor markings or signage that you encounter and avoiding unnecessary hand contact with any hard surfaces. Before you leave the premises, you will be required to again use the hand sanitizer. The door stewards will be there to help you and will need to record who was in attendance.

Do not attend if you have any of the symptoms associated with Covid-19. If you develop any symptoms within the following 7 days, please let the Church Secretary know.

**Sunday Worship** - We now intend that from Sunday 6th September a form of regular Sunday Worship may resume, but again in the Sports Hall with restrictions still in place. The details of what this might entail will be firmed up over the next two months during which time a recorded weekly video Sunday Worship will continue. It is clear however that singing will not be allowed.

**Church Meetings** - Church Business Meetings would normally be held in September and November but the Elders feel that it would not be appropriate to go ahead with these meetings and hence they are cancelled. Whilst a 'Zoom' meeting might work well for 10 people it would not work so well for say 20+. We do however hope that it might be possible to hold 'information' sessions, using video facilities, in the autumn as a further means of involving our Church Members.

**Elders Election** - Details of the Elders Election would normally be notified to the July Church Meeting in readiness for letters to be copied to Church Members, on the first Sunday of September seeking nominations, and an election at the November Church Meeting. We currently have 10 Serving Elders with two of them coming to the end of their first 3 year term. The Elders are proposing that these two Elders are co-opted for a further year with a view to there being an election in November 2021.

**Church Organisations and Lettings** - Opening up the premises such that mid-week activities can restart presents a considerable number of factors that have had to be fully considered by the Elders. If an organisation or group is allowed to meet then we must be assured that Social Distancing requirements are fully met and hand hygiene along with thorough cleaning of all items used by those attending can be sustained at all times to ensure that the Coronavirus is not spread on our premises. Having discussed this fully at the Elders Meeting on 2nd July the decision is that for the remainder of 2020 there should be no other usage beyond that on a Sunday.

This will be disappointing for many of you, but we feel that this is the responsible thing to do at this time. Clearly, we will continue to review these decisions based on the guidance we have available.

**Key Holders** - If you are a key holder please be advised that access to the premises should continue to be strictly limited. There is a log sheet in the Vestibule, and you are required to record any attendance please.

If you have further questions or comments please do contact me.

Mick Barnes - Church Secretary