

the arena

Issue 84 2021-2

newsletter

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JANUARY 8
2021

Dear All,

LOCKDOWN AND THE CHURCHES Many of us sat in front of our TVs on Monday night, waiting for news about the latest restrictions as part of the Tier 5 lockdown. You may also have read how these new rules affect churches: *"You can leave home to attend or visit a place of worship for communal worship, a funeral or event related to a death, a burial ground or a remembrance garden, or to attend a wedding ceremony. You should follow the guidance on the safe use of places of worship and must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble when attending a place of worship."*



The bishops have been at pains since to say to the clergy: "you *can* open - but you don't have to." So I want to use this edition of Arena to explain what we are doing at St James' - and why.

You may remember back to last March when we had to announce in Arena57 (right) that the Church was being closed completely for services and even for private prayer. And I shared with you some of the complaints we received: 'How could our Church be closed at a time like this?' This time, when churches can still stay open, people are asking "Why can the churches stay open if our schools are shut?"



Church of England suspends all services over coronavirus



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The Church of England has suspended all services until further notice, saying it must become "a different sort of church in these coming months".

I think you know that my preference is to keep St James' open.

A Church is as much a place of healing and hope as any other institution. Praying together is the core job of any parish and however well done, zoomed services on YouTube can never replace live events. So after consulting members of the parish I intend to keep the Church open for all the usual services and Sunday School sessions *until the end of January* (ie Candlemass). This will include this coming Sunday when we will be swearing in our Churchwardens, on Sunday 24th when our ordinand Joe Ammoun will be preaching on the theme of Church Unity, and on Sunday 31st when the morning will include the joyful baptism of three members of the Wilson family and the admission to First Holy Communion of five young people who have been waiting for this since mid October! Finally that evening we will be holding the next Musical Vespers when Gisela Meyer returns to accompany Lucy Haire (cello) and Isabel Nisbet (contralto) in a short 40minute service of prayer and Bible reflection.

Then we will review what we have been doing. Because the last thing we want is for people to feel uncomfortable about coming to Church - or guilty if they don't! Each of us has to make up our own minds about what is safe and what is appropriate and helpful.

Over the last fortnight we have done a great deal to improve our video streaming technology. With generous help from the Cloudesley Trust we have been able to buy proper webcams which will allow us to 'live stream' all our services from the end of January.

We have also bought a new Church i-Pad with more memory and this will be available even before the webcams are put into place. This means that we are pretty sure that we can resume sharing services - via Facebook/YouTube - as from this coming Sunday, 10th January.

IF, at the beginning of February, we don't think streaming live services from St James' is really working then, with the support of Adam and Sinead, we will go back to recording 'Services of the Word' made up of audio and video clips sent in by various members of the congregation as we did during the last lockdown. This is perfectly permissible under the bishop's instructions. Parishes have been given a choice about which way to proceed and I do hope that you will let us know what works best for you. That is to say, whether we stream live Masses or record Services of the Word has not been decided already: it depends on what the parish as a whole agrees is the best way for St James' to 'be Church' in these uncertain times. Please let me know what you think.

Some January dates: (nb 8am Masses will continue as usual).

Sunday 10th Parish Mass recorded and uploaded onto YouTube with Second Sunday Choir.

Sunday 17th Parish Mass recorded and uploaded onto YouTube.

Monday 18th PCC meets to review progress and to make recommendations about February services.

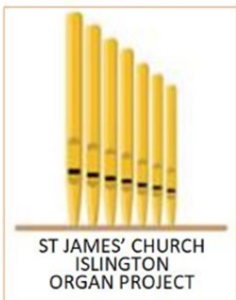
Sunday 24th Parish Mass recorded and uploaded onto YouTube. Preacher: Joe Ammoun

Monday 25th CAVS install webcams in Church.

Sunday 31st Parish Mass, Baptisms and First Communions live streamed from St James'.

6pm Musical Vespers live streamed. Final decision about future services made.

NEWS FLASH: Stuart Jones the Diocesan Registrar has just emailed to say that HH David Etherington QC., the new Diocesan Chancellor overseeing the Consistory Court to determine the future of the Organ Project, will issue instructions about the way the Court hearing will be structured, at a zoom meeting this coming Friday (8th) at 11am. The invitation list includes Isabel and I on behalf of the Proposers, and Alastair Hume and Eric Sorensen as the Parties Opponent. Stuart says the full Consistory is now scheduled to take place (again via zoom) the week beginning 1st March 2021. The PCC meeting, due on the 1st March, will therefore be postponed until the final judgement has been received. I guess we are making progress at last..!



FINALLY Epiphany is a season full of hope and encouragement. Into the darkness shone a light bright enough to draw three wise men on a journey with no obvious destination or time-frame. As a community I hope we can feel reassured that God is very much with us, however difficult the future looks. As Minnie Haskins' famous poem says,

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

As ever,
John



May God bless every £1 we give so that St James' will be here, not just for today and for tomorrow, but for the future he wants to create.