



## **PASTORAL REFLECTION**

*On the use of face coverings at worship*

Dear Parishioners,

I'm sure many of you are now becoming used to using a face covering in shops and other places. It felt strange to begin with, but it now feels increasingly routine, albeit a little inconvenient and sometimes uncomfortable.

As mentioned last Sunday, the government has extended the use of face coverings to other indoor settings including churches. There will be a range of views and feelings about this, but whatever each one of us may think, it is law rather than guidance and we have only limited discretion in its application.

**No one should feel discouraged from coming to church because of this, for the following reasons -**

First, because it is really a very unimportant thing compared to the great joy of being able to worship together, which is our duty and our joy as Christians, and this is surely more important than any small inconvenience such as this.

Second, we are in the fortunate position of having a spacious and well-ventilated building that lowers any risk considerably. The introduction of face coverings may look and feel disconcerting, but the wider measures we have put in place make us Covid-secure.

Third, we are in an area which currently has very low community transmission, we pray that this may continue, and that these measures, which arise from an abundance of caution, may further help in this regard.

Fourth, our Christian faith requires a particular attention for the needs of the vulnerable and to consider others before ourselves. The wearing of face coverings protects others more than it protects us, and we may therefore see it as an act of loving care to our neighbour.

I want to emphasise the breadth of the term 'face covering' which can mean a scarf, mask, bandana or anything else that covers both nose and mouth. Bearing this in mind, please put on your face covering on before or as soon as you enter the church for a service. Please do not be offended if a Steward gently reminds you, and they will have some spare disposable face coverings available for those who come without. On principle, I do not believe anyone should be turned away from worship whilst still upholding the law.

*Please turn over*

Of course, there are exemptions for children and for adults for a variety of health reasons, some of which may be invisible, so we must not judge someone who is not wearing a face covering, and I leave it to individual consciences to consider how exemptions may relate to their own circumstances. If you have reason to be exempt then please mention this to the Stewards, but you are not required to give the specific cause for your exemption.

Those leading worship in some way, such as readers, cantors, readers and intercessors, are permitted to remove their face covering to aid communication, especially when they are more than two metres away from anyone else. For the same reason, clergy will only wear a face covering at the distribution of the Sacrament when close proximity is inevitable. When receiving Holy Communion, remove or pull down your face covering immediately beforehand, replacing it after you have consumed the Body of Christ.

Finally, let us redouble our efforts in praying for our world, the church and our parish at this time when many people are suffering and fearful for the future. I write this reflection on the feast of the Transfiguration when Christ's glory is revealed to the disciples on the mountain top. Likewise, in the midst of a world thrown into confusion by this virus, may we as Christians still discern the light of God's glory shining through the darkness, as we look forward to the day when we can be close together again.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. J. Starrow". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a distinct loop at the end of the name.

Father Stephen, *Vicar*

6<sup>th</sup> August 2020

*Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord*