



Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021  
*Feast of Saint Margaret of Antioch*

Dear Parishioners,

The lifting of corona virus restrictions this week will have brought relief and joy for some, and anxiety and uncertainty for others. As I think of these diverse responses I am reminded of Saint Paul's words in Romans 12.15-16 when he tells us to '*rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep*' so that we might '*live in harmony with one another*'. Although life will look a lot more normal, it is important to remind ourselves that the pandemic is not over.

Throughout the pandemic Saint Michael's has continued worship and church life as far as possible, as an affirmation of the importance of the spiritual life to individuals and the community, whilst working within the guidance in effect at the time to mitigate virus transmission and keep everyone as safe as possible – and I thank God that we have not had any cases linked to church.

In this new phase of our life together, I would like our watchwords to be *caution* and *courtesy*. Caution in terms of moving forward carefully and continuing with some of the infection control measures which are now usual to us all. Courtesy in terms of our attitude to one another and being sensitive to different needs as part of our Christian vocation to love one another.

I see the next few weeks between now and the end of August as a transitional period, in which we learn as individuals and as a parish how to negotiate the new situation. Having consulted with Churchwardens and PCC, I describe below how Saint Michael's will respond to the lifting of restrictions, particularly with regard to worship. These will be reviewed in the days ahead and particularly at the start of September. I hope that they will provide both comfort and encouragement to all of you, however you are feeling at this time.

**Sanitiser** will continue to be available, and you are strongly encouraged to use this when entering the church. The clergy will continue to use Sanitiser regularly throughout services and testing themselves regularly for your reassurance.

**Seating** will continue to be separated with alternate pews roped off. Although there is no requirement for social-distancing it is still strongly encouraged where possible, and the ropes will assist those who wish to remain socially-distanced. You are welcome to sit with whoever you like and in whatever number, but as a courtesy do check with someone that they are happy with this. The abundance of seating at Saint Michael's means that there is room for people both to sit together or to remain separate as they prefer.

**Masks** are not required any longer, but some (perhaps many) will wish to continue wearing them. We are fortunate to have a large and well-ventilated building that lowers the risk of virus transmission, and to facilitate this the doors of the church will continue to remain open during services. *If deemed necessary*, we may designate some areas of the church for people who wish to wear masks and those who don't, particularly with regard to singing (please see below) The Clergy will continue to wear masks to distribute the Sacrament.

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**Singing** will perhaps be the most noticeable change to services, and I know how many of you are looking forward to singing hymns again. We will restart congregational singing from this Sunday, but as part of our courtesy to each other *I ask that those singing without a mask sit in the front half of the church*, so that those who are being more cautious can sit behind.

**Holy Communion** will continue to be distributed in one kind (the Body of Christ) from a standing position – for most services this will be in the Nave as now, although the 8am Low Mass will be in the Lady Chapel. Whilst I would dearly love to see the return of the Chalice, prudence would suggest delaying this for what I hope will only be a little longer. Likewise, while kneeling to receive Communion is an important reflection of our devotion to the Sacrament, it is more practical at this time to continue standing.

**Welcome Cards** are no longer necessary to record attendance of everyone at worship. However please look out for emails from church as it might be necessary to inform everyone of any confirmed cases, and therefore to contact those who were present on a particular Sunday. Welcome Cards will be available for new worshippers to fill in.

**Collections** will continue to be taken at the back of the church rather than passing around collection bowls, and this may turn out to be a permanent change as many people have said they prefer it! I would also like to encourage you to use the contactless payment machine, and if doing so, remember that it can be used before the service as well as afterwards. *As ever, we encourage regular members of the congregation to donate via Planned Giving using the information on the Giving page of the website.*

**The Peace** continues to be shared without physical contact, except for those within the same household or where you know physical contact is welcome. Indeed, many people have not expressed enthusiasm for a return to shaking hands at the Peace.

**Holy Water** is available again, but you are invited to use sanitiser beforehand. The **Lady Chapel** and the Prayer Board beside the Shrine of Our Lady are in general use again.

**Refreshments, social events and meetings** can now resume to a large extent and with no limitations on numbers. It is worth remembering that in all cases it is *prolonged proximity, particularly indoors* where risk is greatest, and therefore as many activities will take place outside as possible and I would also ask you to bear this in mind. Those preparing food and drink will continue to take infection control measures for your reassurance.

**Livestreaming** of worship continues at a reduced level, with a service being broadcast once a month. A list of dates can be found on our website.

The measures above are not necessarily exhaustive and some other changes will be brought in gradually, so do get in touch if you have any questions. I want to thank all of you for your faithfulness to God and your support for Saint Michael's during this time. I am particularly keen to hear from those of you who might need to take extra care so that I and the other Saint Michael's clergy can continue to support you.

With prayers and best wishes,

Father Stephen Stavrou, *Vicar*  
*Saint Michael & All Angels, Barnes*