

Dear Friends

The Dorchester Team clergy have been considering the best way forward for us all during this next stage of the pandemic. I am now sending on to you, as members of the congregations in the Bridge Group, a letter from the Revd Sue which outlines our decisions and our reasoning. I am following her letter with some notes about the implications and options for the Bridge Group.

*First, Sue's letter*

My dear friends

In this the first week of another Lockdown - greetings, prayers and love from me! I am sure you will be wondering what happens as regards our worship together in this Lockdown. We are fortunate that we have not had a complete closure of churches thrust upon us - and as your team clergy we have talked and prayed about the best way forward for God's family here in the Dorchester Team. We were all delighted that we were able to have a wide range of different but encouraging Christmas services in most of our parish churches. This was a real blessing and I want to thank my colleagues and the many church members in different parishes who worked hard to make that a reality, I believe we will all have been left with some good memories of our Christmas celebrations amidst the inevitable disappointments. The new government guidelines currently permit public worship and the Church of England has left decisions about this to our discretion taking into account the local situation and needs. Together we have come to a decision about the way we will seek to serve you for the next month which I will outline and explain below.

Our model up to and including 7<sup>th</sup> February is based on the situation when rules for Churches were relaxed at the end of the first lockdown. Churches will be open for people to come for prayer and personal reflection according to what is best for the communities they serve. On Sundays we will offer a single service of good quality on the Zoom platform which all the clergy will attend. These may be led from homes or from a church and some parts of the service may be pre-recorded in one or more churches. We hope that many of you will participate and join us for coffee and conversation in groups afterwards. Your clergy will also talk to you about the possibility of small groups who wish to meet to pray for their community during the day in weekdays finding a safe way of doing this in their own churches as well as online.

For those who greatly miss the opportunity to receive communion we will be able to offer to anyone who asks what we most often offer to those who are housebound - communion 'at home'. We will bring the reserved (previously consecrated) sacrament to your doorstep and pray with you briefly or leave a form of prayer for you to use as you receive the sacrament at home. We know that this is not the same and, like you, we long for a return to something more normal that can be safe.

I know that there will be those of you who ask why we have made this decision when the government has not banned public worship and I want to try and offer you an explanation by listing our five main considerations:

- The clearly rapid spread of the new version of the virus which remains unknown - and a higher rate of infection in South Oxfordshire
- Our understanding, based on a reliable medical source, that we may still be six weeks away from the 'peak' of this new period of infection.
- Our sense of responsibility to take decisions that will offer you the best we can and continue to protect us all

- A sense that it seems odd to us and to others that the church should be open and meeting when the children and young people in our communities cannot be in school.
- The knowledge that even those who are likely to receive a vaccine in the next week or ten days will not experience the protection this offers for three weeks.

We are setting ourselves a relatively short time before a review. It's quite possible that things will not have changed substantially in that time but it is also possible that we will understand more and therefore be able to change what we do in response to a clearer understanding.

Finally, there are a number of people who will happily work with you to set up Zoom if you haven't yet tried it. If you prefer to watch our services are available on 'catch up' via the special Team Worship page on the Dorchester Abbey website. There are also services on television, on the Diocesan website and from many other cathedrals and churches who broadcast their services.

God Bless - I look forward to seeing you on screen!  
Rev Sue Team Rector

*And some further practical comments and suggestions from me:*

- *There will be no Sunday services in any of the churches in the Bridge Group at least until 14th February; this will be reviewed by the clergy team in early February.*
- *Shared worship will be a weekly service from different parishes across the team using the Zoom platform and then posted on the Abbey Facebook page. The Abbey website [www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk](http://www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk) gives all the information about online worship, including the link to join in the live Zoom services.*
- *In addition, for the Bridge Group, I will be in Long Wittenham church at 12 noon on Tuesdays and in Clifton Hampden church at 12 noon on Wednesdays for about 15 minutes to say prayers for our parishes and communities. Please do let me know, in confidence, about people, or particular issues, for which you would like me to pray. Those churches will also continue to be open for private prayer as they are at present, and if others wish to use that time for prayer for our communities, they will of course be welcome to do so. I can provide a form of prayer for you to use if required. Of course, shared prayer can also use the Zoom platform.*
- *For Long Wittenham, we will continue to use the vicarage as a collecting point for the Didcot foodbank. I have been asked for this by several members of the community, and we will be happy to take items into Didcot regularly.*
- *My usual working days for the parishes will continue to be Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday but I will do my best to respond to any parochial need at other times - please don't hesitate to contact me.*

This could be a difficult time for many people. Please be assured that I, and all members of the Dorchester Team, can always be contacted. We are happy to talk, to share concerns and joys, to be a listening ear and to offer any help or support we can.

With prayers and best wishes  
Paul

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