



OPENING OUR NEW CHURCH BUILDING

Dear Church Family,

Just to let you know that this is a lengthy letter, but these are important pieces of information that as a Leadership Team we wanted to communicate to you. As you will be aware from the recent Next Steps updates, we are hoping to be back worshipping in the new church building sometime in the first half of April. It may well be that the first service in the newly refurbished buildings will be an all age celebration on Easter Sunday. What a glorious way to celebrate the new life we find in the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the same time as our new beginning in the church buildings. There is a slim chance that we may be in the week before, but at the latest we will be in the new church building for Easter Sunday.

As a Leadership Team, working closely with the Next Steps Team, we have been working very hard at preparing for everything in the new buildings. The preaching team, service leaders, worship team, technical team, welcome team and refreshments team are all looking at how we can best serve one another as we begin to meet again in the church buildings. Please remember the upcoming 'get the church ready' Saturdays where we can all pull together in the final preparations around the church grounds (19th March, 9th April & 7th May). And also the fantastic church re-opening and community day on Saturday 21st May.

One of the issues regarding getting back into the church buildings has been that of whether to continue livestreaming the service as we have been doing from the church hall since September last year. The Leadership Team have been discussing and praying about this decision over the past few months. We have come to the conclusion that tomorrow will be our last livestream of the Sunday service. The reasons for this decision are twofold. Firstly, over the past 7 months of livestreaming the services there have been many technical issues with livestream. Sometimes it works great and at other times it has been problematic to the point of causing great frustration for those trying to join online. We could look to solve some of these issues by spending a significant amount of money investing in new kit, although there are no guarantees that this would mean a hassle free connection as sometimes problems are caused by internet issues. For the last 7 months Phil Taylor has been covering the sound and the computer for every single service without a break. Normally we would have 2 people doing these roles. Further to that, a third person is required to operate the phone / camera that brings you the livestream. Here again we have had a few technical issues in recent weeks. Given that we may only have 4 more Sundays before we move into the new church building we do not feel it is appropriate to spend great amounts of money on upgrading the livestream equipment.

The second reason for not continuing the livestream after this week is that we want to encourage as many people as possible to prepare to restart attending the physical church service in the church building. Over the past 2 years many of our church folks have engaged with the services, initially the pre-recorded videos, then the live Zoom services, followed by the lovely open air services and latterly the in-person services in the church hall. Over the past few weeks we have between 35–45 people attending the service in the hall and about 20–25 people watching the livestream of the service. There are then others who catch up with the video of the service either later on Sunday or in the week. From our conversations with many of those who do not attend the service in the hall we know that the majority of them are happy to attend the services when we have the larger space of being able to meet in the new church building. There are others who do not attend either in the hall or engage with the livestream. It is our hope that these folks will feel able to reconnect with the fellowship once we are in the new building. As a Leadership Team we will be making a personal visit to these folks in the next few weeks to see how they are doing and to encourage them to re-join us once we are in the new buildings.

There are also a handful of folks who, due to being clinically vulnerable, do not at this moment in time feel completely comfortable attending an in-person service in the new building. Therefore, from next Sunday, the 20th, we will be recording an audio of the sermon and making it available on the church website for these folks to listen to, and if required we will make CDs of the sermon and deliver it to the 1 or 2 folks who are not online and who do not intend to join us in the new building at this moment in time due to their vulnerability.

The Leadership Team recognise that there have been some folks with connections to BBC that live elsewhere in the UK or even further afield who occasionally join us via the livestream. It has been great to be able to connect with these folks every now and then over the past couple of years. We realise that the decision to end the livestream will impact on these folks. However, we feel that primarily we are a congregation that is called to gather the 'local church' for collective worship and our primary calling is to serve those in our local communities. It is our heartfelt hope and prayer that these friends who have joined us online from further afield in recent months will be able to engage with a local church where they are. These folks are more than welcome to still connect with us by listening to the sermon on the church website and continue to receive from the Lord that way.

Again our apologies for the length of this email and well done if you've made it this far! One last bit of information we want to make you aware of in relation to being back in the new buildings is that of the Covid mitigation measures that we plan to have in place. They are as follows:

- Being in a much larger space than the church hall will allow for greater social distancing for folks who feel more comfortable attending in this environment.
- All the usual wise guidance around not attending if you have Covid symptoms or have had a recent positive Covid test will continue to be in place.
- Hand sanitisers will be located at strategic points throughout the building – please do use them!
- All the upstairs windows will be open to allow for greater ventilation. If you feel more comfortable being near an open window, please do sit upstairs.
- Wearing masks for the church service will be an issue of personal choice. If you feel more comfortable wearing one then please do. You must not feel under any pressure to not wear one just because others are not wearing one. Likewise, if you would prefer not to wear one then do not feel under any pressure to wear one just because other people are.
- We are currently looking to purchase some CO2 monitors for the main area in the church, the fellowship room and the church hall. This will help us to identify any potential build-up of CO2 during our services and activities in all our buildings. This will enable us to take measures to increase the ventilation if CO2 levels become too high, ie open some more windows or doors.

It is our hope that the measures we are undertaking provide you with sufficient assurances that you will be safe when attending the services and activities in the new church buildings. If this is not the case and you would like to discuss any of these issues further, please do get in touch with one of the Leadership Team. In the meantime please do pray for the team of tradespeople as they finalise the last elements of the building work. Pray for us as a Leadership Team and a Next Steps Team as we undertake all that needs to be done in getting ready to restart our services and activities in the new church buildings. And lastly pray for all of those connected with the congregation; that we begin to reconnect with one another in ways and through ministries that have not been able to happen over the last 2 years as a result of Covid and also not having the full use of our church buildings.

Let us give thanks to the faithfulness of the Lord as we, *'cling not to the events of the past or dwell on what has gone before. But watch for the new thing the Lord is going to do. It is happening already; we can see it now! The Lord will make a road through the wilderness and give us streams of water.* Isaiah 43:18–19 GNB

Every blessing,



And the Leadership Team
12th March 2022