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Dear

Reopening the Church Building

I am writing to everyone in the church family about the recent PCC meeting. We made a number of important decisions about the coming months. If you have any questions about any of these, you are more than welcome to call me, or send me a message.

1 Reopening for services

The PCC decided that we will run a **test service** on Saturday 29 August, for PCC members only. This is to test the new layout of the church building (which you can see on the back page of this letter), and to ensure that our risk assessment is adequate for keeping people safe.

Assuming the test goes well, we will hold our first service at **10am on Sunday 6 September 2020**.

However, the limitations of our building, and government requirements mean that:

- Everyone **must wear a mask** at all times (excluding the leader, to help people who read lips).
- **Anyone with symptoms is asked to stay away** and may be refused entry to protect others.
- People at increased risk – defined by the government as those who are over 70 and/or with an underlying health condition – are encouraged to stay away or, if they come, to take extra care to minimise contact with people outside your household.
- Unfortunately we are not able to make the building safe for children 11 and under to attend.
- You will be required to **book a space** if you want to come to a service. This will be done through the church office – (01827) 62573. **This is not something we wanted to have to do**, but we don't have a choice with such limited space.
- **Priority will be given to people who do not have internet access** – i.e. people who are not able to access our online services.
- Bookings will be on a first-come, first-served basis. If the service is full, you may be offered a space in the following week's service. We won't be taking advanced bookings though...!
- The services will be a short version of Morning Prayer, **without singing** (or holy communion).
- There can be no refreshments before or after the service – and unfortunately the congregation will need to **leave as soon as the service is over**, rather than staying around to chat.

2 Continuing online services

Our online services and children's church will continue for the foreseeable future – i.e. until it is safe for us all to meet in the church building again. We will continue to produce and send out the Daily Prayer booklets and emails, and the Night Prayer services.

3 **Ark**

With a heavy heart the PCC has decided to suspend the Ark for 12 months. It is simply not possible to make our building safe to use for young children and families – especially given a number of carers are older and therefore more vulnerable.

We will aim to restart the Ark in September 2021 – either exactly as it was before, or if we have some bright ideas, in a new way!

4 **Place of Welcome**

During lockdown Mandy has continued to stay in touch with many of the Place of Welcome regulars, including providing a weekly quiz. The PCC has agreed to pay her up to four hours per week to continue to do this work, and prepare to reopen the Place of Welcome as soon as the guidelines change and we are permitted to do so.

5 **Grant Funding**

We have been pledged a generous gift of £6,000 to pay 50% of the cost of paying someone to continue the great work Mandy was doing as our Mission Apprentice (unfortunately her funding runs out at the end of August). Allan Baldwin and I have been looking for additional grants to find the other 50%. We hope to make some applications in the autumn, aiming for the person to start working in September 2021.

6 **Maintaining Contact**

It isn't easy to maintain contact with one another during lockdown. Until the guidelines are relaxed, the only options we have are using telephones and video calling.

Our pastoral care team of Sue, Ray, Carol, and Mandy have been doing a wonderful job keeping in touch with everyone over the past months. We have also been running live quizzes through our YouTube channel.

If you have any bright ideas for other things we could do – unfortunately I've investigated and the vicarage garden is not allowed! – please let me know.

7 **Finance**

Thanks to your generosity, our finances are looking a lot healthier than they could be. However, we are still running at a loss each month, because we are not receiving the gifts we would normally expect to from plate collections. This situation cannot continue forever!

If you normally give using envelopes or cash on the plate, please consider switching to the Parish Giving Scheme, which allows you to give via direct debit. If you want more information, you need to speak to our treasurer, Catriona (701905).

I know some have dropped off cash at Catriona's house and she has paid it into the bank – this is fine as a temporary / emergency situation, but should not happen regularly. It is not ok for one person to handle cash in this way – for their own protection (against malicious allegations etc).

8 **Common Fund**

As I have said many times before, we are not able to pay enough money to the Church of England Birmingham to cover the cost of having a full-time vicar. The shortfall is made up by the generous donations of other churches, who pay extra into the pot so churches like ours can have a vicar.

The reality is that this situation cannot continue forever. Unless we find a way to cover the cost of our ministry, it is highly likely I will be 'asked' to take on an additional parish, or start working part-time. I hope the diocese will find some additional funding from somewhere – but they may not.

What's next?

As I said in my sermon this morning:

our church family is not standing still

our church family has not hit the 'pause' button

our church family is definitely not dying!

'The church' is not a building, it is a family, a community of faith. *We* are 'the church', not our (lovely) building. That means God has continued to work in and through the church in Amington, even though we haven't been able to use our building.

And that means **God will continue to work in and through the church in Amington**, even though we won't be able to use our building for many weeks (if not months).

Please continue to:

- pray for one another every day (the prayer calendar is published each week on the news sheet)
- read the Scriptures (our Daily Prayer emails contain a proverb and a reflection for each day, but other resources are available if you'd like something else – just ask!)
- meet if you can (some home groups are meeting virtually – it's not ideal but better than nothing!)
- share your faith (perhaps offer to pray for others, and share Jesus' promise to be with us always?)
- **follow Jesus together**

Celebration

You're all in my thoughts and prayers every day, and I long for the day when we can all meet together. The final thing the PCC mentioned was to have a big celebration and communion when we can all finally meet together down at the church building.

I for one, am already looking forward to that day!

God bless,



Revd Ben Green
Vicar of Amington

New Church Layout

The purpose of this layout is to ensure that we maintain a 2m gap between households attending services in the church building.

We will use cones along the path to help people maintain a 2m distance while they wait to enter the building.

Each of the horizontal lines inside the building denotes a row of chairs:

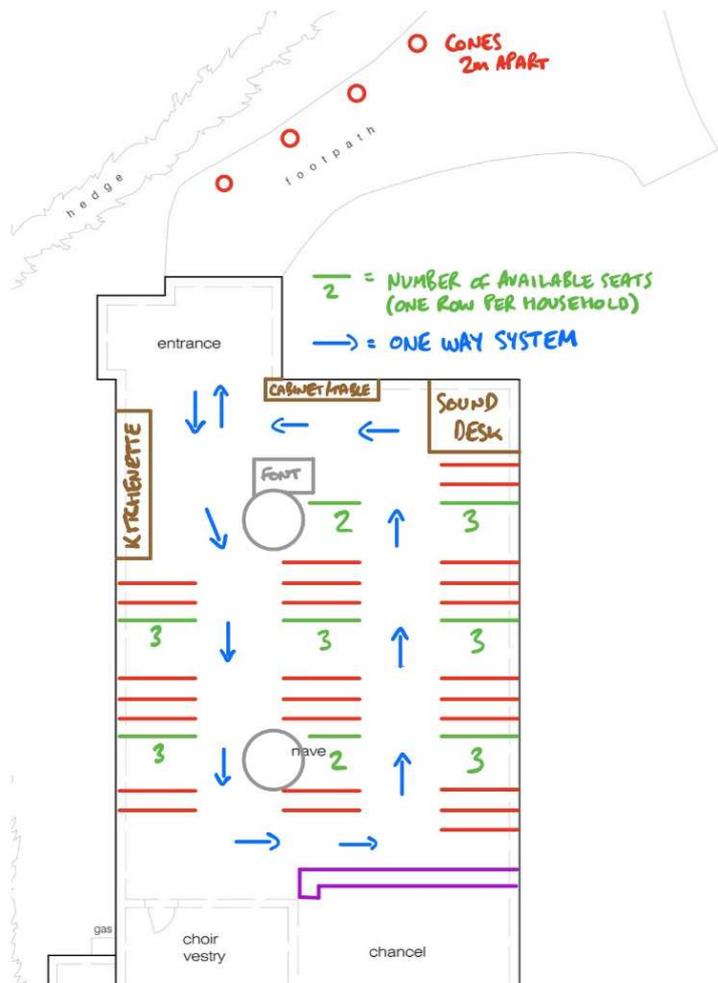
- **green ones** are for people to sit in,
- **red ones** are not.

This means we can fit a maximum of:

- **8 households,**
- and up to **22 people**

in the church building (not including the service leader or the person in charge of the sound desk).

The **blue arrows** show the direction of the one-way system we will be using.



Here is a photograph of what this new layout looks like – the chairs with space are where people may sit:

