



Holy Trinity Huddersfield

Loving God, Loving Huddersfield

Closure of the church building January 2021

At an extraordinary meeting of the Holy Trinity Parochial Church Council (PCC) on 13 January 2021, in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the PCC voted unanimously to request permission from the Bishop of Leeds to close our church building for Sunday worship and private prayer for the foreseeable future. Bishop Nick has today granted that request and therefore all services in the church building at Holy Trinity are now suspended with immediate effect.

It is notable that as part of the latest lockdown restrictions the government included public worship as an activity which is exempt from the 'stay at home' order in England. This is different to the previous two lockdowns, and indicates that the government views public worship as relatively 'low risk', and even an essential activity! It is also arguable that places of worship have navigated the previous lockdowns well, so being able to worship together in person may be regarded as justifiable even in these times of significant restriction.

However, with the decision now being handed to parishes as to whether they meet physically or not, the guidance from the Church of England nationally is that, in these exceptional times, the Vicar and PCC can jointly agree to seek permission from the Bishop to dispense with the legal requirement to meet communally for public worship. The Diocese of Leeds has stated that whilst we *can* meet it doesn't necessarily mean that we *should* meet. So we have had to balance the fact that, whilst church is best expressed by physically gathering together where possible and we have sought to put in place reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus, there are additional factors to take into consideration in these exceptional times.

The following factors formed the basis of the discussion and decision by PCC:

- The new Covid-19 variant is so highly transmissible that the existing safeguards of distance, masks and handwashing may be insufficient to suppress its transmission.
- The vast majority of those who attend our services in church are internet users who have access to our online service. Those in our church community who are unable to access our online services are likely to be those in the highest risk categories and, whilst it is their decision, we should not be encouraging them to consider venturing out.
- Despite our messages to the contrary, we may be putting an implicit but unfair expectation on people to help resource services in church who may in truth prefer to follow the order to stay at home.
- Staying open for services could actually hinder our witness to the parish and town at this time. We are seeking to love God but also love Huddersfield. Our loving of God is not confined to gathering in our building and there was concern that, whilst relatively low risk, our services in church could unwittingly be the means by which the virus is spread, which would obviously not be loving.
- The key government messages at this time are to '*stay at home*' and '*act as though you have the virus*' - minimising non-essential contact and protecting health and other essential public services. Continuing to remain open for services in our church building, even though legally allowed, may be seen as undermining these key messages.

This decision does not affect our public responsibility to continue conducting funerals and weddings in church in line with current government guidance of course.

This is the first time as a PCC that we have ourselves had to make the decision to request closure of our church building for services, and whilst we appreciate that it may not be universally welcomed, we trust that you can understand and appreciate the reasons why the decision has been made. The decision will be reviewed in conjunction with ongoing advice from the government and Diocese, and no later than the PCC meeting on 11th March. The three of us are of course available to receive any thoughts or concerns you have, and if you would like to share your views with, or ask a question of, the whole PCC then please contact the PCC Secretary Paul Triner on pccsecretary@holytrinityhuddersfield.com.

With our love and prayers.

Mike Wilkins (Vicar); **John Playle & Iain Spencer** (Church Wardens)