

Dear Friends,

I had hoped that we would both, be fully out of lockdown by June 21, and that we would be preparing to welcome a new incumbent in September. Sadly, neither of these hopes have come to pass but we trust that God is good and that He knows what He is doing. In the meantime, it is important for us to respond to our ever-changing circumstances with godliness and wisdom, seeking to apply biblical principles to our situation. There are at least two principles we should consider in the coming weeks:

1) In-person church is far better than on-line church

Early in the first lockdown we were able to transition to, live, online, broadcast services. These services are very hard to deliver and it is credit to a team of committed volunteers that these live broadcasts have continued for so long. My thanks go to David Mann, James Mountford, Peter Geddes, and Andrew Patterson in particular, although these four are by no means the only ones who have made online services possible. We praise God for our volunteers and the technology which has made these broadcasts possible. We offered these services because we had to, but in a very real sense online services are not church. The word 'church' refers to a gathering or an assembly. There is very little sense in which an online service is a gathering and therefore church. Some may have thought that Covid-19 was serving to accelerate an almost inevitable shift towards virtual church and digital outreach. In reality, Covid-19 has served to reveal that online church delivers diminishing spiritual returns and we need church as God designed it to be: an in-person gathering around His word.

It is important, therefore, that as soon as is practicably possible we stop our online services and return to church. There is a good question to be answered around how we develop our online and digital presence and I would be grateful for any suggestions. Perhaps naively, I had hoped that June 20 would be our final broadcast but it may be wiser to continue broadcasting services until the end of the school term, that is July 18. After this we will enter our summer 'Indescribable' programme before we start a Bible overview in the autumn.

For those who are housebound we will record the sermons and make these available through Flame radio and on the website. The staff team and MLT will also consider the idea of a monthly podcast, which, if we master the platform, may increase to fortnightly, or even weekly, in time.

2) We need to stay flexible

Over the coming months we will need to remain adaptable and flexible, both individually and as a church. The situation may change quickly and we will continue to review our policies for booking in to church, cleaning the buildings, opening up the halls (which will now be delayed until at least July 19) as well as considering which services we can realistically manage with reduced resources and the absence of a vicar. It's worth doing whatever we can to keep meeting physically, since as material beings we were made to relate in the flesh rather than tuning in anonymously to a YouTube broadcast.

As we return to church, it is an opportunity to press the "re-set" button and get church services started in the way we mean them to go on. It's a really good time to get involved in order to shape the future. We certainly need the help. Each service can be broken down into four broad areas: music, technology, children's work, and hospitality. We need help in all four areas and there should be something that appeals to everyone. As the months go by we would love to be able to offer a warm welcome, provide a hot beverage, get singing, and teach our young people about Jesus. It would be great if every single person who would call this their church could help in one of these four areas. It would also ease the burden on those who are currently working very hard if everyone could do one thing before anyone does two things. If you think you could help, please get in touch.

Thank you so much for your patience and flexibility so far. Please pray that we might have more and more opportunities to "spur one another on towards love and good deeds...not [giving] up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as [we] see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

With love in Jesus,
Chris