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I was glad when they said unto me; we will go into the House of the Lord

Dear Friends

This verse from Psalm 122 was part of the introit for the fourth Sunday of Lent in the old missal. It was often the Sunday when apprentices and servants were allowed to return home to their mother-church and families; from which the tradition of Mothering Sunday arose.

This year this Sunday is the first after the government begins to relax some of the lockdown restrictions that have overshadowed our lives for most of the last year. Though the government regulations were very clear in the current lockdown that attending worship was one of the few valid reasons to leave home, we have all been conscious that spending long times inside with other people could raise the risk of transmission so worship here has been deliberately kept short and numbers restricted. As the vaccine roll-out continues and as all the medical and scientific data show that the situation is improving, the government has laid out a road-map over the next few months indicating how society might begin to move back to our usual open society.

The churchwardens, pcc and I have been looking at how we might have our own parish road-map to returning to normal, that is assuming any of us can remember what that was! I suspect that some things like sharing the peace and communicating in both kinds may take a very long time to return but there are steps we can take towards a return.

Each step we take will be tied to the government's phased plan and will be dependent on that step being announced by the powers that be. The first of those steps, following the start of the official road-map today with the return to school, will be the limited re-introduction of music at the Sunday mass. This will be chosen to keep the mass shorter than usual so the time spent together is limited. So from Sunday March 14, the organ and a cantor will accompany the mass.

The next phase in the government's plan is set for March 29th which is the Monday of Holy Week, which means that hopefully we can keep Holy Week together even in a limited way. So in Holy Week there will be a mass with address at 6pm on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, which will be open for people to attend but will also be live-

streamed. The Bishop's Chrism Mass will also be live-streamed only and more details of that will appear on the website and Facebook page.

- On Maundy Thursday there will be a sung mass at 7pm with a small choir, suitably socially distanced, followed by a shortened watch until 10pm.
- On Good Friday there will be the usual liturgy at 3pm.
- The Vigil and First Mass of Easter will be at 7.45pm on Holy Saturday evening, again with a small choir.

All of these liturgies will have to be changed slightly to meet social distancing standards.

On Easter Day the mass will be at the usual time of 10am but we are asking that people indicate if they are going to attend, in the same way that we did at Christmas; so please drop me a note, email or text or follow the booking system on the website and Facebook pages.

From Easter week onwards both the Tuesday and Thursday masses will be open to people attending. All masses will continue to be live-streamed. Thorough cleaning will continue to be followed after each opening of the building.

As society, God-willing, makes further moves to opening up, then we will move appropriately to returning to a more usual pattern of worship and social events. One question I'm often asked is 'when can we sing again?' As yet there doesn't seem to be any guidance on this and there is a separate government review of social distancing rules, so I suspect congregational singing will depend on the outcome of that review.

We have tried and will continue to balance caution with the need to provide for the worship of God and the building up of his people.

Easter is the ultimate celebration of hope and the realisation of the promises of God. Let us continue to pray for all those who are working to defeat this pandemic.

With prayers and blessings that you might keep a holy Lent,

your parish priest

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. [unclear]", with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.