

Temporary closure of St Peter's: Standing Committee recommendation to the PCC

Background

The government's guidance published on 4th January (updated on 6th January) said:

"You can attend places of worship for a service. However, you must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble. You should maintain strict social distancing at all times."

Bishop Robert, in his letter to clergy on 5th January, said:

"please review your risk assessment(s) and, if at all possible, keep your church buildings open at least for private prayer."

Our risk assessment was reviewed on 7th January by our Health & Safety Officer Mark Heritage and found to be up to date with no amendments required.

Recent experience

In the light of this, the Standing Committee took the view that it was safe to hold a short service of Holy Communion in St Peter's at 11.00 on Sunday 10th January, while at the same time encouraging as many as possible to stay at home and join our service of Morning Prayer at 10.00 online or by phone.

In the event, the overwhelming majority joined the Zoom / phone service, and only three came to the service in church. (It is worth noting that none of the three was aware of the alternative as they did not receive the email circulation. They were happy to give us their contact details so that we can keep them informed in future.)

Conclusion

The Standing Committee reviewed what had occurred on Sunday at its meeting on Monday 11th January. It concluded that, although the service on 10th had gone well and been safely conducted, that was dependent on having a churchwarden present and an adequate ratio of sidespeople to congregants to ensure that the provisions of the risk assessment were adhered to.

This need for supervision places an onus on our volunteers which requires them to place themselves at risk. This seems unwise, unnecessary and quite possibly unsustainable in the present circumstances of rising infection rates and the closure of other churches. Without adequate numbers of sidespeople present (which cannot be guaranteed) it would not be possible to open the church safely. This applies equally to both public worship and private prayer. The Health & Safety Officer agrees.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee therefore recommends that **the PCC should agree to the temporary suspension of services in St Peter's** until it is once more possible to be sure that we can hold services safely.

If the PCC agrees with this recommendation, I will write to Bishop Robert on behalf of the PCC to seek his dispensation from the requirements of Canon Law in this regard.

In the meantime, there will be no service in church this Sunday. The Archdeacon is aware.

pcc 21jan21 st p's closure

13th January 2021