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Tuesday 20th July 21

Dear church family,

I want to begin by quoting these words that I've received yesterday from Walsall Council: -

'The prime minister's announcement last week that England would move to Step 4 of the roadmap out of lockdown today (19 July) will have been welcome news to many; however, the end of restrictions does not mean the end of COVID-19. We are, in truth, a long way from 'life after COVID'. We are still living with COVID-19 and need to manage the risk to ourselves and others by continuing to practice the key behaviours we have become so used to: **hands**, **face**, **space** and **fresh** air'.

Holding the reality of the Covid 19 situation in mind, I shared with everyone in church on Sunday morning that at St James' what we want to aim for regarding this summer period is a balance between <u>making the most of the new opportunities</u> given to us by the restrictions easing, whilst making sure that we are doing <u>everything safely.</u> We want to make sure that everyone coming to St James' building/the church hall for services, meetings or for our Place of Welcome, will feel at ease.

Then, yesterday evening our PCC (church council) met and we arrived at the following decisions that we are confident take into account the welfare of everyone and prioritise the safety of our most vulnerable members: -

➤ <u>About Holy Communion:</u> Whilst the C of E have said that we can either distribute a shared chalice, or give out the wafer with a drop of wine on, the council decided that *for the time being we'll continue giving out the bread wafers only.* This is recognising that those among us who haven't or have only recently started receiving a wafer would be feeling more comfortable with this decision.

➤ <u>About Singing:</u> Since the start of May we've been having members of our Heart of Worship Choir singing as the rest of us reflect, for just a few songs on Sunday mornings and evenings.

From this Sunday (25th July), we are going *to allow everyone to sing*, providing they wear *a mask or face covering*, and are all facing towards the front of church (*in the same direction*). At every service, I will remind us to also make sure that we are singing *in a controlled way* behind our masks/face coverings (not at the top of our voices).

As for Sunday evenings, on this Sunday (25th July) and on 22nd and 29th August, we'll go ahead with our planned *outdoor services*, where we can sing *freely without masks on as we take care to keep a distance from one another.* At PCC we decided that for the whole month of *September* (weather permitting), *each* of our evening services will be *outside*.

➤ About refreshments after services & at our Place of Welcome: For Sunday mornings we decided that we'll carry on making use of the good weather, and so share drinks outside on the green – again taking care to distance as we stand and talk, with there being no requirement to have to wear a mask/face covering.

For our Place of Welcome, we decided that we'd continue to wear masks/face coverings if walking around, and only remove them when sitting to talk with others – again, sitting at a reasonable distance from each other.

About social distancing: The C of E guidance document produced about Step 4 said: 'Vaccination cannot be the sole means of containing the spread of the virus: *hand and respiratory hygiene*, *social distancing*, *face-coverings* and *good ventilation* are also important factors in lessening the spread of the disease'.

Taking all of this into account, we've decided that in the main area of the church building on Sundays and for weddings and funerals, we'll have *rows of chairs from the front* of the church and up to almost two thirds of the way to the back of church. The rows will have *3 feet space between them* and you will also have the option of picking up a *square card* that says: 'Please do not

sit here' (c), if you'd like to sit in a row but not have someone directly to your right/left.

The seating in the back third of the church will be **spaced in ones and twos**, so that there is the option to sit further apart if you'd like to. There will also be a small number of more spaced seating in the chancel area and the fellowship room.

In terms of our seating capacity in the church's main area, chancel and music areas, these decisions mean that this has now risen from **55** to **78 people.**

The last thing I want to let you know is that the verses of scripture that have been coming to me in such a strong way since over last weekend have been 1 Corinthians 10: 23-24: "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others'.

I pray that each of you will be encouraged and experience your hearts being emboldened by the news of this letter about Holy Communion, singing, refreshments and social distancing. Please know that you are also welcome to wear a mask/covering for *all of the time* that you're on the church building's site if you'd like to, and of course for as long as you want to going forward.

Covid 19 has affected us all but the amazing truth is we know that God has never, nor ever will fail us. He will lead us on by the power of the Spirit, that we'll be able to keep on worshipping Him, learning together, sharing fellowship with one another and taking part in His mission among the people of Brownhills and Clayhanger.

With many prayers as we step into this new time, confident that we're held in God's Mighty Hands,

Rev'd Gayle

G. Ferry