Dear Friends

Well here we are. Who knew what this year would bring, when in January we were hearing about the outbreak of a virus called Covid-19 in Wuhan? Who knew things were going to be so different? As we start to come out of lockdown, we now know that it’s not going to be quite the same for some considerable time… or, perhaps, ever!

We have begun to risk assess the churches and, as far as capacity is concerned, the news isn’t great. Would you believe that we can get nearly as many people (which is not many) into the church at Beckwithshaw as Pannal? Our biggest challenge is that, in Pannal, we are a big congregation in a small church and the layout is against us.

When we welcome you back into the church building on Sunday mornings starting on the 13th September 2020, we will almost certainly have an advance booking system in place, which we are developing to be as easy as possible, online as well as by telephone. We will have social distancing of 2m and no congregational singing, but even so it will be a breath of fresh air to meet people face-to-face again, albeit possibly mask-to-mask.

As we plan for September, we are working on a new pattern of worship to provide greater capacity, with three main morning services probably 9.00am and 10.15am at Pannal and 11.30am at Beckwithshaw. We will hold a youth group meeting once a month and Baptisms will take place outside the main service in the afternoon once a month. We have to prune our weekly offering to be able to fit into these new patterns of service. We will have a traditional service one a month at 8.00am and we are suspending evening services for the time being. Our mid-week communion service on a Thursday will still go ahead but will be in church and follow all the safety measures of a Sunday. We hope to use a mixture of traditional and contemporary liturgy to ensure it is accessible. We are currently exploring how we engage with Junior church and Crumpet church which can’t proceed in the same way as it did previously. We will keep you informed of what we are doing with regards to our children’s ministry as we work out how to engage safely and with equity. Music is also another issue and I will be meeting with Kevin Paynes to chat this through in some detail over the next couple of weeks. We do have some guidance, but we were expecting another announcement regarding this which hasn’t transpired. We can’t sing but we will still be able to have music. This will mean the spoken aspects of the service will have new and deeper resonance, now they are our main shared expression of worship.

Our online services continue through the summer, and thanks to the boldness and willingness of our PCC in Pannal to grasp the nettle, we will have a new audio-visual system and the facilities to be able to stream a live service from St Robert’s each week. We will need a team of volunteers to enable this as we go forward, as well as financial support to cover the cost of this new equipment, but I have every faith God will provide.

If you continue to engage through our YouTube channel please don’t feel guilty that online church is the right option for you; instead, enjoy, receive and share these services with others. It has never been easier to invite someone to church – just send them the link!  This remains a central part of our church witness, and a significant point of contact for a congregation too large to fit into our churches whilst observing social distancing. This indeed is “church without walls”, and it feels as if we are walking in the footsteps of the first disciples…

With summer now here, we will be developing our plans during the school holidays and taking a break as usual.  We may be resting a bit, but God will be still at work!  All over the world the greatest revolution in the communication of the gospel since the birth of the early church is taking place.  The pandemic has caused great distress, but also much blessing.  Let us use this summer wisely, to prepare ourselves to step more fully into his wonderful will for our lives, church family, nation and the world.

With every blessing

John & Abbie