

Dear All,

We write to let you know at the earliest opportunity the outcome of our deliberations yesterday evening at the Deacons' Meeting regarding reopening the church sanctuary for worship. We are very mindful that this will cause disappointment and we apologise for this, but after much careful consideration, we decided that we do not feel it is right to open up for worship again on Easter Sunday, 4th April. We will explain how we came to this decision.

On 5th January this year, the United Reformed Church strongly recommended that churches do not open for public worship although this was not prohibited by the Government's rules. The Baptist Union gave the same advice. The Government made an announcement on the 22nd February setting out the road map for the easing of lockdown and both denominations responded by withdrawing the recommendation to remain closed.

The Deacons began to consider their response to this change and cautiously proposed that we might reopen on Easter Sunday. This was the main item on the agenda for our Deacons' Meeting this Thursday. You will understand that it was a surprise to receive further advice from the Synod Moderators of the URC, issued on Friday of last week, which included the following statement:

Even if/where it is permitted, we urge churches to consider carefully whether they should open as soon as Easter Day, unless the current improvements are sustained and the risks are properly assessed and managed. Rather, we suggest that Pentecost may be a better time to consider as a point for the resumption of in-person worship, subject to a number of important conditions being met.

You can read the full text of their advice on this link:

[Synod Moderators issue new guidance on reopening of church buildings](#)

Following a lengthy and prayerful discussion about this at the Deacon's Meeting, we came to the conclusion that we should not go against the Moderators' advice. Of course, we are free as a congregation to make our own choices about our church life. Also, it is the Deacons who have the legal responsibility to ensure that we follow the law and that we safeguard all who are involved in our church. Still, we do not think we should disregard their advice at this point. Again, we are very mindful that for some of you this will be a disappointment and others will be relieved that we continue to take a cautious approach. Here are some points for us to bear in mind:

- If we had opened on Easter Sunday we would not have been permitted to sing or to socialise before and after the service. We could not have given out Easter eggs or held an Easter Breakfast, so the experience would have been less than we usually enjoy.
- Although case numbers are reducing in Ipswich as elsewhere, we do not yet know what the impact of children returning to school will have on numbers.
- Most of our congregation will have had a first dose of vaccine but very few will have had the second dose by Easter. We know that the vaccines are good, but they will not be effective for everyone.

We appreciate that Pentecost Sunday may seem a long way off. As ever, we will keep this decision under review. We all very much look forward to gathering again as a church family. In the meantime, we continue to be the Church together in our 'lockdown' mode and will maintain our current approach to worship, fellowship and pastoral care. We continue to do our best as a Diaconate to support and care for folk within our Church family but if ever you need some support or are aware that someone else might, please do reach out to one of us and we will do all we can to help.

Every blessing to you all,

Neil and Rob

On behalf of all the Christ Church Deacons