

Dear Friends

I am writing to confirm the arrangements that are being made for St. Sampson's and St. Mary's Churches as we look to resume congregational worship on Sunday 21st June.

Over these last few weeks, we have been praying and reflecting on the future direction of both churches. Those of you who attended last Sunday's Zoom service will have heard me saying that I feel we have reached a *Kairos* moment in the church (that is, a moment when God's call or challenge is acutely felt) and within wider society we may well be entering a new paradigmatic phase. St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans (Ch 12 vs 2) "Do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God." *Kairos* moments are challenging, often shattering our old certainties and requiring of us new reserves of resourcefulness and hope.

After these weeks of prayer and lengthy discussions with the Churchwardens of both churches, also involving the Trustees of St. Mary's and having advised the Dean, we have decided to respond to this *Kairos* moment and to make some significant changes. As a result, we will be introducing a new and more creative pattern of worship as follows:

9.45am Service at St. Mary's comprising:

1st and 3rd Sundays usually Morning Worship, 2nd Sunday Parade Service, 4th Sunday Holy Communion. The music at the service will be organ led;

11.00am Service at St. Sampson's comprised of informal worship followed by a short Holy Communion. The music at this service will be pre-recorded.

On Sunday 21st June, the service at St. Sampson's will be a Family Communion service. From 28th June, for approximately one month, St. Sampson's Church will be closed to enable repairs to be made to the fabric. During this period, services will be held at 11.00am in the Church Community Hall at Potters Corner. The services will take the form of a café style church with an optional Holy Communion at 11.45am.

Why are we making these changes now?

As mentioned above, the Covid 19 lockdown period has given us a period to pray and reflect on the ministry and witness of the churches. Since joining the Parish, it has been clear that both churches are struggling financially and numerically and that significant change would be needed to begin to halt and reverse the decline.

As we all know, these last few months have not been easy. Before Covid 19 came along, it was apparent that any mention of change was causing disharmony, particularly at the Parish Church. We discussed these issues at the St. Sampson's Church Annual Meeting which was held on Sunday 15th March, the final Sunday on which we met prior to the beginning of the Covid 19 lockdown. It was clear at that meeting that it would be very hard indeed to find a compromise with which everyone would be content.

For this reason, the Churchwardens and I have concluded that we would offer a more 'traditional' service at St. Mary's for those who prefer organ led worship, whilst St. Sampson's will explore different forms of more contemporary worship using pre-recorded music. Congregation members will be able to choose the service which best helps them to

worship. This could mean that some from St. Sampson choose to worship at the 9.45am service at St. Mary's and, conversely, some from St. Mary's may choose to worship at the 11.00am service at St. Sampson.

In order to offer this flexibility of worship across the two churches, it is necessary to change the time of the mid-morning services, which both took place at 10.30am. An additional benefit of this change is that it will allow me to minister across the two churches in a way which ensures better continuity. The restrictions placed at the start of the Covid 19 outbreak in March, on Clergy and Licensed Lay ministers aged 70 and over officiating at funerals and presiding at other services remains in place. Although I expect this to be lifted in the near future, it means that John Le Page cannot currently take services at St. Mary's. When the restriction is lifted, I look forward to John resuming his part, assisting in the ministry of St. Mary's.

We hope that by focusing our energies on these morning services, we will both sustain and nourish our existing church members and provide focused worship which will be attractive to those who are taking their first steps of faith. This is vitally important as we look to grow and build our fellowship at both St. Mary's and St. Sampson's.

In coming to this decision, we have looked at all of the other services which were held at St. Sampson's. The evening services were struggling and ceased in January and these will not re-start for the foreseeable future. We have also had to take the difficult decision that the 8am Holy Communion service will not re-start. A glance through the Service Register shows that the 8am service has been in numeric decline for several years and on some occasions, there have been fewer than three people present. Taking a decision like this is not easy because we recognise that some have attended this service for many years. We hope that those affected by this change will be able to attend a service either at 9.45am or 11.00am. We would guide those whose lifestyle means that they specifically prefer to worship at 8am, to the neighbouring churches of St. Peter Port and the Vale, both of which currently offer an 8am service of Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer – St. Peter Port Town Church, Common Worship Order 1 Traditional Language – Vale Church).

I hope that this letter clarifies the new pattern of worship for both St. Mary's and St. Sampson's and the reasons why we are prayerfully making these changes. I would ask that you pray for the renewal of our churches and that you would be supportive of these changes and of the leadership as we look to further discern the future direction of our churches.

Blessings

Gill
Revd Gill Nobes
Rector of St. Sampson's

16th June 2020