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Dear friends,

You are warmly invited...

... to join us at Larkfield & East Malling Methodist church for services in the church building from **Sunday 13 September 2020**. After six months, we are delighted to be reopening our doors. This letter sets out some of the measures that have been put in place to ensure we can gather safely; everything you'll need to know about attending a service; and the options available if you're not yet ready to gather in person.

What will be different (and what will be the same)?

For the time being, we'll be holding one 'in-person' service on Sunday mornings at **10am**. As usual, services will be led by a range of ministers and Local Preachers. Services will be shorter than usual (probably around **30 minutes**) and will include a mix of **prayers, readings, and reflections**. Although we won't be able to sing, our services will still include music in other ways. We don't know when it will be possible for Junior Church to resume, but **children and young people** are most welcome to attend and to sit with their families. Services will necessarily look and feel very different in the immediate future, but we are confident that it will still be possible to worship together 'in spirit and in truth'!

Due to the need for physical distancing, our seating capacity is limited, so we will be operating a **booking system** (more details below). Services may be held in the hall (which has a higher seating capacity) or in the church, with overflow into the hall, depending on numbers. All those attending worship will need to wear a **face covering**, unless they are under 11 or otherwise exempt (more details below). On arrival, a team of welcome stewards will help you to **queue safely** before entering the building and to **sanitise your hands**, and will show you to your seat. Please let them know if you have any additional needs, or if you would like a hard copy of the notices. You'll be able to sit with others from your household but will need to maintain a **two-metre distance** from others. After the service, we sadly won't be able to provide **refreshments** – instead, a church steward will let you know how to leave the building safely (following the one-way system and sanitising your hands as you exit). If you wish to chat to friends from church, we ask that you do so once you have exited the building, at a safe distance from one another. The **accessible toilet will be available**; please use the hand sanitiser provided before entering the toilet and when you leave.

We won't be passing round an **offering plate**; instead, there will be a plate at the entrance and exit, if you would like to make your offering in cash or by envelope. If you haven't already done so, you might like to consider switching your regular giving to standing order.

We'll also be producing a short video, to help you visualise the experience of attending church under the current restrictions. Keep an eye on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/larkfield) and website (www.larkfieldmethodist.org).

What do I need to do?

I am enormously grateful to all those who have worked hard to prepare the church for reopening and to complete our risk assessment, or who have volunteered for additional roles while the restrictions are in place. But in order for us to gather safely, each of us has a vital role to play.

First, if you or a member of your household has COVID-19 or any symptoms of the virus, we ask that you do not attend a service at church.

Second, if you would like to join us for worship, we ask that you contact Dave Raven on 07867884043 in order to **book your place** for the coming Sunday, either by:

- sending Dave a text message anytime between 4pm on Wednesday and 6pm on Friday, or
- phoning Dave between 6pm and 8pm on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday.

We are very grateful to Dave for managing the booking system, and kindly ask that you don't attempt to book a place outside of these times. Dave will ask for the number of people in your household who will be attending the service, and for your contact details, which will be held on file for 21 days and then destroyed as part of the Government's '**Test and Trace**' programme.

Third, in accordance with Government requirements, you are asked to wear a **face covering** at all times while in the church building. There are certain exemptions (based on age and physical and mental wellbeing); all the details can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/facecoveringexemptions>

Fourth, we ask you to maintain **physical distancing** (2m wherever possible) while in the church building.

Finally, we ask that you follow the directions of the team of **welcome stewards** and the **church steward on duty**, who will be on hand to help you and answer any questions.

What if I'm not ready?

We fully understand that, for a variety of reasons, many people will not feel comfortable attending a public act of worship at this time, and so the circuit will continue providing a weekly **online service** for the foreseeable future. Whether you worship in a church building or at home, both are equally valid expressions of 'church' and you will continue to be a valued member of our church family.

I know that you will all give careful thought to your own safety, that of your household, and that of the rest of the church family before deciding whether or not to attend a service at church. The Government's advice for various groups, including those who are deemed 'clinically vulnerable,' can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/stayalertandsafe>

Careful work has been carried out on our church's risk assessment; this work has been scrutinised and approved by the Church Council. If you would find it helpful to see the risk assessment, or if you have any questions about the measures that have been put in place to keep us all safe, please don't hesitate to be in touch with me. We will keep a careful eye on the restrictions, and let you know (via the notices, your Pastoral Visitor, the Facebook page, website and other means) of any changes.

Since we last gathered for worship in March, it often feels as if the world has changed beyond recognition. It has been a time of unexpected blessings – from the live-streamed services that have regularly reached 300+ households, to the incredible work of our Pastoral Visitors keeping our church family connected. But we recognise that, for so many, this time of physical separation has been one of grief and loss. So as we prepare for a future that includes a richer array of opportunities to worship in person, online *and* by phone, we give thanks that we are a resurrection people, and that God will bring us through this period of grief into the joy of new life. As always, we praise God for all that is past, and trust him for all that's to come.

Every blessing,

The Revd Naomi Oates



The church and hall with 'physically-distanced' seating.