

The Revd Naomi Oates
Burham, Eccles, Larkfield & Tonbridge Road Methodist Churches
The North Kent Methodist Circuit
45 Garner Drive, East Malling, West Malling, ME19 6NF
01732 875 072
naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk

1 September 2020

www.methodist.org.uk
www.nkmethodists.org.uk
registered charity no 1132208

Dear friends,

You are warmly invited...

... to join us at Tonbridge Road 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 **10.30am**. 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. Although there won't be a separate Junior Church for the time being, **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'!

On arrival, we ask that you enter through the **front door** of the church. A team of door stewards will help you to **queue safely** before entering the building and to **sanitise your hands** as you enter the church. All those attending worship will need to wear a **face covering**, unless they are under 11 or otherwise exempt (more details below) – but don't worry if you forget, as a small number of spare masks will be available. The door stewards will tick your name off a list if we have your contact details on file, and ask for your contact details if not; these will be held on file for 21 days, in accordance with the Government's '**Test and Trace**' programme. Please let the door stewards know if you have any additional needs (eg mobility issues, or if you need space to park a pram!), or if you would like a cushion or 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. This means that not all pews will be available, and that some will be reserved for larger households; a steward will show you to an appropriate seat.

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 in the church will be available**.

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.

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, 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>

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

And finally, we ask that you follow the directions of the team of **door 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>. For those who would usually offer or receive a lift to church, advice on travelling safely can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/traveltochurch>

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 News Sheet, your Pastoral Visitor, the church WhatsApp group 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