

NEWINGTON METHODIST CHURCH

MINUTES OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING (ONLINE VIA ZOOM) – 17 AUGUST 2020

Present: Rev Robert Zachar, Bernard & Jenny Gilbert, Chris Chare, Peter & Mavis Rye, Eileen Hill, Alan & Sue Thorn, Martin Smith, Michael Read-Leah

1. Pastoral Matters

The meeting discussed pastoral matters affecting church members and attenders. People were reminded that it was possible to pay one's offertory online via BACS, but if doing so please include details of what the payment was for in the reference so that it could be tracked by the Treasurer. Chris Chare agreed to provide relevant details to Martin. **ACTION**

2. Reopening the church: risks, actions & date of reopening

Robert Zachar said that a risk assessment for reopening the church had been circulated, with thanks to Bernard Gilbert for working it up and others for their comments. It was essential to enabling reopening and would need to be constantly reviewed too. Robert suggested a couple of further amendments to the assessment:

- Hiring premises: add the need for 'track and trace' of attendees at meetings.
- Church activities: confirm that face masks are mandatory (unless exempted) when inside the building and that 'track and trace' was also relevant for these activities.
- Circuit services would continue online and on the phone, and Martin Smith was recording services on CD for those who want a copy.
- Transport of people to church: that should also be considered, with all people in the car wearing face masks (unless exempted).

The Council agreed the risk assessment as presented, subject to these amendments, and that it would be kept open for discussion as public health advice developed. Michael Read-Leah agreed to update and circulate the document to the Church and Circuit office. **ACTION**

Robert proposed restarting Sunday worship on 13 September. Alan Thorn asked whether the intention was to have weekly or monthly services; who would lead the services (given that many local preachers were not intending to leave their locality); whether the building could accommodate everyone with distancing; and the intention for handling offertory money. Alan also noted that the majority of members were aged over 60 (the suggested vulnerable group); entry and exit to the building would need to be managed; and sanitisation of the building would be required.

Bernard confirmed that normal congregation numbers could be accommodated; leaving the offertory money untouched for a week would enable any infection to die away; and the practicalities of managing entry/exit and sanitisation were not difficult given the building layout and activities under consideration. Robert agreed that frequency and style of services needed consideration if congregations were smaller than normal. Jenny Gilbert suggested they could start as a prayer group set-up. Robert said there was a Circuit discussion on who

would lead services, with local preachers encouraged to preach locally and churches to have local arrangements; there were no plans for communion services.

In discussion, it emerged that the majority of members did not anticipate returning to any church building before December. It was therefore concluded that there were insufficient numbers to justify restarting services at Newington at that time given that there were alternative venues should people wish to attend a service in person (for example the outdoor services at Sittingbourne). In addition, Robert said he would try to visit Newington to say prayers to make a point of opening the building and would put details in the notices so people could come and join in if they wished.

The Council agreed to aim for a resumption of worship services at Newington on 29 November (1st Sunday in Advent) for the annual Covenant Service, subject to prevailing conditions at the time. The position would be reviewed on a monthly basis.

The meeting considered the situation for building lets. Robert noted that hirers would be responsible for cleansing surfaces before and after their session; managing 'track and trace' of attendees; and recording that they had done what they were supposed to do. The Church would have to see their risk assessment in advance; Michael agreed to advise the regular lets accordingly, sharing an appropriate format they could use if they wished. **ACTION**

Before hiring recommenced, the building and grounds would need to be cleaned up. Robert said he would be happy to help with this. It was suggested that signage could be made available for hirers to use according to the requirements of their risk assessment.

The Council agreed that the building could be reopened to hirers from 1 September, subject to the above measures being in place.

Michael mentioned that a Newington Garage Sale had been proposed by the parish council for the end of August or early September, and the Kent Ride and Stride event was planned for Saturday 12 September. It was agreed it would be desirable to have the church open for these events to provide open air refreshments to reinforce the message that the Church remained active in the village, and to utilise any advertising opportunities accordingly.

Michael also advised that St Mary's, Newington planned an open-air benefice service in the churchyard at 10am on Sunday 6 September.

No other business was raised. It was agreed to hold the next Church Council meeting on 19 October at 2pm; it was expected that also would be held online via Zoom.

The meeting closed with prayer at 3pm.