

First Ballyeaston Presbyterian Church



Dear Member

1 September 2020

RESUMING WORSHIP SERVICES IN CHURCH ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2020

It is with grateful hearts that we write to let you know that we will be resuming worship services in our Church on Sunday 20 September - assuming the Coronavirus situation enables us to do so.

The last service in Church was on 15 March, and we are thankful to God for his care since then and are excited to be able to meet together again. We had hoped to return to Church on 6 September, but the Coronavirus situation remains serious and uncertain and it seems prudent to wait a further couple of weeks. This will allow us to monitor Covid developments as children resume school and also to become familiar with our new AV system (see overleaf).

We want to re-open for public worship in a God honouring way and this means we need to exercise care for every member of our congregation. Consequently we encourage everyone, especially those who were medically shielded, to exercise their own discretion when considering the best time to re-join the services in church. We must also ask that anyone displaying symptoms of Covid-19, or who has been in close contact with anyone who has displayed symptoms, does not attend church until after the required quarantine period.

CHURCH WILL BE DIFFERENT

As we return to Church we need to comply with Government requirements and the recommendations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Our services will be different – but that is something we are getting used to in many areas of life. So, what will church be like?

- When we arrive there will be sanitising gel and distancing markers in the entrance hall.
- We won't be able to greet each other by shaking hands, but smiles and waves are ok!
- 2 metre social distancing will limit seating in the church and restrict the numbers we can accommodate. We will be shown to our seats by friendly stewards, and family groups from the same household will be able to sit together.
- To meet Track and Trace requirements we will photograph the congregation. This will avoid the need to sign in on arrival and will provide a record of where people sat. The photographs will be used only for this purpose and will be destroyed after 3 weeks.
- The service will be relayed to a new large screen in the Galbraith Hall which will provide additional capacity and the option of an alternative venue for families with children.
- We will not be able to provide crèche or Children's Church at this time. So we will have family services and children will stay with their parents during the service. We hope to have packs including worksheets for younger children, and downloadable worksheets will also be put on our web-site each week in advance of the service.
- All Bibles and Hymn Books will be removed from the pews - so please bring your own Bible.
- Toilets will be available, with cleaning products which can be used to keep them hygienic.
- We will not pass offering plates around, but will have a retiring collection.
- Face coverings are not compulsory for services, but the main church leaders are encouraging worshippers to use them and we will have a supply available for anyone who forgets.

We understand this will not be appropriate for those exempted from wearing face coverings and for younger children.

- The worship service will be shorter (about 45 minutes) and those leading from the front will not be able to wear masks, but will be 4 metres distanced from the congregation.
- To reduce the risk of spreading the virus the Guidelines suggest that singing should be softer rather than louder. We will be using music to respond reflectively, but have decided that as we resume worship it would initially be safer to have no congregational singing.
- After the service we will be guided out in an orderly manner. It's natural to want to talk with others, but please respect social distancing as you leave the Church and in the car parks.
- The church will be cleaned weekly and there will be wipes for you to use if you wish.

As we again gather together, we ask for your tolerance and patience. The guidelines are for our safety and will take time to implement in a way that works for us in First Ballyeaston. Let's also remember to stay in touch with those who cannot be at church for whatever reason, as we have been doing during lockdown.

THE NEXT TWO SUNDAYS

On 6 and 13 September we will be providing internet services that can be accessed on our Church website www.firstballyeaston.org and through Facebook, as we have done in recent months. These services will be recorded in Church, enabling us to get used to our new digital audio-visual system. We are thankful to God that the installation of this new system has just been completed. It replaces our previous analogue system which was 10 years old and will improve the sound and picture quality in church, and the quality of recorded services for our website and CD ministry.

INTERNET SERVICES

We know that some members will be unable to return to church for health reasons, and others will be reluctant to do so in the current environment. We understand these concerns and no-one should feel under any pressure to come. We will be continuing to provide recorded services on the internet and on CD, which we hope will be a means of connecting with your church family.

CHURCH ORGANISATIONS

Unfortunately, Sunday School and Bible Class, GB, BB, PW and Bowling Club will not be commencing their winter programmes as usual in September. GB Headquarters has decided that companies in NI will not resume meeting until at least the start of November.

CHURCH FINANCES

Along with this letter you will find:

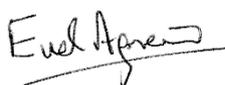
- a record of your contributions to the Church in 2019. Apologies that this is later than normal due to the abnormal circumstances in 2020.
- a note from our Treasurer about the impact of Coronavirus on our finances in 2020. We really appreciate members' generous contributions during recent months and look forward to your on-going support for God's work over the remainder of this year.

Finally, Church will look and feel different for a while yet, and we will continue to respond to this as best we can. Meanwhile, our God is unchanging in his love for us and we are thankful for the freedom we have to worship Him and to be part of His community of grace.

Yours sincerely



Rev E McDowell
Minister



Euel Agnew
Clerk of Session



Malcolm Downey
Congregational Secretary

First Ballyeaston Presbyterian Church

A Note from our Treasurer

As expected, following the Covid 19 restrictions and the end of weekly services in our Church building, contributions to the work of the Church have been lower than in 2019. These are difficult and uncertain times for many, and I want to thank those members who have continued their financial support for the work of our Church. I also know others have continued to set aside their weekly contribution, waiting for the time when they can put it in the collection plate - thank you for doing so.

The following table below gives a brief snapshot of our church income up to 20 August 2020, with 2019 figures for comparison purposes. Although additional members have taken out monthly Standing Orders, contributions through the weekly FWO envelopes are significantly lower and consequently the balance in our General Revenue account is down by £2,300.

	2019	2020	Change £	Change %
Freewill Offering	£34,134	£29,875	- £4,259	- 12 %
United Appeal	£ 3,697	£ 2,686	- £1,011	- 27 %
Property Fund	£ 2,744	£ 2,236	- £ 508	- 19 %

Like any household, the church has on-going running costs to meet for utilities, salaries, PCI Assessments, property upkeep etc.

So, as we get back to church, I would like to ask that you review your financial contributions to the church's work. There are three ways in which you can contribute:

- At church through the free will offering envelopes. (Could I ask that if you are holding over 20 weeks of envelopes you please consolidate the money into 1 envelope). We would prefer cheques or notes, rather than coins, as this requires less handling and poses less virus risk to those counting the money.
- By post – please send this by cheque to me at the address below and include a WFO envelope with the amount written on it. If you wish part of the contribution to be allocated to the United Appeal or Property, please include a note indicating the relevant amounts.
- If you are familiar with online banking, please consider this as a means of contributing. I can provide account details to enable a direct transfer to our Church account or alternatively you could set up a Standing Order payment for a regular monthly amount.

We understand that there are some whose employment situation has changed significantly and we would not wish anyone to give more than their circumstances permit. We all have so much for which we should be thankful to God and I trust we will reflect this in our support of His Church and its ongoing work.

Yours sincerely.

Joe Bingham

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