

Marking our Communities 1

Opening the Doors: re-entering our church buildings

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1.1 Across the Church of England, we are actively planning for a phased re-opening of our church buildings in line with the Government's easing of the lockdown. The timetable remains uncertain because the Government is keen to avoid a spike in the infection rate. Initially, it is likely that the Government will allow churches to open their doors simply for individual private prayer, and perhaps for 'small' weddings and funerals. Gatherings for public worship will come later. How should these occasions be marked?

1.2 For many people, not to be able to enter our church buildings over the past few months has been a serious deprivation. Re-entry will feel like a joyful homecoming, a long-awaited return from exile with an opportunity to celebrate the presence of the risen Christ in our midst. For some, relief and celebration will be tinged with anxiety as they undertake risk assessments and embrace the challenges of maintaining the safety and cleanliness of their building. For others, feelings of grief and loss will be dominant. Few congregations have been unaffected by illness and death, and this too will need to be reflected in the way the re-opening of a building is marked.

1.3 New challenges and opportunities continue to emerge as a result of this pandemic, including new ways of being church and of worshipping on line. The unusual circumstances in which worshipping communities have found themselves have raised significant questions about the celebration of Holy Communion. Meanwhile people are dipping into worship, observing, watching, praying. We are connecting with 'the fringe' in ways the Church of England has longed to for years. Parishioners who for reasons of infirmity or disability have been unable to attend their parish church have suddenly been re-included in the life of their worshipping community. These good things need to be built on, not squandered in a casual return to former patterns of church life.

1.4 As part of our 'recovery', a suite of liturgical resources has been gathered. Sadly, it is unlikely that our worship will be able to include congregational singing for some months. National guidance about music, singing and worship is being prepared and will be circulated separately. In spite of social distancing and on-going restrictions, we hope that our prayer, both private and public, will echo the joy of pilgrims returning to Zion: 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Isaiah 35.10).

+ Robert Exon

Chair of the Liturgical Commission

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1 Prayers and Scripture for public or private use

These might be used by individuals entering the church building for the first time since the lockdown, or later in the context of services when people are allowed to gather once more for worship.

Almighty God,
we praise you for the many blessings
you have given to those who worship you
in this house of prayer:
and we pray that all who seek you in this place may find you,
and, being filled with the Holy Spirit,
may become a living temple acceptable to you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

Loving God,
thank you for this house of prayer
where we praise and thank you
for all you have given us.
Help us to go out into the world,
refreshed by your Spirit,
to do what you have called us to do
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Lord God,
sustain us in this vale of tears
with the vision of your grace and glory,
that, strengthened by the bread of life,
we may come to your eternal dwelling place;
in the power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

O Christ, door of the sheepfold,
may we enter your gates with praise
and go from your courts to serve you
in the poor, the lost and the wandering,
this day and all our days.

All Amen.

Saving God,
open the gates of righteousness,
that your pilgrim people may enter
and be built into a living temple
on the cornerstone of our salvation,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

A blessing

Christ, whose glory is in the heavens,
fill this house and illuminate your hearts;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

Passages of Scripture for study and proclamation

Psalm 24	The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it
Psalm 84	How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts
Psalm 100	O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth
Psalm 122	I was glad when they said to me
Psalm 127	Unless the Lord builds the house
Genesis 28.10–22	This is none other than the house of God
1 Kings 8.22–30	Will God indeed dwell on the earth?
Haggai 2.6–9	I will fill this house with splendour
Luke 19.1–10	Jesus and Zacchaeus
Ephesians 2.19–end	A holy temple in the Lord
1 Peter 2.1–10	The living stone and a chosen people
Revelation 21.22–26	I saw no temple in the city

2 Acclamation at the re-opening of a building for public worship

This acclamation could be used creatively in different contexts or form the basis for personal prayer.

How awesome is this place.

**All This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.**

I saw a ladder which rested on the ground
with its top reaching to heaven,
and the angels of God were going up and down it.

**All This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.**

You will see greater things than this.
You will see heaven wide open,
and God's angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

**All This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.**

You are the temple of the living God,
and the Spirit of God dwells in you.
The temple of God is holy, and you are that temple.

**All This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.**

3 Affirmation of the Christian Way

This Affirmation may be used at the first occasion of public worship in a church building, as a reminder of our discipleship. The texts in roman and italic type might be spoken by different people.

As we follow the Way of Christ,
we affirm the presence of God among us,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
God calls us to share in worship.

*Jesus said, where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.*

All Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share in prayer.
Jesus said, remain in me, and I will remain in you.

All Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share the Scriptures.
*Jesus met his disciples on the road
and opened the Scriptures to them.*

All Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share in communion.
Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me.

All Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share in service.
Jesus said, as you do it for the least of these, you do it for me.

All Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share the good news.
Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations.

All Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

4 An 'Easter People'

This section, drawing on Common Worship: Times and Seasons, provides a form of thanksgiving with the lighted Paschal (Easter) Candle as a focus. It could be used at the first public service or at a principal Sunday service, mindful of the fact that our buildings were shut during Holy Week and Easter, and we are an 'Easter People'.

Congregations might also wish to renew their baptismal promises using A Form for the Corporate Renewal of Baptismal Vows (Common Worship: Christian Initiation, pp.193-196).

The president says

Christ yesterday and today,
All the beginning and the end,
Alpha and Omega,
all time belongs to him,
and all ages;
All to him be glory and power,
through every age and for ever. Amen.

A minister brings in the lit Easter Candle.

May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.
Alleluia. Christ is risen.
All He is risen indeed. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The president says

Everlasting God, we give you thanks
that our Lord Jesus Christ was raised gloriously from the dead,
crushing the power of sin and destroying the sting of death.
May we, and all Christ's people, shine as lights in the world
to the glory of God the Father.
All Amen.

The minister holding the Candle says

The light of Christ.
All Thanks be to God.

Other candles may be lit from the Easter Candle.

5 At the first celebration of Holy Communion

A Preface or the Extended Preface for the Dedication of a Church may be used, as may other texts for the Dedication Festival. See Common Worship: Festivals, pp.133-138.

The Collect, Preface or the Extended Preface for the Dedication of a Church may be used, as may other texts for the Dedication Festival. See Common Worship: Festivals, pp.133-138.

Collect

Almighty God,
we praise you for the many blessings
you have given to those who worship you
in this house of prayer:
and we pray that all who seek you in this place may find you,
and, being filled with the Holy Spirit,
may become a living temple acceptable to you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

Preface

And now we give you thanks
for your blessing on this house of prayer,
where through your grace we offer you the sacrifice of praise
and are built by your Spirit into a temple made without hands,
even the body of your Son Jesus Christ.

(or)

Extended Preface

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
almighty and eternal Father,
enthroned upon the praises of your people.
We thank you for this house of prayer,
in which you bless your family
as we come to you in pilgrimage.
Here you reveal your presence in sacramental signs
and make us one with you through the unseen bond of grace.
Here you build your temple of living stones
and bring the Church to its full stature
as the body of Christ throughout the world,
to reach its perfection at last
in the heavenly city of Jerusalem,
which is the vision of your peace.
Therefore, in union with the heavenly Jerusalem,
with angels in joyful assembly,
with all whose names are written in heaven
and with the spirits of the righteous made perfect,
we lift up our voices to join in the triumphal song of praise:

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God,
sustain us in this vale of tears
with the vision of your grace and glory,
that, strengthened by the bread of life,
we may come to your eternal dwelling place;
in the power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Blessing

Christ, whose glory is in the heavens,
fill this house and illuminate your hearts;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.