**Reopening of Banff Parish Church Sanctuary**

Dear Friends,

We are very pleased to let you know that Banff Parish church is hoping to reopen for worship inside the church sanctuary on Sunday 9th May and thereafter weekly, with services starting usually at 11am.

We are really looking forward to welcoming folk back to church and have done all we can to minimise the risk to everyone attending. But it is of course for each person to weigh up their own situation. Importantly if you don’t feel you are able to come or if the time is not right for you physically to attend as yet, don’t worry – that’s absolutely fine - you can still join us in other ways. We will be continuing with our online services, [available via Facebook, website, phone-in [on 01261 303464]and CD recordings. If you are unable to access them, let us know and we will see what we can do. Remember also that you can contact us if you would like someone to call you for a chat. If you would like to join us for Sunday worship and are a little nervous about what to expect, please read the guidelines below and be assured that we will do all we can to make your return to church services as joyful and safe experience as we can.

**Preparing to attend a church service : advance booking essential**

Government restrictions require we ensure everyone [apart from household members] is 2 metres apart. This means that we have pew seating for up to about 40 people [including office bearers on duty], if some are households who can sit together. It will be necessary to let us know in advance if you would like to join us. You can do so by telephoning the church office on 01261 818211 and leave a message with your contact details before noon on the Friday of the relevant week. You can alternatively email the office [[info@banffparishchurchofscotland.co.uk].](mailto:info@banffparishchurchofscotland.co.uk].%20) Someone should get back to you by noon on Saturday. Your district Elder or the Minister should be happy to oblige if you require further information. If we have to limit numbers, we will attempt to include everyone who wishes to come, at a service over a rolling two week period as numbers permit. Remember to put on your mask before you enter as for other public places, as it is required to be worn throughout your time in the church unless of course you are exempt from wearing one.

**What to expect when you get there :**

When you arrive, you will be met outside by an Elder who will greet you and ensure that safe social distancing is in place. After entering the front porch in single file you will meet another Elder standing by a table where hand sanitiser will be placed for use before entering the main building. We are required to register your name and telephone number for track and trace, this will generally be done when you book your place and confirmed as you arrive for the service. We are required to store this information for 21 days, after which it will be destroyed. After using the sanitiser you will enter the main part of the church where you will be escorted to your seat by another duty Elder. David, our Minister, will also greet you.

You must sit in clearly designated seats only-if you feel you may need to leave your seat during the service, please let the Elder know and you may be able to sit near the back. Please try and limit your contact with others and items as required. There will be two offering plates placed on tables at the entrance and exit. Sanitisers will also be available at the exit. Limited toilet facilities are available in the hall and can be accessed by following the signs in the church.

The church will look a little different due to all the information signs and the removal of all excess furniture. The floor will also be covered in markings for the purpose of social distancing. When you leave the church you will be guided one row at a time towards the vestry door exit.

**The service :**

The service may be slightly shorter than usual. We are not permitted to sing out loud but we will have music and hymns played for us to listen to. Some music and singing will be pre-recorded on the computer and Stephen, our organist, should also play at some points. David will not be masked during the service and will talk to us from the pulpit or lectern with live comment and prayer as was usual. In line with regulatory guidelines, there will be no cushions or bibles in pews, but there will be a bible on display at the front of our church as it is central to our worship.

All information will be projected on to screens, as paper bulletins are not permitted.

Families are welcome and we have separate seating for at least two families to sit with their children, and be able to restrain them from running around. Since this may be very difficult for small children you are very welcome to come for a short while, and an Elder will escort you to the appropriate door.

If you have any concerns or further questions about the above or more generally, please do not hesitate to contact us or a Church Elder. We very much look forward to welcoming you to church and sharing worship together in person, when the time is right for you.

In time- but not immediately, we hope we can organise some after church refreshments, albeit under government restrictions of socially distanced seating. But for now as this is not possible yet, our enjoyable Banff Zoom chats each week will continue but at the slightly later time of 12.30pm to 1pm- details are available from the church office

Separately can we say that we were able to reopen our church hall specifically for the recent election, using council expertise and a team of volunteer cleaners. We hope in coming months to allow some other activities to restart but they must each be risk assessed individually and will depend very much on availability of cleaners.

Hopefully all will be back to ‘normal’ sooner than later. You, our congregation and community, remain much in our prayers

Yours faithfully,

Rev David Locke, Minister and Mrs Margaret Henderson, Session Clerk