



Holytown Parish  
Church of Scotland

Minister: The Rev Caryl Kyle

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Dear Friends,

27 July 2020

After being required to close our buildings earlier in the year due to the COVID-19 emergency it was indeed welcome news when the First Minister announced that churches could re-open from July 15<sup>th</sup> for worship services, if they wished, albeit in a limited way.

However, as with all things related to the Covid-19 virus this re-opening of our buildings and the resumption of worship services is not as simple as merely opening the doors and welcoming you all back into the worship space and sharing worship as we once did – much as we would love this to be so – it is much more complex.

As we are all still living with this virus in the world around us, the Church of Scotland like many other organisations, has issued Guidelines for us to consider and has encouraged ministers, Kirk Sessions and congregations to consider carefully whether or not they should return to the church building in these early phases or wait until a later phase.

Of course, that decision to re-open is not one all churches can take together because it depends on the circumstances within each church and so different churches may re-open at different times.

Across the church national and locally there are still many parishioners and indeed ministers in high risk groups who could be at particular risk from infection and so we need to make sure we keep everyone safe.

We also know that with physical distancing and a cap on numbers who can attend worship that it may be the case that there simply will not be enough room for all those who might wish to attend Sunday worship and consequently there may have to be a decision made as to who can and cannot attend in any given week.

Worship itself will be very different at present too, due to the possibility of spreading the virus, we are not allowed to sing, we are not allowed to say the Lord's Prayer aloud, we cannot have Hymnbooks in use or printed Orders of Service, we cannot physically pass the offering bags and we are not allowed to shake hands or offer a hug even after all these months.

Some of the things we will have to do are wear a mask within the building, follow the one-way system which will require to be put in place, use sanitiser on entry and exit from the building, leave your contact details on entry in case Test and Trace has to be instigated, leave the doors open while worship take place, sit two metres apart and try not to touch door handles and surfaces and of course, wash your hands if you need to go to the toilet.

All of this, as well as displaying signs to follow and ensuring the church is deep cleaned between services all has to take place and be organised by the Kirk Session.

It goes without saying that the guidance issued by the Church of Scotland and all of these procedures to be followed are designed to support those who will need to implement the changes and restrictions which will need to be put in place so that congregational worship, funerals and weddings can safely take place within a church building. We want to keep everyone safe!

The church has been empty for such a long time now and so before we can re-open we are required to complete a Buildings Checklist to make sure it is safe for us to re-enter the building, we need to complete a Covid-19 Risk Assessment and ensure anything we have identified as necessary is done; we need to ensure our Fire Risk Assessment is up to date and that we have in place procedures for any Emergency which may occur, Covid-19 related or otherwise. All of these then need to be sent to Presbytery for them to check and approve. So as you see a complex process.

The Kirk Session recognises that our building is an important sacred space and the opportunity to return to our place of worship, even on a limited basis, will bring spiritual and mental-health benefits.

However, a virtual gathering of the Kirk Session was organised last week on Zoom to begin consideration of whether or not we should open our building at this time and it was decided by the Kirk Session at that meeting that the time was not quite right to re-open our building. It was agreed to begin work on the paperwork which is required to re-open and send this on to Presbytery but for the safety of the congregation – all of you – it was decided to wait a little longer before re-opening.

I know this may be a disappointment to you all but for the Kirk Session your safety comes first and we won't compromise on your safety! Keep well, keep safe, keep faith we will get through this time of exile!

Blessings  
Caryl

*Can I add that one huge consequence of the closure of our buildings has been that the bills still need to be paid yet we have no income coming in – only that of those who give their offerings by Standing Order or Direct Debit or who have arranged to get their offering envelopes to Susan – and this is a worsening situation. I am sure most of you are putting away your offerings each week, I know you are 'good givers' so could you please read Susan's Financial Update below it is so important and perhaps give some thought as to how you might get your offerings to us? Susan has kindly given her phone number so please contact her if you can help out and as you know mine is 01698-832622 and I can always arrange for someone to call and collect your envelopes if required it would certainly help us out at this very difficult time and would be greatly appreciated. Caryl*

#### **Financial update**

Since our last day of worship on 22nd March, our finances have declined considerably.

We lost our income from the weekly Freewill Offering envelopes, cash offerings from the plate and our regular Hall Lets. We were fortunate that we applied for and received our annual Gift Aid claim from the Government in May which helped us to pay our ongoing expenses for another few weeks. We applied for grants through the Church of Scotland website but were unsuccessful. In order to continue to pay our Ministries and Mission to the Church and various other monthly requirements, the Kirk Session has given me permission to transfer money from our Reserve Fund held in Edinburgh to our General Expenditure account and our Fabric account. This will only help for another month or so.

We also discussed ways of increasing our income through the Congregation whilst the Church remains closed. If anyone has Freewill Offering envelopes or wishes to make a donation please feel free to contact me and I will come and collect them. My telephone number is 01698 732904.

If anyone wishes to change their method of offering to standing order or direct debit through their bank please contact me and I'll provide the necessary Church banking details.

Take care and stay safe Susan.

<b>Action for You:</b>	We do hope, God willing, that we will be able to open our Church in Holytown by middle of September. Could you please indicate if you are willing and able to attend Church having considered all of the above. An informal indication would be of great help. Can you please
<b>Thank You!</b>	contact <b>Mrs Linda Baillie</b> on <b>07842592671</b> or e-mail:- <b>23lbailie@mail.com</b>