

Important news about the re-opening of Immanuel Presbyterian Church for Public Worship

(this should be read in conjunction with the Stay SAFE at church leaflet from PCI)

Dear Immanuel Church Family,

Thank you for your support for our church during these difficult weeks of lockdown.

Our gratitude is also extended to our Minister for the online services which have enabled our worship to continue and to all who have helped in any way to keep us connected via phone calls, emails, Zoom, the website, Facebook and all other means. It is appreciated.

With the Stormont Executive relaxing restrictions on church gatherings, both the Kirk Session and Congregational Committee have met in recent days to consider the way forward for Immanuel, in light of the detailed guidance issued by the Clerk of the General Assembly on behalf of PCI.

At our Kirk Session meeting on Monday 6th July 2020, the decision was taken to reopen our building for public worship on **Sunday 2nd August @11.30am**. As a pilot for the new arrangements, this will be preceded by a midweek prayer meeting on **Wednesday 29th July @7.45pm**. We look forward, God willing, to welcoming you back to worship on these dates.

Regretfully, for the foreseeable future, there will be no evening service while all other organisations and activities in the church buildings remain suspended until further notice. The Kirk Session will continue to keep matters under review.

This will inevitably be a time of mixed emotions; joy at being able to worship together again in Immanuel and uncertainty about what the future "new normal" may be and how we will cope with the requirements for physical distancing, hygiene and safety. Worship will not be the same as it was when we closed the building in March, and we would like you to be prepared for what to expect when you come out to church.

We recognise that there may be some of you who feel that this is not yet the time to come back to church and we fully understand and appreciate that. Services will continue to be recorded and made available online. It is also intended that livestreaming of the service will be operated for a period. Your elder will be in touch before the end of July to ascertain whether you intend to join us on the first few Sundays back. This information will help us to have some idea of numbers in advance of meeting together.

Please remember that if you are displaying any of the symptoms of Covid-19 (high temperature, new and continuous cough and change to sense of smell or taste) you should not come to public worship. You and any members of your household should be self-isolating at home. Similarly, if you have been contacted by the contact tracing service you should not be attending worship whether you have symptoms, or not.

The process for arrival and departure

On arrival in the car park:

- You are encouraged to come reasonably early to help prevent the need to queue at the entrance.
- Stewards will be present in the car park to help maintain the 2-metre social distancing rule.
- When you arrive, exit your vehicle maintaining the 2-metre rule.
- If there are others in an adjacent car, please wait in your vehicle until they have moved away.
- In bad weather, members should stay in their car, waiting to be called rather than joining a lengthy queue along the side of the building.
- **Entrance to the building will be by the main front door only.**
- If there are others at the door then you will be required to queue along the side of the building within the car park where 2-metre spacing will be highlighted.
- A steward in the foyer will call you forward when space is available.

Entering the building:

- Always maintain social distance of 2 metres.
- A steward will direct you to the inner doors of the main building at which point you will be issued with hand sanitiser which you must use. A steward will direct you to where you are to be seated.
- Compliance to physical (social) distancing will, in effect, reduce the seating capacity in the meeting house with families and couples expected to be allocated positions in the centre pews and single persons occupying the chairs. Seating will be on a first come, first served basis. Please do NOT expect to be able to sit in your usual seat.

- Some of the pews and rows of seats in the main building will be cordoned off but it is planned that each household will be seated at an appropriate distance from others.
- Extra seating will be available in both the Dunlop and Baird halls as an overflow which will receive an audio and video stream of the service.

There will be some rooms in the church that are not to be used initially. These include both kitchens, the Simms hall, the Nelson room, the session and committee rooms and minister's room. There will be no access from the meeting house into the halls unless the stewards require the halls for seating. As the kitchens will be locked, there will be no coffee/tea facilities for the foreseeable future.

As the service is likely to be slightly shorter than before and members will be in the buildings for a more limited period, it is anticipated that there will be reduced requirements for toilet facilities. However, the disabled toilet in the church reception area will be available, as will the one near the Minister's room for those seated in the Halls. Users are asked to please wipe down the surfaces and taps after use.

On leaving the building:

- When the service is over remain in your seats until a steward asks you to leave.
- Leaving the building will be staggered row by row to maintain social distancing. Members are encouraged to leave promptly without forming groups to chat.
- Please exit the door that the steward directs you to.
- You will be required to go directly to your vehicle and stewards will be present to help maintain the 2-metre social distancing rule.
- If your vehicle is unable to be moved due to other cars, please wait within your vehicle until the other cars have moved away.

The Service: The service format will be different for the foreseeable future.

- The service will be shorter than usual.
- There will be no crèche or children's church - children attending the service will sit with their parents or guardians and we would plan that some age-related material (worksheet) will be available that might help them to follow the service.
- We are permitted to sing in worship, perhaps not as much as usual and this will be on a blended approach of "softer" pieces of praise accompanied either by the pianist or from a video displayed on the screens. The choir will not be able to sit together at the front.
- When leading the service, the minister is required to stand 4 metres from the congregation.
- The latest guidance in Northern Ireland is that it is not mandatory to wear face coverings, but it is recommended by the NI Executive in indoor settings. Please feel free to wear a face mask if you feel that you need to do so. Disposable masks and gloves will be supplied as you enter the building.
- There will be no church Bibles available. Please bring your own.
- There will be no flowers in the church on a Sunday morning for the time being.
- The offering will not be taken in the normal way but rather there will be an opportunity for FWO envelopes and cash to be dropped into plates at the entry and exit points. We again thank all who have continued to provide financial support for the work of Immanuel during the lockdown.
- To assist in 'track and trace' we are required to record the contact details of all who attend services. Along with the recording of the service, a photograph will be taken of the congregation and this information will be kept for a few weeks and then destroyed. Visitors will complete a welcome card.

Cleaning: We have been given guidance that if the building is left for 72 hours after an activity there is no need for any kind of deep clean as the risks of infection after this time are very low. We will, however, be cleaning hard surfaces after each service which should make it much easier to keep the building free of infection. We are also asking all keyholders to please refrain from visiting the church building other than during scheduled times of opening. All exceptions should be by prior arrangement with the Clerk or Secretary.

Finally, a big "thank you" is due to the Covid-19 sub-committee for all their preparatory work and completion of the necessary pre-opening tasks that will allow us to gather for worship again. It is recognised that returning to the building will mean some disruption to previous norms and routines and will also require the commitment of members of Kirk Session and Committee to carry out several duties each week. It is appreciated.

Our present service arrangements will, of course, evolve as and when new guidance is forthcoming. In the meantime, we thank you again for your understanding and trust that our sovereign God will continue to bless us and direct our paths.