

Date: 26th March 2021

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

Dear Immanuel Church Family,

Thank you for your support for our church during this latest period of lockdown since Christmas.

We again are very thankful to our Minister for the online services which have enabled our worship to continue, to the weekly contributors to Immanuel Kids 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.

The purpose of this letter is to update you on our plans to resume in-person worship following the recent discussions between Church leaders/Stormont Executive and the latest detailed guidance we have received from the Moderator and Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

At its monthly meeting on Monday 22nd March 2021, the Kirk Session agreed:

- To reopen the Meeting House for public worship with a Good Friday service on **2nd April @7.30pm.**
- To resume Lord's Day worship on **Sunday 4th April @11.30am** when the sacrament of communion will be celebrated. (Tokens will not be distributed in the present circumstances) It is our intention that the evening service will recommence from the beginning of May.
- To resume the midweek prayer meeting on **Wednesday 7th April @7.45pm.** For those unable to attend, the Kirk Session is investigating whether it may be possible to follow this online from home, details to be confirmed.
- To help inform members who were unable to return to worship during the previous period in 2020 when restrictions were eased or who may have some concerns, it is intended to produce a short video demonstrating the health & safety measures and procedures for arrival and departure of the building.
- Regretfully, for the foreseeable future, all other organisations and activities in the church buildings remain suspended until further notice. The Kirk Session will continue to keep matters under review and as circumstances allow.

As Easter approaches, we especially look forward, God willing, to welcoming you back to worship and would strongly encourage as many as possible to attend. These past few months have been very difficult for many as our routines have been disrupted and perhaps, we have developed habits we would prefer to change. We are very mindful that the Bible instructs us ***"not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching"***. (Hebrews 10:25).

While many in our congregation have already received their first dose of the vaccine, we do of course recognise that there will be some who feel that this is not yet the time to come back to church and we fully understand and appreciate that. For this reason, the Sunday services will continue to be recorded and made available online.

In preparation for returning to the building, PLEASE NOTE:

All gatherings for worship will continue to follow the guidelines issued by PCI, particularly in relation to the wearing of face coverings, inside and outside the building, hand sanitisation and 2 metre social distancing. 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 will be very similar to before. 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. You are requested to attach your mask/face covering before leaving your car or reaching the steps. In wet 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, where a steward will assist. 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. On entering, please always maintain social distance of 2 metres. You will be issued with hand sanitiser which you must use, and a steward will direct you to where you are to be seated. As before, compliance to social distancing will, in effect, reduce the seating capacity in the meeting house and there may be a need to use the Dunlop or Baird Halls to accommodate overflow. Seating will be on a first come, first served basis.

When the service is over, please remain in your seats until a steward asks you to leave. Members are requested to exit the building promptly without forming groups to chat and to continue wearing face coverings outside in the carpark.

Toilet facilities will be available – the disabled toilet in the church reception area will be open as will the one near the Minister’s room for anyone seated in the Halls. Users are asked to please wipe down the surfaces and taps after use. There will be no access to the other rooms, including both kitchens.

The Service

Our present service arrangements will, of course, evolve as and when new guidance is forthcoming. However, as before, services are expected to be slightly shorter than usual. Singing will again be on a blended approach of “softer” pieces of praise accompanied either by the pianist or from a video displayed on the screens. There will be no crèche or children’s church and no flowers in the church for the time being. Pew Bibles will not be available, and you are requested to bring your own. The offering will not be received 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 may be taken of the congregation and this information will be kept for a few weeks and then destroyed.

To mitigate the risks of infection, the congregational committee approved the purchase of a fogging machine before Christmas which will help with the cleaning of the building after services while all keyholders should 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, we thank you again for your patience and understanding. The steady progress of the vaccination programme in Northern Ireland is providing some sense of hope in the wider community that the crisis may soon come to an end, restrictions can be eased, and freedoms restored. These developments are positive and to be greatly welcomed but for now, we are all advised to remain cautious.

For the church, we must continue to trust in the promises of a sovereign God and with our hope firmly placed in Jesus Christ, our Lord, King and Saviour.

“I joyed when to the House of God, go up they said to me” (Psalm 122:1)

The Kirk Session