

Dear staff and leaders,

Further Guidance on Church Reopening

On 12 July 2021, PM Boris Johnson re-confirmed that most COVID restrictions will be removed from 19 July (roll out of Step 4 in England). Please click to read <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-summer-2021-roadmap/covid-19-response-summer-2021>

In addition to the government announcement, the church has the responsibility to look after the well-being of its members and to provide a safe environment for its staff and people to come to worship God. This is in line with the biblical teaching of “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt 22:39) and “let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Phil 2:4) The following guidance is given in the spirit of upholding these principles.

Thank you for working hard in to prepare to re-open church premises for Sunday services. Further to the previous Church Board’s guidance to staff and leaders and letters to the church members, which was issued on 22 June, the Board has updated the following guidance to support the local congregations in the management of their congregation reopening in the coming weeks. This guidance applies to the period from 19 July (implementation of Step 4):

For the period whilst we remain in Step 3 all existing COVID guidelines shall remain.

1. The Board wishes the congregations to reopen their services this July as planned. This is done with the intention to permit and welcome members back to worship in person without pressure, and gradually return to normal life of meeting up again and be better able to share fellowship in a reasonably safe environment.
2. If Step 4 is rolled out, any precautionary measures introduced in July would be our Church’s and not the government’s.
3. Given that the virus is expected to be in our community, the Board understands and would like to alleviate the concerns expressed by some, whilst trying to strike a sense of balance with society at large. The Board encourages staff and leaders to work together on risk assessment, to prepare and implement precautionary safety measures for their congregations in order to minimise some risks while at the same time monitor and evaluate development of the COVID situation over a period of 4 to 8 weeks initially from the date of reopening.

It is up to the staff and leaders to talk to and advise their congregation members on some of the safety measures they are implementing when they reopen to welcome them back from July. Whilst it may be challenging to enforce some of these safety measures, the Board trusts that the good relationship between their pastoral staff and leaders with their congregation members will enable understanding that the health and safety of its worshippers is equally important to our Church.

4. The Board encourages members to continue the practice of good personal hygiene, which includes frequent hand washing, avoid touching their faces and proper disposal of used tissues and facemasks. As COVID transmission is airborne or by contact, and since facemask and social distancing are acknowledged to be the most effective way in protecting the wearer and, more importantly, in preventing the spread of the virus, all servers and worshippers are obliged to wear them to protect themselves as well as others unless they are exempt according to government guidelines. Good ventilation also helps to minimise risk.
5. **Singing will be allowed during services provided facemasks are worn.**

6. The Board supports using individually packaged communion bread and cup for Holy Communion and the use of offertory boxes at each centre. In order to minimise unnecessary contact, we would recommend worshippers to bring their own Bible and Bible readings will be shown on screen.
7. Offertory bags will not be passed around during Sunday Services. The congregation council should encourage members to give electronically, or for cash donors, provide a few secured Offertory Boxes and offering envelopes next to them.
8. Some congregations have a larger number of worshippers in relation to the size of its worship place. Social distancing of "1 metre plus" will continue. A registration system will be used to allow worshippers to pre-register to attend the Sunday Service initially, until the risk of the pandemic is minimised.
9. Lunches and refreshments served in the Church tend to encourage people to congregate and spend longer time indoors. These will not resume temporarily.
10. The above guidelines should be clearly displayed in the main halls and in every meeting rooms.
11. Fellowship groups that normally meet at church centres can resume after 19 July with the above precautionary measures in place.
12. External organisations which have been hiring or booking our premises will be able to do so after 19 July if they agree to adhere to the above precautionary measures.

The church would like to take a more cautious approach than government guidance to protect the well-being of its staff and members on church reopening. If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to approach members of the staff team, Elder Oliver Tang or Linda Lim.

Finally, COVID is likely to be a situation that you and I have not experienced before in our lifetime, and the situation continues to change and evolves frequently. Consequently, we are required to monitor the situation carefully, and make changes as situation can develop quickly. Any changes will be discussed with the staff team and we would advise you to follow their instructions. Prayerfully we seek God's wisdom and protection to help us to take the right steps at the right time to reopen our services. May God grant us His blessings and make us His blessings to our members and friends.

"Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed." Psalm 57:1

God bless,
Tommy Wong
Board Chairman
On behalf of the Church Board