

The Benefice of St George's Benenden and St Nicholas Sandhurst

The Diocese of Canterbury

4nd June 2020

Dear Bishop Rose,

Re: Opening of Churches for Private Prayer and Public Worship – St George's Benenden and St Nicholas Sandhurst in the Diocese of Canterbury.

Preamble

St George's Church, Benenden, is grade 11* Listed, average congregation 40, with seating capacity of 400 approx, It is wonderfully placed, in the center of the village at the top end of a lovely village green, with the Rectory and village pub are close by. St Nicholas, Church Sandhurst, is grade 11* Listed, average congregation of 20, with seating capacity 200 approx, St Nicholas is a mile from the village center, was built on a sandstone hill with the most stunning views of Kent and Sussex. Both Churches had, until lockdown, been open daily.

Present situation

As Churchwardens we are very disappointed to learn that there has been no relaxation by the Government in relation to the opening of Churches for Private Prayer or Public Worship. Particularly as schools are open, non essential shops, markets and car showrooms among other things are opening. We do not think the Church should be treated in the same way as Cinemas, football spectators and other public gatherings.

To delay opening our Churches for Private Prayer and Public Worship, will be and has been detrimental to our Church Families and the wider community in terms of their mental and spiritual health. We have been fortunate to that both Churches and the village communities have been involved in supporting the vulnerable in their communities. We have also been very fortunate that our Rector, the Rev David Commander has, with his Ministry team, put on very good video link Sunday Services, firstly from the Rectory and latterly from our Churches. However this form of Worship is not available to all the Church Family, particularly the elderly, many of whom to not have internet access.

Rural Churches such as St George's and St Nicholas, would we believe, be in a position to offer safe, very much needed, Private Prayer, and safe Public Worship now.

2.

We realise that the Church of England should follow Government Guidelines. However we would like to see the Archbishop and Bishops apply maximum pressure on the Government to allow Churches to open for Private Prayer and Public Worship immediately. We feel confident that the practicalities of the reopening of our Churches, could be assessed and organized at a local level. The people on the ground have a good knowledge of the particular circumstances and needs of their communities and could ensure adequate precautions were put in place for their Church family to enjoy safe Private Prayer and or Public Worship .

Please do not delay, please discuss at the very highest level

With best wishes,

Anne Tylden-Wright

Church Warden

St Nicholas Sandhurst

David Collard

Church Warden

St George's Benenden

Tracy Claridge

Church Warden

St George's Benenden

c.c. Rev David Commander

The Archbishop of Canterbury

The Prime Minister

Greg Clark MP

Helen Grant MP