



Bulletin 26

Dear Church!

As we come to the end of our two weeks off-site at Emmanuel and St Paul's, decisions have had to be made as to what each church will do. The Church of England as a whole has left the decision up to local parish incumbents with their PCCs. So far, just over 50% have felt it best to be online only for the time being. Pending the PCC meeting, the Standing Committee made a decision today.

In making their decision, Emmanuel took the following into consideration . . .

1. With vaccine so close, why push safety margins right to the tipping point of what's allowed?
2. There is now far more risk and lack of understanding of transmission than previously.
3. We demonstrate love for our neighbour by keeping our hospitals as empty as possible.
4. Meeting onsite with the extra social restrictions in place is very discouraging and potentially even a negative experience under new the rigorous restrictions.
5. Even though impeded online, we can provide more encouragement there at present.
6. We need routine to see us through this last phase of the Covid battle – not knowing what we can reliably anticipate each Sunday is unsettling and demoralising.

. . . and decided that the church building should remain closed for public worship at least until the end of February. Towards the end of February, decisions will be made as to how to proceed with March activity.

Under Tony's leadership, the smaller community of St Paul's have agreed to meet in the church building for the time being, but with additional restrictions.

For a church, eager to meet but frustrated in doing so whatever we choose, all this raises the question of why we meet at all, whether on-line **or** in-site!

Why do we meet?

1. We meet to engage with and encounter with our Lord.

 **1 Corinthians 5:4** *So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present...*

- The implications of this snippet of a verse, though derived from a different context, are astonishing in their implications for today's church.
 - Firstly, when we meet in his name, the power of Christ is *present* among us. The liturgical greeting, "*The Lord is here*" and response "*His Spirit is with us*" comes to spiritual life when we realise the truth from verse 4!
 - Secondly, Paul was able to feel equally part of this **church at a distance!** (He didn't even have to be online!!!)

2. We also meet to encourage one another.

📖 **Hebrews 10:25** ...not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- ✳ Meeting together is important because cultivating and feeding the sense of togetherness, feeling members of the body of Christ and travelling together is integral to our corporate life.

So, whether on-line or on-site, the reason we meet is for Godly encounter and encouragement.

Online Facebook and YouTube worship feels very second best to meeting in person, but it nevertheless enables encounter and encouragement.

A lesson in coping through these past Covid months has been to realise that life cannot be at its best or lived out to its full right now, but it can still be lived! We have had to learn patience in the midst of frustration and to 'wait' when we have wanted to 'have now'! That has certainly made us consider again what blessings we **do** have and have hitherto perhaps taken for granted.

So, the Sunday 10.30am Facebook and YouTube online parish service continues as it was in the beginning.

In place of the weekly Wednesday 10.30am Informal Communion at Emmanuel, we will be offering a weekly, informal Zoom Agapé service followed by coffee lounge time to chat (make a coffee before the gathering!) The [Meeting ID is 876 6947 1222](#) with usual password! If you cannot easily get online, please go to the Web or the Facebook page (Emmanuel with St Pauls) or phone or email the parish office. We have been able to find spare, free equipment for some over the past months so ask if you need help.

Also, on a brighter note, I am absolutely delighted to announce the appointment, from February 1st, of Holly Martin as our new children's worker. She will be organising ministry amongst families with children up to end of Primary School age. We have prayed, given, searched and longed to make this appointment. **This is a great moment for Emmanuel to celebrate what I hope will be the first of new steps in developing and consolidating our young people's ministry. Praise the Lord!**

Finally, I realise that the closure of Emmanuel's doors again brings renewed frustration and sadness upon us, but after deep reflection and prayer, the staff meeting felt compelled to run with a better quality of service online than we could provide in the church building; safety; love for our Plymouth neighbours; and at least knowing what lies ahead for the next month and a half so that we can settle into predicted routine. For St Paul's, the frustration will be equally felt. But hopefully this will be our last containment before things begin to open up towards the early summer. It will have been over a year since this started by then.

My, has that year past so quickly for some, yet so slowly for others! But my, has the Lord been mighty to sustain and serve us as a bunch of aliens travelling to the Promised Land! **"Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me."** **Psalm 54:4** Never forget the journey you are on and your eternal destiny in Christ!

Yours, in His Grip and Grace,
Rev Karl