

Christchurch Worship After Lockdown

Introduction

The Christchurch Trustees asked us to reflect on what we had learned from the last year in preparing for a return to a more 'normal' worship pattern later in 2021. Input was received from Christchurch members, and the Trustees, specifically from their meeting for clearness.

This document proposes a pattern for Sunday morning worship at Christchurch from September, when government rules once again permit gathered indoor worship without social distancing. Containing some differences from the pre-COVID practice, it is a suggested pattern for the Sep-Nov quarter, and will be amended and adapted based on feedback.

Our process was to consider what we had learned positively from the last year, and should therefore retain, and what needed to change to honour the headlines we had been passed from the leadership group.

Online worship

- If there are people to run it, we hope that Family Church, which has been so successful online during Lockdown, will continue in some form - but may move from Zoom to 'in person' (pending discussions with our existing Family Church team)
- Regarding service streaming in a post-lockdown situation, we considered the audiences to be the housebound, enquirers/shy, physically distant and "Homers" (pyjama worshippers)
- We felt maybe we would encourage pyjama worshippers to get dressed and join us :) The housebound would continue to be covered by audio CDs - or a move to live audio stream.
- Other groups could be served by a monthly compilation. If the service is captured in video (single camera - see later) we can clip that for a few bits of music and other highlights, record fresh links and make a short monthly online act of worship. This enables those 'enquiring' about Christchurch to do so safely before walking through the doors and enables our distant family (at university, for example) to stay in touch.

On premises worship - the 9am service

We propose that the 9am service does not restart right away in September. Staffing it may be challenging right now, and, whilst there is a certain efficiency to having the same preacher do a shorter version of their later service at 9am, leading two services on a Sunday morning is not a popular solution with all of them.

If / when an earlier service does return, this could take the form of "Morning Devotions" in a smaller and more intimate space than the sanctuary and be led by a Worship Leader for

about half an hour. A room with a piano/keyboard, copies of Singing the Faith and a pianist would enable musical worship. A published reflection can be used instead of a sermon where an accredited preacher is not leading.

The move of location would also give enough time for technical and musical preparations for the later service in the Sanctuary.

On premises worship - the 10.30am service

Here is an outline of our suggested pattern for the main morning service.

- From 10:00 to 10:30 worshippers arrive and can use the sanctuary space to prepare for worship or gather in the Bradbury Welcoming Area or the Hall Lounge for fellowship. Tea and coffee are available from self-service stations.
- At 10:30 an act of worship is held in the sanctuary, led by a minister or Local Preacher with assistance from a Worship Leader as available.
- The sound and video from the worship is relayed in sound and vision to the Bradbury Welcoming Area, and possibly to the Hall Lounge. These areas are a "Semi-Space" where the worship can be accessed in a more informal way, enabling conversations to be held more freely. Tea and coffee remain available from self-service stations.
- At around 11:15 – 11.30 (latest) the formal act of worship finishes and worshippers may leave the sanctuary if they wish. However, the sanctuary remains a worship space for anyone wishing to respond to what has been said or what they have heard. The Prayer Team is available for specific prayer concerns and the musicians (one or two from band, or the organ) will continue to play suitable music for about 20 minutes. The leader of worship will most likely move to the "Semi-Space" area to engage with the congregation there.
- The preacher is encouraged to provide two or three thought-provoking questions / discussion points based on the theme of the service for worshippers to consider as they gather afterwards.
- From the formal end of the service, beverages are available from the kitchen serving hatch and the Hall is available for conversation and fellowship. This time can be used to discuss the preacher's promptings. The kitchen closes around 11:45am.
- If anyone feels prompted to share what has been laid on their heart during worship, they are encouraged to speak to the preacher or a church leader. There is also a "Sharing Box" for personal experiences to be written anonymously if desired. We encourage a sense of listening and sharing of what God is saying to us individually and as a church as well as feedback on the changed pattern of worship. A short 'Christchurch Community Moment' will be available for anyone wishing to share with the congregation but will not be planned on a regular basis.
- By around 12 noon the morning worship is expected to have concluded and worshippers have left the building, but, of course, this is flexible.
- The act of worship in the sanctuary does not include the taking up of a monetary offering. Responses of this nature are encouraged through electronic banking with Gift Aid where appropriate. A box for cash offertory is placed at the rear of the

sanctuary. However, the leader of worship is encouraged to include a blessing for monetary offerings in the service.

- Pending discussion with the Youth, Children and Families steering group, we anticipate all ages would be together for at least some of the corporate worship time each week and the service content is planned accordingly. Likewise for a regular All-Age service where we remain together for the duration. Families are encouraged to sit together. The format of Junior Church after lockdown is outside the remit of this report.
- Consideration should be given to a mid-week service for anyone seeking spirituality on whatever level. This will be a way of being church for people who want something different. One option would be something like the “Soul Space” worship that was part of Christchurch’s life a few years ago, which would fit with the trend especially in younger people to look for meditation, mindfulness and a sense of stillness.
- On an occasional basis the opportunity for reflection and discussion is widened for the congregation with breakout rooms to explore the theme in different ways. This is akin to our “Experience...” services and the “All Together” services seen in recent years.

Background notes

- The suggestions here are not intended as a permanent ‘one-hit fix’ but are a starting point for continuous improvement as we receive feedback. We realise that we cannot satisfy everyone, so we remain flexible.
- We have been driven by a principle of trying to “Keep It Simple” and being aware of the need for any proposal to be sustainable for a reasonable length of time; with sufficient people available to support the various roles required.
- We recognise that spirituality is for everyone, and we want to give opportunities to explore that in different ways that suit the individual. Changes to the physical space are being looked at by others, but we hope that room could be made for those not ready to sit in the sanctuary and the seating in the sanctuary adjusted to offer more freedom of movement in and out of the space.
- In creating a space where worshipers are more physically comfortable, we give *freedom from* the regimented, tightly packed rows formation to enable *freedom to* engage with the Holy Spirit as we are led individually and corporately.
- Preachers would be encouraged to make space for listening to God as part of the act of worship, not just at the end.
- We believe that hospitality is a key feature of Christchurch and would like to offer breakfast before worship on some occasions but felt this to be too much of a burden on our servers to offer every week.
- As we physically come back together to worship as a congregation, the need to reconnect with God in His house and to reconnect with each other is a key factor. Giving the opportunity for us to listen to God, to respond to His promptings and to share those encouragements with each other, where appropriate, is important. We want to enable worshippers to respond to the Word, to see where God is working and to join Him in that work. In this way we support ‘Whole Life Worship’.

- We expect there still to be limited preacher availability from September, as everyone tentatively returns to social interaction in public spaces. Therefore, only one worship service on a Sunday has been suggested. We encourage the whole Christchurch family to come along and worship as we return to the building – all together in one place. The essence of Christchurch is its multi-generational coming together for worship and church life.
- We recognise the work of online Family Church during lockdown and hope that it might be possible to continue to offer engaging worship for families across a wide age range.
- The Semi-Space could be “staffed” with members who have a gift for talking with and listening to people.
- The streaming of the worship to other parts of the church remains “in house” with no feed to a live stream on the Internet. A single, fixed camera is set up to capture the dais and the band. The audio feed comes from the Sound Desk.

Acknowledgements

This recommendation has been put together by Mandy Pye and Tony Edmonds (Worship Area Leads) and Paul Arnold (Trustee with responsibility for Worship).

The whole Trustee Oversight Group provided valuable input from two very thoughtful meetings and the Christchurch membership views were collated from the Church Meeting on 17 March 2021.