



A ROAD MAP FOR GATHERING TOGETHER

As the Spring begins to blossom, we are delighted by the possibilities of meeting together more as a church family in the coming months. Over the last 12 months, in facing the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, we have sought to stay well connected with each other, alongside considering how best to serve our local community in a time of great need. During this period, each week we have been live streaming services, moved all our Life Groups to Zoom, and organised regular online prayer meetings among many other things.

Patience required

As we work towards being able to see each other safely, we are all going to require patience as we navigate this slow return to normality. As we have learnt over the last 12 months, there is still much uncertainty as to whether virus rates (infections, hospitalisation, deaths) will enable the government to keep to its proposed schedule from which we have prepared our own roadmap **for PBC's context**. At the moment, things seem to be going in the right direction and we are glad to hear that so many of you have taken the opportunity to be vaccinated or will do so when the opportunity arises. We continue to follow the advice from the legal team at *Baptist Together* who helpfully interpret government guidelines for a church's context.

When will we get back to normal?

Understandably we are all asking this question in the light of the government's **roadmap**. When can we sing together? When will we be able to meet without face masks or social distancing? When can we restart in-**person children's** and Youth ministry? Inevitably it is impossible at this stage to answer these questions with any certainty as we await further details from relevant Government departments. What is clear, is that it will be a long slow process of easing and that nothing much is going to dramatically change soon - especially not this side of Easter. Indoor mixing between members of the congregation (other than in their own households) will not be lawful before 17 May at the earliest.

The next steps for gathering

Given that church is primarily about people, the ability to physically connect with one another has been a real loss and, as the government are now beginning to lift the lockdown, this finally opens the way for us to be able to start to re-connect together. Whilst the pathway to this is still uncertain and precise details of what is and is not allowed are only just emerging, the PBC leadership felt that it would be helpful for us to create a **"roadmap" for how we see the process of recommencing being physical church together**. We have, therefore, covered this process under the headings: Church Services, Pastoral Care and Group Discipleship, Children and Youth Ministry and Community Outreach. All **suggested dates should be caveated with the phrase 'from the earliest'** as the government has stated.

Church Services – Indoors & Outdoors

During Lockdown 3.0 churches were not stopped from meeting in-person. However, in line with the *Baptists Together* guidance, and since **the general ‘Stay at Home’ rule remains in place in England until 29 March**, it has been decided that Easter weekend would be the earliest sensible time to restart weekly services in the church building.

As of yet, there is no government guidance that suggests congregational singing will be permitted until the 21 June (at the earliest). The usual process of social distancing (2m distancing and wearing face masks) are currently set to remain until that date also.

Outdoors

29 March

Mixing and mingling in groups of 6 or from 2 households is permitted in the church car park (only). This socialising outside could take place after the church service from Easter weekend onward (bring your own favourite beverage!).

17 May

You can meet up as a group of 30 outside anywhere. Activities could be organised by the church in local outdoor venues. Rigorous compliance including risk assessments will need to be carried out before events can go ahead.

21 June

At present, no legal restrictions.

Indoors

29 March

From Easter weekend onward we will resume the 10.30 morning service in-person. As with how this operated in Autumn 2020, every person will still need to book a seat in advance (by the Thursday morning). The capacity of the congregation in the church sanctuary will be limited in accordance with the 2m distancing rules.

11 April

Sunday at Seven will resume weekly in the church sanctuary following all the protocols of the morning service.

12 April

Weddings and wakes will be allowed with 15 guests. Funerals will remain at 30 guests.

17 May

- We will be able to mix between groups of 6 or 2 households indoors. Adhering to the rules, we would encourage you to meet with friends from church and watch the live streamed service together if you are not able to join us in the church sanctuary in person.
- Up to 30 people will be able to attend weddings in the church.

21 June – no legal restrictions on mixing

On this date the government hopes to lift restrictions on large events and performances that applied in the previous steps, and also hopes to make a decision on whether all limits can be removed on weddings and other life events.

Pastoral Care and Group Discipleship

The current guidance allows for support groups of up to 15 people, visits to provide care and assistance to vulnerable individuals, and to take exercise with one other person from outside your household. The roadmap will gradually allow more social mixing, which will open more opportunities for pastoral ministry, especially in an outdoors context. This will be valuable particularly for mutual care between church members, whether individually or in small groups. Any social meetings are likely to continue to be subject to social distancing guidance (including wearing masks inside public buildings) until 21 June at the earliest.

8 March

You can do a Bible study or pray over a coffee with a friend outside.

29 March

Your Life Group can meet up as 6 people or 2 households outside, including in private gardens. This will enable pastoral visits and small gatherings. This will be a good opportunity for those with patio heaters and gazebos to exercise hospitality to others.

17 May

- 30 people can gather outdoors in groups of six. This could be something like a socially distanced church picnic.
- Groups of two households can gather indoors: Families could pair-up with each other in a living room to join a Life Group, prayer meeting or an Equip Group online.

Children and Youth Ministry

Although children can return to the classroom from 8 March, this does not mean that PBC's youth and children's groups can resume from this date. Churches are unable to run rigorous Covid testing that schools in our local area have access to. Therefore, we await specific guidance for 'out of school settings' from *Baptists Together* before groups can resume. However, the PMs roadmap does indicate some ways in which the restrictions will be relaxed that will enable some youth and children's ministries to restart, in addition to the more general relaxation on social gatherings of other age groups. These are as follows:

29 March

- Organised sport allowed. In theory this would mean activities like 'The Cage' or similar could resume.
- Outdoor parent and children groups permitted with a maximum of 15 parents. This could include children's groups where social distancing is able to take place.

12 April

- All indoor parent and toddler groups up to 15 permitted (Guidance will be published nearer the time).
- Scouts will continue online until after the Easter school break (19 April) when in-person meetings will restart with outdoor activities at first. Indoor activities will resume as soon as the situation improves and guidelines permit.

21 June – no restrictions

Community Outreach

With the gradual easing of restrictions, serving the most vulnerable in our community remains a high priority. For some programmes, in-person human contact is essential. We have therefore consulted the *Covid 19- Response Spring 2021 document* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021> particularly regarding guidance on the reopening of retail and business operations pp.36-46.

Shelters and Feeding Schemes

- The Link operating as a take-away service from the URC carpark and buildings can continue. Details are at www.purleybaptist.org/thelink.
- The Croydon Churches Floating Shelter (CCFS) response to Nightwatch (in the absence of being able to run the Nightshelter) can continue to provide sandwiches until the end of March for clients at the Nightwatch Headquarters.
- We can continue to provide a hot meal to The Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub (SSTS) from Croydon University Hospital.

The Purley Cross Centre

It may be possible to resume certain operations from 12 April.

Cameo

And other groups that operate as a worship service could resume from Easter.

17 May

Courses operating indoors can resume with a maximum of 6 individuals.