

Service times and worship patterns – a consultation

2nd July 2024

Author

Revd Philip Howson after consultation with Joint Working Group and Ministry Team.

Purpose of Paper

To consult with Parochial Church Councils, ministers and our Joint Council on the approach we take to regular and festival worship.

This consultation will run throughout July 2024, with a new approach and pattern to start from September 2024.

1 Introduction

With the appointment of Revd Philip as incumbent of the Benefices of South and West Leightonstone and the creation of the Leightonstone Churches Joint Council, we have the opportunity to explore new ways of being church together.

The ideals shaping our work are for us to *celebrate our heritage while working together for our future*. We have also been guided by twin principles of *keeping what is good but doing together what we can't do alone*.

This means we celebrate our local parishes and churches, but we also work together in what we can't do in every locality.

One of the great joys of this approach has been the growth in collaboration and of sharing in ministry. However, the complexity of our local and shared needs makes our work a challenging balancing act, and after some months of experience it is clear that we need to re-model and re-focus some aspects of our Sunday worship and the way we organise festivals.

2 Purpose of this document

Our ambition is to enjoy a helpful and peaceful environment of worship for all our churches which is:

- i. sympathetic to the needs of our communities and to established patterns,
- ii. courteous of the capacity and energy of worship-leaders and ministers,
- iii. accessible to younger generations and those on the fringes of our faith communities,
- iv. meets the needs of regular worshippers, and
- v. that is consistent, but can flex for local needs

3 Reason for Writing

There are fourteen parishes held in plurality by Revd Philip. At time of writing, he coordinates five other ministers who are authorised to lead worship¹. However, recent experience shows there are times when timetables and availability are squeezed.

The particular challenges are:

- i. We have a strange mix of times, and they don't always work well together e.g. Sunday worship times are: 9:30, 10:00, 10:45, 11:00, 3:00, 4:00, 6:00. The third Sunday is particularly stressed.
- ii. This means service times clash and overlap, or there is high demand for the same slot.
- iii. The time between some services can be tight and means ministers don't have the opportunity to get to know communities after worship. These after-service moments are great opportunities to encourage people, to find out about those in need, and to offer ad hoc pastoral care. However, timetable and travel pressures mean this ministry can be sparse or hurried.
- iv. Most ministers are part time volunteers. As volunteers they have the right to take time off when they want (and they do). Revd Philip is also entitled to six Sundays a year away from parish. This can create pressures for parish teams during some months.
- v. It's also preferable for ministers to be regular and consistent in parishes for both continuity and care of our communities. Chopping and changing is not helpful but it is difficult to resolve.

¹ six once the Children and Families Minister is appointed, and seven when a House for Duty priest come to live in Brington Rectory

When the pressures get too much the options are not ideal:

- i. We might cancel a service and invite a congregation to travel to a neighbour;
- ii. We might ask a warden to lead; or
- iii. We could consider shopping for ministers from outside the Benefices.

These workarounds get us through pressure-points, but they have problems. They can erode continuity, fellowship, pastoral care and energy, they have an actual financial cost through lost attendance or in purchasing ministry from elsewhere, and they can be demanding for local volunteers.

3.1 What do we need?

We need a regular pattern of worship that is sustainable, simple and consistent.

We need to work within the energy and availability of ministers².

We want a pattern that allows for pastoral care and support, and that promotes great community while avoiding jostling or competitiveness between parishes.

And we would prefer ministers to be reasonably consistent in working with parishes.

4 Festivals

These pressures get much worse during festival times such as Christmas, Easter and Harvest or key days like Mothering Sunday, Pentecost, All Souls or Remembrance.

PCCs know that these times are the best opportunity to connect with the community, they are a great time of celebration for all. They are key to our identity as worshipping communities. They can be excellent fund-raisers, which really helps a church through lean times.

Some of the challenges include:

- i. Planning the season to be fair to all churches and their communities,
- ii. Taking account that some parishes are more successful than others in attracting the community either in proportion to the local population, or in sheer numbers,
- iii. Planning the season early enough so that publicity and organisation can be arranged,

² Employing ministers from outside our team

Ideally we want worship to be led by trained ministers from within our team. In their absence, church wardens are authorised to lead non-eucharistic worship. However, should there be impossible conflicts or the demand is too great, then parishes need sufficient time to either create and lead an event themselves under the supervision of a warden, or organise and pay for ministry cover from outside the benefices.

- iv. Avoiding clashes so that ministers may lead worship and share their skills,
- v. Ensuring ministers aren't always exhausted by the season.

4.1 What do we need?

We need festivals to work for and serve all our parishes and we want to support our fellow parishes without neglecting our own.

Even though we *can* do worship ourselves, we would much rather have trained and authorised ministers leading.

Nevertheless, during festival times we are more interested in holding the event than in who leads it.

5 Connecting with Newcomers

Where possible our gatherings need to be accessible and enjoyable to newcomers – particularly younger generations. Nevertheless, a challenge for newcomers is that we usually worship using ancient liturgical models of worship, and these are fundamental to our Anglican identity. With that we use an ancient and broad heritage of music which can be hard for newcomers to enjoy.

Consequently, our acts of worship may be quite odd for newcomers, particularly those who don't have a church background. Indeed, some acts of worship will be actively off-putting or boring, and infrequent attendees will find it very difficult to participate.

Timing is also important to make our gatherings accessible, enjoyable and easy to get to. Busy and blended families are often time-poor, and there are times on a Sunday they aren't likely to attend such as early morning or Sunday teatime. This means the best times for families on a Sunday would be late morning or late afternoon. This makes late morning and late afternoon our "shop-window" services and means we need to be extra thoughtful about the types of worship we put on in these time-slots.

Nevertheless, there is still an important place for our "boutique" specialist worship like matins, evensong or BCP communion which are vital for some worshippers.

Worship *times and days* are also what makes us accessible (or inaccessible), and they need to be consistent and predictable. It's easier to remember "10:00 every Sunday" than it is to remember "9:45 every second Sunday except for August".

Put simple, what we do, when we do it and how we communicate it are very important for attracting and retaining newcomers.

5.1 What do we need?

We need a range of times and styles of worship that work for regular worshippers *and* for newcomers.

6 The Particular Role of Kimbolton, St Andrews

All our churches play a key and leading role in the culture of our villages through community events, care for our buildings, ongoing worship, and support of our neighbours.

However, with no desire to provoke competitive comparison, St Andrews, Kimbolton is significantly different from our other parishes. It is much more of a civic church, it serves our largest population, it has a (comparatively) large number on the electoral roll, it can organise high impact events and acts of worship, it is able to run worship four Sundays a month, has regular Sunday School, works with three local schools, and has a lot of volunteers. As a result, it is able to be more of a “programme” church alongside its community and civic role.

The contrast with our other parishes is significant and is seen numerically, financially and organisationally.

Because of those differences it is able to offer stable and regular worship and events, and has the most potential to be a full family church. As we’ve said throughout our work, we are working hard to retain what is good in our life together and this principle is just as important for our largest church.

With that in mind we propose that of all our parishes, Kimbolton retains at least one act of worship four Sundays in the month and that it will always have an event on key festival days, allowing it to continue building as a full family church alongside its civic role.

7 The Fifth Sunday

It has been our habit to gather together at alternating churches, getting to know our neighbours and their places. This would continue.

8 A Summary of our Needs.

Our needs are:

A regular worship pattern

- i. that is sustainable, simple and consistent.
- ii. that works within the energy and availability of ministers.
- iii. that enables pastoral care and support,
- iv. that promotes great community while avoiding jostling or competitiveness between parishes, and
- v. allows parishes to have reasonably consistency in which ministers they enjoy
- vi. where we travel to each others place of worship for 5th Sundays in the month

In festival seasons we want arrangements that:

- vii. work for and serve all our parishes,
- viii. helps us support our fellow parishes without neglecting our own,
- ix. that are led by trained and authorised ministers.

And in terms of content, we want:

- x. a range of times and styles of worship that work for regular worshippers and for newcomers.

And we want:

- xi. To retain Kimbolton as a full “family” church with weekly worship.

9 Proposals

9.1 Service times throughout the year

It is our proposal to move regular Sunday worship times to: 9:00, 11:00, 16:00, and 18:00.

This gives clarity and simplicity of time which is better for advertising and for remembering, and allows for ministers to give more of their time between services and provides more rest and preparation time.

These times offer options for hospitality and fellowship either *before or after* worship.

There may be other times you want to consider, or a case for particular parishes, but whatever we decide, the times need to be memorable, simple, and consistent throughout the group.

9.2 What kind of worship in which time?

The working assumption of this pattern is that some acts of worship such as BCP communion, matins or evensong are the acquired taste of regular worshippers and are actively off-putting for newcomers. These styles of worship should be focussed into the first or last time-slots (e.g. 9:00 or 18:00), so that newcomers and families may attend family-friendly worship in the “shop window” times (e.g. 11:00 and 16:00). During these shop window times, we would hold family worship, main communion services, café church, messy church, and Sunday School etc.

Each PCC needs to consider which time slots, and what form of worship is best for the people who worship with you and the community you want to attract. It may be helpful to consider the needs and balance of the “flock” (those who come all the time) along with the “fringe” (those who might come sometimes) when considering this question. Whatever you propose is not set in stone, and as things change so can what we offer.

9.3 How that might look.

Time	What might happen in this time?
09:00	Matins, BCP communion, morning prayer
9:45 – 10:15	Hospitality after worship
10:30 – 11:00	Hospitality before worship
11:00	Family worship, parish or communion (with options for young families such as Sunday School), café church.
16:00	Family worship, Café church, messy church, praise and worship events, children’s church, outdoor festivals
18:00	Evensong, BCP communion, compline, in-depth teaching

9.4 Negotiating Festivals

Festivals are highlights of our year, and a great opportunity to bring the community together and encourage those on the edges of faith to join us. Nevertheless, they are times of high demand for ministers and create pressures because they all happen on one day or week.

With our ministry team we have, we might be able to lead ten acts of worship on a festival day. Nevertheless, many parishes would prefer a “shop window” slot to serve their community. Using the ministry team, we could only cover up to five services at 11 a.m. This means we need to compromise.

We have also found that large gatherings at Christmas and Easter, drawn from our wider group are fabulous. This is a joy we would want to keep, giving all our churches the opportunity to celebrate together.

9.4.1 What are our festivals?

Events that will need consideration will be:

- i. The patron saint of your parish
- ii. Candlemas
- iii. Mothering Sunday
- iv. Lent
- v. Holy Week
- vi. Easter Day
- vii. Ascension
- viii. Pentecost
- ix. Harvest
- x. Remembrance
- xi. All Souls

- xii. Advent
- xiii. Christmas week
- xiv. Christmas Day

9.4.2 What will we do?

To negotiate these challenges, we suggest:

i. **September.**

In September, each parish considers its festival needs for the year ahead. These can then be discussed during a meeting of the whole group (conveniently we can use some of a Joint Council meeting to do this, with representatives of all parishes at that meeting).

This will also be a helpful point to review how the previous year went.

If a parish is not able to be represented, they can forward their requests to the Rector.

ii. **October**

Revd Philip works with his Administrator on the following year's festivals and consult with ministers and church wardens on proposals

iii. **November**

The full rota for the following year is published.

Please note that some of the ministry team may not know whether they are available this early on. There will therefore be some likelihood of events organised that will need to be flexible about who leads the event.

9.5 Publicity

Once we have completed the consultation, we will publicise the full rota (including festivals) for the following year on our website. That will allow local parishes to plan with confidence.

10 What to do with these ideas

- i. Within your PCC, consider the proposals and ideas behind them.
- ii. Consider your worshipping community and the wider community, the needs you serve, your capabilities, and what you believe to be a practical and effective approach for your parish.
- iii. Delegate someone to can talk things through with Revd Philip on your behalf.
- iv. Send your thoughts to him before the end of July, letting him know who to talk to if needed.

We are aiming for a new rota from September.