

Towards normality? Worship in church - what did you think?

Introduction - Meeting and worshipping together physically in church form an important part of our life as Christians and yet for good reason this has not been possible since Spring. Like many churches, we have been able to include a good number of our folk with internet access in a form of corporate worship through our regular Zoom services but this form is not for everyone. The recent relaxation of the official virus restrictions to allow some limited services to start **in churches under carefully controlled conditions** is very welcome but poses real problems for us at St Luke's.

We are blessed with a lovely church building in which Christians have freely worshipped together for almost 600 years. However, the very age, layout, and small size of our building limit the number of worshippers who can safely attend a service whilst keeping to the necessary social distancing and safety measures.

To guide the discussion at the July meeting of the Church Council about how and when to resume the limited church services at St Luke's permitted, we consulted our congregations through a short questionnaire.

Questionnaire - There are about 240 people listed with a connection to St Luke's and we did our best to get a representative sample by contacting everyone with an email address (143) and telephoning as many as possible of the others with the help of our Prayer Networkers.

The questions and summary statistics are shown below.

Questions:

- 1. When did you join St Luke's?** *Last 3 years / 3-10 years ago / over 10 years ago*
- 2. Are you able to join Zoom church on Sunday mornings?** *Yes / No*
- 3. How many times have you come to Zoom church?**
Most weeks / occasionally / never
- 4. Would you like someone to phone to help you join Zoom church?** *Yes/ No*
- 5. Would you come to restricted communion: at 10.30am?**
Most weeks / occasionally / never / uncertain
- 6. Would you come to restricted Sunday communion at 9am?**
Most weeks / occasionally / never / uncertain
- 7. Have you tried Zoom Morning Prayer on Mon/Tues/Wednesdays?**
Most times / occasionally / never
- 8. Would you come to Zoom Thursday prayer meeting?**
Most times / occasionally / never / uncertain
- 9. What would the best time be for our weekly prayer meeting?**
Weekday evening / at the weekend / weekday morning

Questionnaires returned:

- 104 from the 240 people listed with St Luke's (43% overall response)
- 86 of the 144 who received it by email (59% response)
- 18 of the 62 on our postal-only list contacted by phone (29%)
- 67 respondents provided individual thoughts and comments (64%)

Answers given:

	Q1 At St Luke's
10+years	85
3-10 years	12
last 3 years	7
Q Total	104

	Q2 Zoom Capability	Q4 Zoom Help needed
Yes	63	5
No	41	99
Q Totals	104	104

	Q3 Zoom Church	Q5 Wed 10.30	Q6 Sun 9.00	Q7 Mornng Prayer	Q8 Prayer Mtg	Q9 Prayer Mtg time	
Most times	49	15	31	10	10	19	Weekday am
Occasional	7	26	40	8	13	12	Weekday pm
Never	48	55	27	86	78	4	Weekend
Uncertain	-	8	6	0	3	-	
Q Totals	104	104	104	104	104	35	

Findings:

1. The 43% overall response to the questionnaire is excellent for which many thanks! It reached 59% of those with email/internet and 29% of those without it, providing a clear picture of views across the parish for the Church Council to act on.
2. Unsurprisingly, Q1 confirms that the majority (82%) of our congregations have been with St Luke's church for more than 10 years.

3. An encouragingly high number (63; 60%) of respondents can participate in Zoom services (Q2) – internet connectivity with a smartphone or another video device. From individual comments, the reasons for non-participation included poor or no internet and lack of technology, as well as discomfort with video as a medium for worship. However, the offer of telephone help with Zoom (Q4) had only a few takers (5; 4.8%).
4. The responses to Q3 about the Sunday morning Zoom service bear out the actual situation in which an important new ‘congregation’ has been established during lock-down. Thus, the majority (56; 89%) of those responding, and able to join, said they did so most weeks or occasionally.

Note: in practice, between 45-55 homes are connected in the Sunday Zoom service involving 60-70 worshippers, many in family groups. We can only safely accommodate 30 worshippers in St Luke’s under the current restrictions and so the Sunday Zoom service needs to continue into the Autumn, albeit at a new later time of 10.30am.

5. There is a good level of support (68%) for a restricted service of **Holy Communion on Sunday at the new time of 9am** (Q6: 31 stating they would come most weeks and 40 occasionally, with 6 uncertain and 27 who would never attend until restrictions are removed).

Note: 9am was chosen as the time for the restricted Communion service to be accessible to both our former Sunday 8.30 and 10am congregations.

6. There is also reasonable support (39%) for a restricted service of **Holy Communion on Wednesday at 10.30am** (Q5: 15 stating they would come most weeks, 26 occasionally, with 8 uncertain, and 55 who would never attend either because of work commitments or until restrictions are removed.)

Note: before the lock-down, attendance at the Wednesday 10.30am service was 15-20.

7. Support is more limited for 9am Zoom Morning Prayer on Monday-Wednesday (Q7: 18 of the 63 possible attending at some time) and the Thursday 9.30am Zoom Prayer Meeting (Q8: 23 of the 63 possible attending at some time).

Note: in practice, both Zoom Morning Prayer and the Zoom Prayer Meeting continue to be attended by 10-12 people, significantly more than was the case before the lock-down.

Postscript:

The Church Council considered the questionnaire responses carefully at its meeting on Monday 20th July. It decided to provide restricted services of **Holy Communion in St Luke’s on Wednesdays at 10.30am and Sundays at 9am (new time) during August** to assess the level of attendance and evaluate safety provisions. The church building will be open for individual private prayer until midday after the Sunday and Wednesday services. **The Zoom Sunday service (at the later time of 10.30am) and our other Zoom services on Monday-Thursday mornings will continue.** Please see our website at <https://www.stlukesholmeschapel.uk> and **FaceBook** page for updates on service arrangements.

Steve Smith, Secretary, Church Hulme Parochial Church Council