



# Link

**July 2020**

The Magazine of the United Reformed Church  
Stratford-upon-Avon



***Worship, Witness and love for others through Jesus Christ***

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# Thoughts for July

## Where do we go from here?

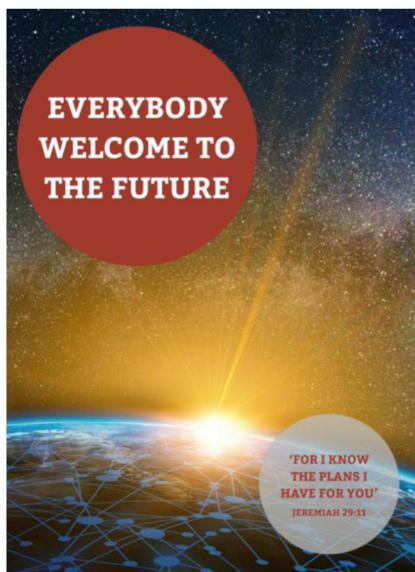
Last month I started to discuss and look at the implications of the Pandemic for our Church and THE Church generally. Elders have continued to look at the questions posed by coronavirus. I attended The Ministers ('Virtual') Summer Conference last week when we also debated the implications of coronavirus for individuals, for the Church and for the future. Each one of these issues took a whole morning!

There have also been quite a few publications debating the same issues and I wanted to share those with you this month. The results of these should help to inform our decisions in the future.

Tearfund commissioned a survey about Prayer and Lockdown. Here are some of the results:

- 44% of UK adults say that they pray
- 26% of UK adults say that they pray regularly
- 24% of UK adults say they have listened to or watched a religious service during lockdown
- 53% say they have prayed for family during lockdown
- 34% pray about friends
- 27% pray about frontline services
- 66% of UK adults that do pray agree that prayer changes the world and:
- 33% who pray say that they prayed since lockdown because they believe that prayer makes a difference.

*(these figures included all religions, not just Christianity)*



I think these are very significant numbers when you consider that a Tearfund survey in the past found that only 7% of the population considered themselves as practising Christians. Some 10% attended church weekly and two-thirds had not gone to church in the past year. Similar circumstances occurred after the death of Princess Diana. It seems that disasters and stress awaken people's spirituality and bring innate values to the surface again. In connection with this, you will know that we have had a "Try Praying" campaign, with a large poster and free booklets. We ordered 100 booklets and the last time I looked we only had about 30 left!

There has also been the "Everybody Welcome Online" church survey. Most churches went online: only 16% did not. Quite a few individuals did not switch to online at their local church. 30% of people either attended churches that did not go online, or did not access their church's online services. They comment, and I agree, that 30% is a lot of people to lose! But the survey suggested an average of 49% increase in attendance online – the variation was between 35 and 70%. Of course, not all online attendance is new people. But then some people are 'two timing' i.e. they attend more than one online service per week. The growth varies by the platform used for the online services. Zoom services have not experienced an increase – simply because you have to be invited to join in. The growth in attendance was seen in all sizes of churches – it was similar in small churches as large churches. The trend is apparently still upwards with 21 churches saying that their numbers have continued increasing, 29 where it was steady and only 4% falling.

Tearfund suggests that there have been three shifts in consciousness during the lockdown. Firstly, there is a shift away from individualism to supporting each other. We have found greater empathy for each other, and have come together as communities. Secondly, we have begun to value life more than productivity. Dignity of life for everyone is top of the agenda. The economy has been put on hold to protect people's health, the homeless have been housed, millions have been giving of their time and resources to support the most vulnerable. And thirdly, there has been a shift towards greater imagination. Only 9% of Britons want life to go back to "normal" after lockdown. We should ask ourselves "What is possible?" After all, new NHS hospitals have been built in days. There has been unprecedented Government support for companies and individuals affected by Coronavirus. The world has been changing overnight. We also have to ask ourselves "What do we want?". Now, more than ever, people are hoping that the world will



really change for the better. But, if we don't act now, we could end up falling back into the old ways.

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said at Easter: "After so much suffering, so much heroism from key workers and the NHS, we cannot be content to go back to what was before, as if all is normal. There needs to be a resurrection of our common life".

We in our churches should be cognisant of these shifts in the population's perceptions. We should apply all this knowledge that we have gained, to both our church life and our online presence. We have a lot of thinking to do and we need to do it fairly quickly.

As it says in the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Corinthians "Let light shine out of darkness" and as God said to Jeremiah "For I know the plans I have for you".

To go back to my original question: "Where do we go from here?" Well first of all, we need to consider all these facts and pray about them and also pray that God WILL reveal his plans for us.

**Peter**

## Family News

Very sadly Patrick passed away on 4th June. He had had a fall and broke a hip. When discharged from hospital to the care home he deteriorated quite quickly. He would have celebrated his 95th birthday in November. Because of the current restrictions, only eight people were present at his funeral which was held on 17th June. We offer our sincere condolences to Patrick's family and his friends at this time.

Clive is very happy in the Limes and is slowly making progress. Rob has regular phone contact with him.

Kirsty has brought her Mum down from Newcastle to be part of their "bubble" for a bit.

I have made phone contact with Bill's daughter and he continues to be well looked after in his home with regular attendance from carers and his son who is able to visit regularly.

Peter's brother, Andrew, has come through his operation and we wish him a successful recovery.

Ann's young friend, Abbie, is very poorly.  
Please continue to hold everyone in your prayers.

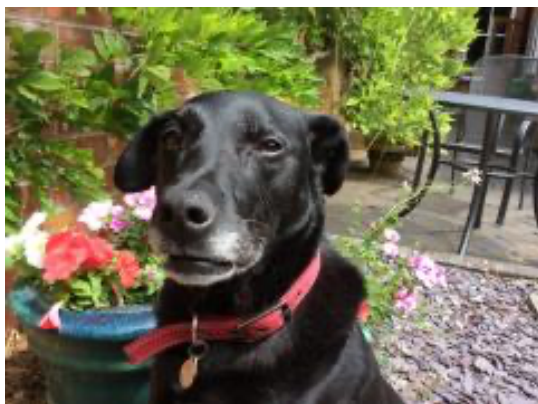
*Ileen Fisher*

*Editors: following on from last month's articles about the experiences of lockdown, here are three others:*

## Oscar's Lockdown Diary

This has been a very strange time for dogs. I think it might have been strange for humans too, but I can only speak as a dog.

I first noticed something odd going on when my mum and dad seemed to stop going out - I was never in the house on my own and this made me very happy. Then mum and dad started rearranging the furniture and two men brought a big machine into the kitchen. I had no idea what this was until I saw my dad running on it. I thought I might join him, but he told me I wasn't allowed. Now, this machine seems utterly pointless to me, my dad runs, my mum walks, but they don't go anywhere!

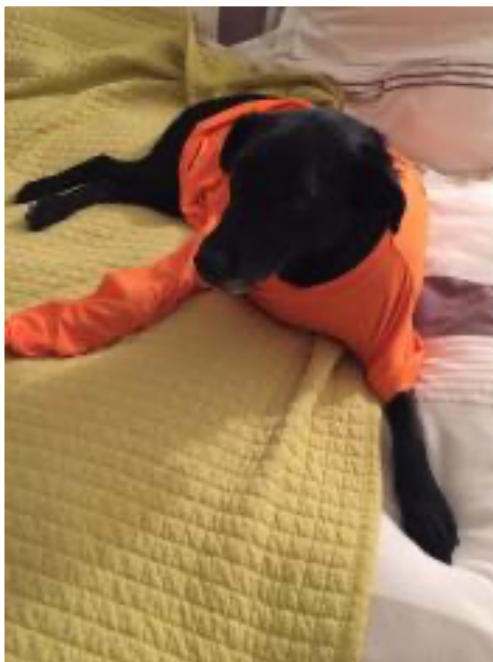


The next strange thing I noticed was that mum and I would walk through the car park but we wouldn't go into the church. After a while I got used to this and stopped trying to pull my mum in that direction.

We had no visitors to the house. I could jump up to my neighbour, Glynis' window, but she didn't come out to see me. We usually get on very well so I don't know what has gone wrong there.

On Sunday afternoons I could hear familiar voices - all my family were gathered together, but I couldn't see them. Mum, dad and Adam were looking at the screen and talking to it and it was talking back to them. Sometimes I could hear my cousins, Bertie and Jack barking, but I couldn't see them or play with them.

Adam seemed to go for several weeks without seeing Lucy and my friend, Little Oscar. Then we met them for a walk, but Adam and Lucy didn't hug or hold hands.



Little Oscar and I had a good play though. Suddenly, Little Oscar came to visit, he came into the house but Lucy stayed in the garden. This was very puzzling to me.

Gradually we started to meet people. We met Barbara for a walk, but although she made a fuss of me, she didn't get close to my mum and they seemed to be shouting at each other - all friendly and laughing though. Then we met Rob, Jill and Merle. I don't know whether Rob and mum have fallen out with each other, but he threw a bag of books towards my mum and she threw a bag of books back!

In the middle of all of this I went to see the vet. Usually mum comes with me into the surgery to hold my paw, but this time she couldn't come. A nice lady took me up the stairs and the next thing I knew, I was

waking up with my leg in a bandage. My mum and dad came to collect me and I was very spoilt for two weeks. I couldn't lick my leg so someone had to watch me all the time and I got to sleep with my mum or dad every night. This was very acceptable to me, although I wasn't so keen on the pyjamas I had to wear!

Things seem to be beginning to get back to normal, we have started to go out for coffee but I think mum and dad have gone off Box Brownie as we now go into Bell Court and sit on a bench. This is fine with me as one of the cafes has free dog biscuits. We have met Barbara and Ileen there too and it seems to be very busy. We have found a lovely new walk in Alcester which we do with my mum's friend, Lesley. Usually they go to look at gardens or go out for lunch, leaving me behind so this is a bonus for me.

I have noticed that mum doesn't go to church anymore. I sit with her whilst she looks at the screen and joins in with the hymns and prayers. She enjoys this but I know she misses going to church and I hope she can go back soon.

I miss the Friday coffee mornings too, I miss the fuss and the biscuits, so I hope I will see you all again very soon.

***Oscar x***

# A Garden Makeover



After a couple of weeks of lockdown Adrian and I started thinking about what we could do as a project. For some years now we had intermittently thought it would be nice to grow some vegetables in the garden but other than the odd grow bag, we hadn't done anything about it. The imposed lockdown provided us with the impetus needed. When we couldn't go to the shops we had to look at what we had around us for ideas. We decided that the old decking down the garden which we never used could be adapted to create sunken beds. So this is what we did. We cut holes in the decking and used the wood we had taken up to create the sides of the new beds. We managed to get a load of top soil delivered and hey presto we had a result! We are delighted with our transformation and wish we had done it years ago! Our biggest challenge now is to keep the vegetables safe from all the rabbits, pheasants and other wildlife which visit the garden. Once again we are recycling. When we lived in France, Rachel did Agility with one of our dogs and the garden resembled an obstacle course so they could train at home. The poles you see in the picture were the slalom poles (they were always going to come in handy again one day!) and are very useful for holding up the protective netting. We are now enjoying the fruits of our labours: lettuce, spinach and strawberries with the promise of much more to come.

***Kirsty and Adrian Knott***



# The Editors also had a busy lockdown

We can't rival the ingenuity of Kirsty and Adrian, but we too have spent a lot of time in the garden and the allotment. Here is a representation of the fruits of our labour.







A few of our flowers and the allotment. On the previous page the orange rose was bought with the Gift Token that the Church gave us last year. The yellow rose is called Golden Wedding and was also a gift.

# The Knot's Prayer

Dear God,  
Please untie the knots that are in my mind,  
my heart, my life.  
Remove the have nots, the can nots and the do nots  
that I have in my mind.  
Erase the will nots, may nots, might nots that may find  
a home in my heart.  
Release me from the could nots, would nots  
and should nots that obstruct my life.  
And most of all, Dear God,  
I ask that you remove from my mind,  
my heart and my life all of the 'am nots'  
that I have allowed to hold me back,  
especially the thought that I am not good enough.  
Amen.



***Submitted by Fran Maddy***

## 'Like Billie-O' and other Family Sayings

Recently I had a course of antibiotics which actually ended up giving me a sore mouth. When I brushed my teeth the toothpaste began to sting and I found myself thinking, that hurt 'like billi-o' - one of my Dad's favourite sayings. But where did it come from?

Well, there isn't a clear cut explanation of its origin, but there are a few suggestions - one of them being from the old steam train 'The Puffing Billy'. Interestingly, the people from Maldon in Essex believe that it came from Joseph Billio. He was a Puritan Minister in 1696 and an enthusiastic 'hellfire and damnation' preacher, at what is now the United Reformed Church in Market Hill. They even have a plaque to prove it.

This got me thinking about other sayings in our family - some you might know and others might be new to you.

My Mum: "It looks a bit black over Bill's Mothers, put your shed up if it starts to rain"  
We lived for a time in Kingstanding, Birmingham. Because it was high and very windy

there, she told everyone it was the nearest point to the Russian Steppes.

If something good happened it was: "Better than a slap in the face with a wet kipper"

She hated that expression used by some children, who wanted a sandwich: "Can I have a piece"

When I had untidy hair: "I looked as if I had been pulled through a hedge backwards"

If she had to wear a head scarf she looked like "Granny Gum"

My Nan also had a few favourites:

"Get out of the horse road and go and play up your own end."

"Take your coat off or you won't feel the benefit."

It's a pity that a lot of these expressions seem to have died out. I feel that they added colour to our language and maybe the time has come to pass a few of them on to our children and grandchildren.

*Jill Fradley*

## Letter from the Moderator

**Editors: We received the following letter from Steve Faber, the Moderator of the West Midlands Synod:**

Dear colleagues,

Greetings on this afternoon of Pentecost. I trust that you are well and have managed to worship the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit today. Even though we remain apart, we are still one in Christ Jesus.

I am writing to you to ask how you and your Elders are getting on with the "**New Normal**" booklet. It is essential that we do not try to return to our buildings for worship until URC policy changes, and you **MUST NOT** try to do this until your church will be "**Covid-19 Secure**" – i.e. you have everything in place to make the place as safe as possible for people to start gathering again. I completely understand that "New Normal" is a long document and that there is a lot to work through. It needed to be that long to make sure that we offer a safe place for worship.

Is there any help that you need to understand what you must do, or to put things in place?

We are planning to provide an updated version with more specific information as it



emerges, and we're aiming for that to be ready at the end of June or early July.

Remember that July 4<sup>th</sup> is the very earliest date that our churches will be allowed to open. **ONLY** if you have completed the Covid-19 Secure steps, laid out by the Government, will you be able to open then. **Most churches should be aiming to re-open no earlier than the autumn**, and for some it will not be possible to open safely for much longer than that.

If there is any support that we can offer to help you to be ready, please do ask and we will do our best for you. Our aim, like yours, is to get our places of worship open at the earliest date that it will be safe to re-open.

With my continued prayers for you all,

Steve

**The Revd Steve Faber**

**Moderator, West Midlands Synod of the United Reformed Church**

Digbeth-in-the-Fields United Reformed Church, Moat Lane, Yardley, BIRMINGHAM  
B26 1TW

## WAITING

*In lockdown they waited, those men long ago  
In God's Holy city; their feelings so low.  
His word to them: "Wait! In the city right here".  
So each day they waited, with lives full of fear.*

*They knew he had risen and ascended on high  
For they had all watched Him rise into the sky.  
How tempted they were to resume life as before  
And take out their boats lying idle on shore.*

*But, stay where you are men, in faith remain strong  
Just to think otherwise you know would be wrong.  
There's a new life before you, things won't ever be the same  
The Lord's work will be your work, all done in His Great Name.*

*Then release came with Power and set you all ablaze.  
You came out of lockdown, preaching the word  
Amazing the people with all that they heard!*

*The Church was born that Pentecost,  
And through it the Shepherd, is still seeking the lost.*

**Written by Jim, a 90 yr old friend of the Reynolds**

# Four Candles

Editors: Geoff and Margaret sent us a video that they received from a friend in Scotland. Obviously we can't show that in the magazine, but here is an interpretation of it: (We'll put the video itself on our website).



*Four candles slowly burned. The ambience was so soft, one could almost hear them talking.*

*The first candle said "I am Peace! - the world is so full of anger and fighting. Nobody can keep me lit." Then the flame of Peace went out completely.*



*The second candle said: "' I am Faith - I am no longer indispensable. It doesn't make sense that I stay lit another moment". Just then a breeze softly blew out Faith's flame.*



*Sadly the third candle began to speak: "I am Love - people don't understand my importance, so they simply put me aside. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them. And waiting no longer, Love's flame went out.*



*Suddenly, a child entered the room and saw the three unlit candles. "Why aren't you burning? You're supposed to stay lit until the end". Saying this, the child began to cry.*

*Then the fourth candle answered: "Don't be afraid, I am Hope! Whilst I am still burning, we can re-light the other candles". With shining eyes, the child took the candle of hope and re-lit all the other candles.*



*"The greatest of these is Love .... "*

*.... but the flame of Hope should never go out in your life!  
With hope each of us can live with Peace, Faith and Love.*

*Prayer:*

*'Dear God. You are my light and salvation. You are my hope. Please come into my heart, forgive all wrongs and give me your wonderful gift of eternal life. Help me to be an instrument of your love and cause your light to shine on others through me.  
Amen*

# MakeLunch Update

As you may know, we have been running this club during the school holidays since last Summer, until Coronavirus stopped us in our tracks!. Ann has supplied some of our families with vouchers to tide them over Easter and summer half term, but there is still a great need for us to help them during the long summer holidays, especially this year, with all the ongoing problems re employment, schooling, and the rest. So, we are teaming up with the Foodbank, who will provide emergency food parcels for our families, and we will be topping up the supplies with fresh fruit, simple recipes to try, and some activities for the children to enjoy. These will be delivered by our team of volunteers, supplemented by friends from the RSC.

We have already had several applications for our help at this time. We do have some monies left from the generous donation received last year from the Municipal Charities, but if you are able to support us in this summer's project, your prayers and maybe donations would be gratefully received.

## Website

A reminder about our website - an important part of our life in the coronavirus era. You can find the Sunday Services there. In addition there are prayers and audio files to listen to. We have discovered that we have people in different parts of the country and abroad who login and watch / listen to our facilities.

**[www.stratforduponavonurc.co.uk](http://www.stratforduponavonurc.co.uk)**

On the opening page there are several blue buttons for the various eatures. Click on the blue button labelled 'Online Services' and then click on the 'Play' icon in the video. If you wish to watch it full screen click on the little icon in the bottom right hand corner of the video window. - and turn up the volume for the hymns!

However, if you don't have access to the internet we can provide a DVD of the services - delivered to your door, and you can watch the services on your television. Please let us know if you would prefer that.

**The next edition of Link will be published on 26th July 2020.**

The deadline for submission to the next edition is Monday 20th July 2020

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour - If you have views about the future of the Church, please let us know.

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# Psalm 28 Verse 75

The Lord is my  
strength and shield.  
I trust him with all  
my heart.

He helps me, and my  
heart is filled with  
joy.