

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley

Extraordinary Times

a magazine to help us through COVID-19

Issue 41

January 10th 2021

From your minister...

So we enter a new national lockdown this week, the third since the pandemic first struck back in March 2020. There are some differences to the rules of the first lockdown, one of which is that churches are technically still permitted to remain open for worship. Each of the churches in our circuit, however, has taken the decision to suspend public services in the light of the rapidly spreading Covid variant. So I would reiterate my advice from last week that you should not enter the church premises at the present time unless you are involved in cleaning or property maintenance.

On a more positive note, we are still permitted to broadcast our Sunday services from church via the medium of Facebook: though this has been scaled back to the minimum of participants in order to keep everyone safe. Ministers and local preachers are discouraged from travelling outside of their local area, so this means sadly that we are unable to bring online services from St Pauls at the present time. As such all of our Sunday services in the immediate future will be coming from Trinity, and we will be coming together as two churches in our annual Covenant Service this Sunday at 10.45am. I do hope that you can join us.

I mention this because the service this Sunday is highly significant. The occasion upon which we make our annual covenant with God is always significant, but never more so than this year as we face all the uncertainties and challenges of 2021. I vividly remember making my first covenant prayer back in January 1986: I had no previous experience of the covenant service and had never seen the text of the prayer. But I remember how powerful the words were as I spoke them that first time, and how they cut right through to my personal life and experience. I have since committed myself to the Lord every year with these same words, as I'm sure many of you have and I have learned that the tougher the times, the more potent the prayer becomes. This year, with all that we have been through and all that we are facing, the words carry unprecedented weight and vigour.

It's always a good idea to look at the covenant prayer in advance of actually using it, so here it is:

*I am no longer my own but Yours.
Put me to what You will,
Rank me with whom You will;
Put me to doing,
Put me to suffering;
Let me be employed for You
Or laid aside for You,
Exalted for You
Or brought low for You;
Let me be full,*

*Let me be empty,
Let me have all things,
Let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
To Your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am Yours.
So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

Whilst this is a very personal commitment, it gains efficacy if we make it together. I realise that you may not have access to the internet, and all this talk of online services is therefore of little relevance to you. But if you recite these words this Sunday January 10th, at around about 11.30am, then do so knowing that you join with members of our two churches in pledging ourselves to Jesus for this coming year. Whatever befalls, He is with us. As the Bible says:

"Come near to God, and He will come near to you...humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up." (James 4:8,10)

Take care of yourselves and stay close. *Ralph*

What's On

Sunday 10th 10:45am Annual Covenant Service with Rev Ralph Ward

Sunday 17th 10:45am worship with Ms Jill Brooks

Sunday 24th 10:45am worship with Ms Jill Brooks

Every Wednesday 2pm Rev Ralph will be presenting his Bible study

Find these live on [Trinity's Facebook page](#) and [St Paul's Facebook page](#) with videos available afterwards

Ralph on leave

Note that Rev Ralph will be taking annual leave, and so will not be available, from Monday Jan 11th – Monday Jan 25th. During this time, Sunday streamed services will be led by local preacher Jill Brooks. The Wednesday bible studies will be presented by Ralph as usual. If you need to urgently contact a minister, please email ask.stpauls@gmail.com or phone Rev Melvyn Cooke on 01293 973847.

In your prayers

Pray for the NHS, hospitals and all medical workers as pressure increases and they struggle to keep on top of everything..

Pray for the USA, at present in political turmoil.

Pray for Lyn Gorrings's sister Wendy and niece Leah, who have contracted the Covid virus, and continue praying for members of our own church community and others you know who need our prayers at this time.

Send your prayer requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com

Permission must be received from a person before their name is put on the Church prayer list

Report from the Leadership Team

St Paul's Leadership Team met via Zoom this week. Our discussions were focused on carrying on the church's work and mission during and after Covid. Our future plans, made before the pandemic struck, are based on 4 aims:

1. Growing the church
2. Engaging more people in fellowship
3. Addressing our growing shortage of human resources
4. Make our buildings fit for purpose

We need to consider how to ensure progress on these aims during Covid. Live streaming services is proving successful in the first 2 of these and will continue to be part of our strategy in the future.

Isaac, our Property Manager, has continued redecoration of the premises as and when it has been possible. The human resources problem is one which must be addressed. In this meeting we concentrated on numbers 1 and 2 above.

Covid has stopped us doing a lot, particularly activities with children and families. Jill and Carol have been sending a monthly activity sheet to our families but we are keen to expand what can be done. We have observed that Trinity church is now running activities online for families and children. (Since the meeting we have contacted the person driving these for advice on setting up similar activities at St Paul's).

Our regular fellowship and house groups have not met since March last year. We will be looking at getting fellowship groups up and running as soon as possible; maybe using Zoom or similar until restrictions are lifted and we can once again use private homes, church premises or, when warmer weather comes, the church garden.

Recognising the importance of keeping our church community in contact and, bearing in mind the needs of our households without internet, we do encourage everyone to keep in touch by phone. The weekly *Extraordinary Times* newsletter will continue into the foreseeable future.

Stamps for the Hospice

Bobbie Gillett is still collecting used stamps for St Catherine's Hospice. We can't take them into St Paul's at present, so please collect them up at home until church is open again, when Bobbie will be able to pick them up. St Catherine's makes a significant amount of money by selling them on, so it's well worth doing.

Methodist Church Guidance on use of church property

The new Covid restrictions make little change to the use of our church but you can read the update of 5th January [here](#).

'Putting our hand into the hand of God'

"Please pray for all who have difficult decisions to make this week and for all who in any way will minister to others through this pandemic, because their ministry will put hands into the hand of God." The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of the Methodist Conference, writes about lockdown: <http://ow.ly/OpSR50D1xBB>

Frances' Welsh Girdle Cakes

In the good old days before Covid, when we could go to St Paul's monthly Coffee Stops, many of us enjoyed `Frances' delicious Welsh Cakes. We look forward to a time when we can do that again but, meanwhile, how about making your own – here's her recipe:

200g self-raising flour
1 x 2.5ml spoon salt
100g margarine
50g sugar
50g currants
1 egg
30ml milk to mix

Mix flour and salt, rub in margarine, stir in sugar and currants.

Mix to a fairly stiff dough with egg and milk.

Roll out about 1cm thick and cut into rounds.

Re-roll the trimmings and repeat.

Bake on a moderately hot, well greased griddle for about 3 minutes on each side.

Serve buttered, hot or cold.

And finally – a few thoughts about dogs

You want a friend in Washington? Get a dog. Harry Truman

I've seen a look in dogs' eyes, a quickly vanishing look of amazed contempt, and I am convinced that dogs think humans are nuts. John Steinbeck

A lot of shelter dogs are mutts like me. Barack Obama

It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.
Mark Twain

Happiness is a warm puppy. Charles Schulz

Rev Ralph is on leave until Monday 25th January. Please email urgent requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com or phone Rev Melvyn Cooke on 01293 973847

Prayer requests & newsletter items ask.stpauls@gmail.com

St Paul's website www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk

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