



Abington Pastoral Letter No.16 10.06.2020

Dear Friends

Our prayer, praise and worship will never cease

The restrictions are gradually being lifted. It is encouraging that we can now meet friends and family. It is also encouraging that the church buildings may be open for private prayers. Please note that what is being permitted is supervised private prayer. This means if the church building is going to open for private prayers, it will have to be staffed as well as complying with rules on thorough cleaning, disinfection process, social distancing and so on.

According to the latest reports, the rate of infection of Northamptonshire is almost as high as the one of Manchester. Last month Northampton has seen one of the highest number of new cases across the country.

Given our circumstances, I think the risk and stress would be too great for us to re-open our church building at this stage. We all long for the day when we are able to come back to our place of worship to pray and praise together. And we will when it is safe locally and possible to clean our church within our capacity. I envisage that there will be some churches that might be able to open in the deanery and I hope I can share the list of them in the coming weeks for your information.

Since the lockdown began, we have seen so many people sitting, praying, reflecting, chatting in our beautiful churchyard. We have seen God at work, pouring out his abundant blessing and his Holy Spirit upon his people while they are praying, worshiping and serving in their homes, in their walks in parks, in their communities. Let's focus on that. Because that is one of the stories, one of our testimonies that we should pass on to the next generation; How we are reminded that we are the Church and how God worked through us and walked with us during this time of exile and pain.

However I am very conscious of that all this is taking its toll on all of us. Right now, some of you might feel quite weary or confused or frustrated and many other emotions. There will be more ups and downs in this journey. So we have to remind ourselves once again where our foundation for hope is. It is not in shops, not in holidays, not even in church buildings. Our foundation for hope is in Christ. He is our friend, savior, way maker and our light in the darkness. As we live through this time of change and uncertainty, let's put our hope and trust in him and him alone.

Church buildings may open and may shut. This actually is happening in South Korea. South Korea has seen so far less than 300 deaths since the outbreak. A few weeks ago, they didn't have a single case for weeks. So they opened church buildings. But now they have seen cases increasing in some parts of the country and they are closing church buildings again. It can happen to us (I pray and hope not). But if we put our hope and trust in Christ, if we focus on not things that change but on the one who does not, we will fear no evil, we will not be overwhelmed no matter what happens in the coming months. Everything has changed and is still changing. But there are things that never change. We choose to trust in the one who does not. That is the choice we have made as Christians at the beginning of this pandemic. Let's not forget that. Let us encourage each other with that faith. Buildings may open and may shut but our prayer, praise and worship will never cease just as God will never cease to be with us.

Churchyard

As I said above, the churchyard has been a wonderful place of prayer and comfort to many in this community. All thanks to the wonderful work of Janet and her friends, especially Jackie. Can we give them a round of applause in our hearts? Thank you so much Janet and Jackie for keeping our churchyard so beautiful and letting us to have this wonderful space during this time. We will make an opportunity to hear from them at some point.

Sunday worship and new people

Our worshipping congregation on Sundays continues to grow. Now the average number is more than 100. We see names of those whom we haven't met or seen for a while appearing on the screen. Some of them tell us that they are new or they are joining our worship for the first time. When it happens, may I encourage you to just leave a short comment such as 'good morning'

or 'welcome to the service'? I know it will make a big difference and it will make them feel really welcomed.

This coming Sunday's service will be the Eucharist with the theme of Corpus Christi.

Expecting a new baby!

Some of you may or may not know this but Simona and I are expecting a new baby to the family. Her due date is 3rd of July which is 23 days from today. We are also told that the second baby may come a lot quicker.

When the baby arrives, our original plan was to invite Simona's mother from Lithuania to here to help us but that is not possible because of the quarantine rules. That makes me pretty much the only person who is able to help. So I am planning to take a paternity leave for at least two weeks when the baby arrives.

The Sunday service will continue as an online service. It will have to be streamed only via Youtube while I am on my paternity leave. Liz, Alison and Bob will take turns to lead the service. The order of service will be sent out to you in advance so that you can follow the service. I have asked Bob to be the coordinator of all communications during my leave. So if you have any message to send out then you can contact Bob at bob.purser@abingtonchurch.org.uk. I am very grateful to all our lay leaders and ministers for their support and their fantastic ministry work.

Please would you pray for Simona, the baby and Emmanuel? We would be very grateful.

Message of Solidarity from Christians in South Korea

During the service on Sunday, we received and appreciated the message from Revd. Dr. Boram Cha, who is a member of the clergy at Seoul Anglican Cathedral. Here is the script of what he said during the service.

Hello, I am very glad to give a greeting from Seoul, Korea to you all of Abingdon Church. I am Boram Cha. I was one of the colleagues of the Revd Jun Kim, who is a fascinating friend and mentor of mine. Although you may not know, I and my family spent wonderful times at Abingdon's vicarage with the Kim's family around New Year's Day this year just before coming back to Seoul after completing my doctoral studies at Durham University. We had a chance to visit the beautiful Abingdon Church. And it helps me a lot to feel connected to you now.

I feel so privileged to be part of your online Sunday service. I serve Seoul Anglican Cathedral as a member of priests and I have found it encouraging to connect with global aspects of the Anglican Communion since the pandemic swept over all the corners of the world. I have been really inspired and encouraged by the great stories of the charity, care, and hospitality that all kinds of frontline workers and key workers in the UK, doctors and nurses in the NHS have exemplified.

And I have a story to tell you of a young man with the spirit of service and dedication. I was sent a text from an unknown number in the very early Sunday morning two months ago when the covid-19 had just broken out in Korea. And it turned out as being sent from a guy who just started to attend Sunday service at Seoul Cathedral. He asked me to pray for him to have courage and hope while he serves a special Covid-19 medical centre as a volunteering nurse aide. He had entirely dedicated himself for eighth weeks at a battlefield-like medical centre and came back to daily life in Seoul after going through two weeks self-isolation period.

I once wanted to encourage and comfort him by sharing with him a passage of Isaiah 40, which you have heard this morning.

"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagle."

The global children of God are comforted and nourished by God who renews our strength and upholds the very existence of all of us. And I believe it enables us to live up to the lives of service and care, love and justice, kindness and hospitality against any kind of hostility and discrimination.

May the holy and blessed Trinity, one God in three Divine persons give you heavenly delight and joy today. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.

Compline and other services during the pandemic

Donald has kindly shared with us some of his thoughts on worshipping during the lockdown and information about other services available out there. Thank you very much Donald. Here is his words.

When we first started the lockdown and could not go to church this not only meant missing Sunday worship but also the house groups and Tuesday morning prayers in church for me.

We were anxious to keep worshipping and praying as much as we could. We always listened, Monday to Friday, to the Morning Service on Longwave on Radio 4 at 9.45am when we could and that is most days now. We always listened to the Morning Service on Sunday mornings at 8.10am on Radio 4 before coming to church. We would then watch Songs of Praise at lunch time on Sunday. We did occasionally listen to Choral Evensong on Radio 3 on a Wednesday at 3.30pm, we try and listen to this each week. All these services help us to keep our links with the prayers and worship offered up by others which we feel is so important.

Our own Sunday Abington morning worships have brought us so much pleasure and spiritual food, we do not know what we would have done without it. It is so good to receive the greetings in the chat boxes, when they pop up it brings a smile to our faces that despite the virus, we can still greet each other. It is so good to see Jun, Simona and Emmanuel there in front of us and all our friends from church making such wonderful contributions to the services. Lizzie and I like to keep Sunday as Special as we can and so now after our 10am Abington service, and a cup of tea, we catch up with the 10am service at St Andrew the Great, Cambridge. This is the church our son Robert and his family have attended since they were married there and before, whilst they were students. We then join, through YouTube, their evening service live at 5pm. Gosh, you may say that is a lot. Yes, it is but it has been our way of getting through without meeting with our Christian family each week and receiving the spiritual uplift of worship and fellowship at Abington.

However, that is not all. We do pray more now since the lockdown and one way of providing variety is the service of Compline. We have always enjoyed this service during Lent and the way it punctuates our worship and prayers especially at that time.

You can find the form of service on line at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/daily-prayer/night-prayer-compline>

The service as you probably know is one of quiet prayer used throughout Christendom since about the 5th century and was always used by the monks as the last service of the day before retiring or going into silence. Following the format is easy and not too lengthy. You can have your regular prayer list ready to offer up during the service, there are selections of short readings and psalms, but you choose your own if you want to. So, we have used this but then we found there are YouTube services of Compline recorded in different places. For example, the Dean of

Canterbury sitting in his lounge by a coal fire leading us through or sung by the choir of Clare College, Cambridge, and many others. These allow you meditate and to pause the service when it comes to the time of offering up our personal prayers. We find these comforting and a good way to end the day.

The Church of England has another website where there are other daily services, which can be accessed throughout the day.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

I originally headed the article just Compline but the more I wrote the more I wanted to share with you how we have tried to make best of not meeting each other to worship and the resources out there. Rev Jun's prayer sheets have also been a great help with readings for the week and prayers to help us structure our prayer time.

Please continue pray for each other and those with particular needs at this time and to thank God for our daily blessings and for this new day.

God be with us all and keep us safe.

Donald

Weekday Zoom Prayer Group

Our first Zoom prayer group will be led by Liz tomorrow (Thursday 11 June) at 10 am. You can join in via telephone if you haven't an access to the internet. More details will follow from Liz later today. Please contact Liz at lizmk@outlook.com if you are interested in this service or if you have any request or questions. You will need to install Zoom on your smartphone or laptop. You can download it from here <https://zoom.us/download>.

That is all from me for this week. Stay safe everyone. God bless you all and your family.

With love in Christ

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