



Abington Pastoral Letter No.17 17.06.2020

Dear Friends

We have seen some encouraging news this week with the announcement of developing a medication that can reduce the risk of death by covid-19 as well as further relaxation of restrictions. It is good to see families meeting together, children walking outside with parents, streets and parks becoming more vibrant.

Prayer requests

Locally however I have received sad news over the last couple of weeks. In our parish, more people have contracted the virus and many of them are very unwell. Please pray for Amanda, Ellen and Finley who are slowly recovering from the illness but are still feeling quite unwell. I also would like to especially ask you to remember in your prayers Mark Wade, an evangelist, musician and a husband of Revd. Jane Wade at the Abington Avenue URC Church. Mark has sadly died after contracting the virus on Thursday 11th June. I have sent a letter to the secretary at the URC Church as I lament and mourn together with them. May he rest in peace and may God comfort Jane and everyone at the URC Church at this very difficult and painful time.

Being hopeful and being vigilant

Although the restrictions are being lifted off, the virus continues to take lives. There are encouraging signs but we should not get complacent. We can celebrate the improvements and achievements that have been made so far while staying vigilant at the same time. Keeping that balance between being hopeful, being realistic and being vigilant would be one of the keys for us in imagining how our world might look like after this crisis.

I would like to share with you part of what Bishop Donald has said in his Bulletin to the Clergy this week. I think he really points out the real challenges that we all have to wrestle together. He wrote,

"A lot happens in a week! Monday turned to Saturday for private prayer in church buildings, and small-scale funerals were included.

The indicative dates we have heard from the government for various aspects of life to be opened up keep changing: sometimes one date or set of conditions from the relevant government department, and another from Downing Street. Policies change, the rate of unlocking, the perceived priorities ... It can be hard to keep up.

However, don't worry! As I've said before, and I might well say again, these are just permissions. True, it can be unhelpful when a government minister says "Your parish church will be open again from Monday", but we just have to put up with that. Sadly, even in this crisis, it appears that some politicians (on all sides of the political divides) are more interested in the spin, how they appear, their popularity, than they are in doing the right thing. The fact is, it is up to you, with advice from your churchwardens, and your PCC, as to when and how the church building is opened up. I and the senior staff are happy to advise, or to talk issues through with you; but it is up to you, and I will support you, whatever you decide.

Basic Principles

The pendulum has swung for some, from health and safety as the highest priority, to economic health. Back to work! Spend, spend, spend! Even though, just before lockdown, we were hearing arguments about not buying cheap one-season fashions, but more expensive long-lasting classical clothing; and to reduce our flying; all for the sake of the environment: that has been forgotten now, as the cheap "fashion" shops re-open, and "air-corridors" are created so we can chase the sun while keeping the airlines in business and the skies polluted.

One particular bit of nonsense is the government's idea of "suspending" Sunday trading restrictions for a year to kick-start the economy. (Hands up anyone who thinks those restrictions would be re-imposed after such a suspension.) Surely this virus has reminded us that we need our rhythms of life. We, our land, our livestock, and our shop workers, all need a Sabbath – a weekly day when we can rest and re-create without having to be productive economic beings.

In fact, we need a better place for that pendulum to settle than either "health and safety at all

costs" or "maximum productivity and wealth creation". We ought to be discussing "the common good" or "the well-being of the most vulnerable" or "the caring and just society." We could, even, be using this horrid crisis to be dreaming and planning a better future, rather than either hiding in our caves and refusing to come out, or rushing headlong back to the madcap destructive past from which we have come. I and others are trying to say these things (by Zoom) to the House of Lords, but I am not yet aware of any senior politicians brave or imaginative enough to re-think our society in these ways."

As Bishop Donald has said above, we really need to discern carefully how our world should look like when this crisis is over. And it won't happen automatically or naturally. You might remember that in my previous pastoral letter I mentioned how the Israelites travelled through the desert after escaping from the slavery of Egypt. First they were glad that they were finally escaped from the life of Egypt. But then they realised that the new life outside Egypt was quite uncomfortable and inconvenient. Do you know what they said to Moses and Aaron later? Let's see how it is recorded in the Bible.

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you (Moses and Aaron) have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Exodus 16.3)

So Moses asked God for help. And you probably know what happened. God in his love and grace sent them manna to satisfy their hunger. But you know what? The Israelites were still not happy! They said,

"If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (Numbers 11.4-6)

Again, God in his love and grace sent quails for them. But even that wasn't enough for them. The Israelites will later build an idol, a golden calf and worship it, saying that will bring them prosperity and safety.

Friends, as we can see in the Bible, when God leads us into somewhere new, there will be strong voices that will tempt us to think that that we really should go back to where we were and things should go back to how they were. As Christians we need to be a voice that invites people to listen to what God is saying to us and to discern what he is calling us to do and what he is

calling us to be as a society in these critical times.

Planning ahead

It is expected that government might make an announcement that the church may be open for public worship on 4th July. Of course anything can change anytime in these uncertain times. And it is just a permission as Bishop Donald has said above and local institutions will have to make their own decisions. I have initiated a planning process to see how we might be able to open the church for public worship. And let me be honest with you. It is not going to be an easy straightforward process. The more we look into it the more we find challenges and hurdles to overcome. The logistics and seating plans are only one of the smallest challenges. There are so many things to consider and to take into accounts. It means we will have to proceed ever so carefully, giving each area a proper amount of time for planning as it should be.

I am also preparing for the arrival of our second baby while trying to help out Simona as well as organising and planning the worship every Sunday. Given all that, I would like to suggest that until I am back from my paternity leave, we continue our online worship as we have been doing. In the meantime, we will carefully carry on with our planning. Once I am back from paternity leave, we can have an extensive discussion through the PCC to make important policy decisions. I know this might sound a bit frustrating or messy. There will be more frustrations. There will be times when things feel messy. That is the nature of being on a journey in a desert as we have seen in Exodus and in Numbers in the Bible. But the Bible tells us that we will discover the goodness and faithfulness of God even in those moments of frustration and messiness. Let us make this time as an opportunity for all of us to be rooted deeply in in his goodness and faithfulness rather than leaning on our own plan or understanding. I would be very grateful for your patience, support and prayers as we prepare ourselves for the next stage of this journey.

Volunteering for Usher Team

When the church is open, we will need ushers to guide people to enter the building, to be seated in a safe and social distanced way. I have asked Dianne, Donald and Bob to oversee this area. They will gradually develop plans to see how things might look like. We will probably need 3 ushers each time but we will need more volunteers if we are going to have a rota. This is not an urgent request and many things are still in the pipeline, but if you think you can help with

this, please would you let me know in time? More details about this area will follow in due course. Thank you.

Volunteering for Broadcasting Team

One of the challenges when we are back to the church building is how to combine the off-line worship with on-line worship. It is clear that we will still need online worship as there will be many people who won't be able to come to church. This is again another area that needs a lot of careful planning and investigation. One thing is clear, I cannot be the celebrant and broadcaster at the same time when we are back to the church building. So we are looking for people who are interested in operating streaming software, camera work, sound system, video editing etc, creating and directing various contents for our service. Again this is not an urgent request and more details will follow in due course but if you think you can help or if you are just interested, please would you let me know? I would be very grateful. I know some of you are very good and interested in this.

Patronal Festival Service

Our patronal festival service will be on 28 June. I am planning and organising this service which will be an online service.

Church Fete

It is with regret that I announce our annual church fete is not going ahead. But we are looking into ways to do other things in a creative way. If you have any good idea for fundraising events or just for a community event please contact Melissa at mTallack2@anglianwater.co.uk.

Plants sale

Please find the message from Jennie about plants.

As there is to be no fete this year, I have a quantity of cosmos plants surplus to requirements. They are in 7cm pots, smaller than I sell on the plant stall, but healthy, have filled their pots, and

need planting out a.s.a.p. Most grow to about 60cms but I do have some of the taller ones which grow to 120 cms approx. Colours are: pinks, cranberry, pale lemon, white, and a few bicoloured. If you are interested in buying any, they are 70p each. The money will go in to the church flower fund for when we start doing flowers again- hopefully! E- mail or phone me if you are interested. Jennie.

jenniesutton01@gmail.com

Phone: 240831.

Photograph of flower or your garden

If you haven't sent a photo of a flower or a plant to Sarah, please send it to her at sarah.may@rathlin.net. It is still not late and it will help her to create another wonderful outro which we can all enjoy. Here is her message.

Following the success of our Church Family photos I thought it would be nice to have another photo slide show. Perhaps you could send me one or two pictures of either a flower in your garden, or a picture of your garden, and if you haven't got a garden, perhaps a flower or plant that you have seen while out and about that you enjoyed seeing. We can then share all of this beauty!

I think 6 pages are more than enough for a weekly pastoral letter. Please take care and stay safe. Please do let me know if you need any assistance pastorally, spiritually or practically. The church is always here for you.

With love in Christ

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