



THE CHURCH  
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Diocese of St Edmundsbury  
and Ipswich

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### **Bishop Martin Seeley editorial**

Life is going to be different, and we can all help that be in ways that are good for everyone.

Last week we held three "zoom" meetings involving a total of 150 clergy and lay ministers across Suffolk.

We asked them three questions about what they thought God is showing us through this challenging time:

What have you and your churches started doing during the pandemic, and particularly the lockdown, that you believe we should carry on with?

What have you noticed that we should do differently – and preferably stop doing?

And, thirdly, what do we need to do now to make sure both can happen?

These were clearly energising questions and there was no shortage of ideas and solid practical suggestions.

Churches across Suffolk have adapted in remarkable ways and that has included developing extensive networks of support and care for people in our villages and neighbourhoods, and a variety of forms of online worship.

So there is a huge amount of experience from these last two months that the ministers in those three zoom meetings wanted to share.

"We have been doing what we are meant to be doing – caring and praying - and not bogged down in meetings and admin."

"So let's have fewer meetings, and use zoom if it cuts down on the travel."

"We have been surprisingly accessible through our online worship and all sorts of people have been joining in."

And as I listened, I realised these are three questions we all need to be asking as we cautiously (or in some cases, less cautiously) emerge from this extraordinary challenging and sometimes painful time.

What have we found ourselves doing we want to carry on? What have we discovered we could well do without? And how do we make sure these happen?

We could ask them as theological questions too: what have we seen through this terrible time that we believe God is calling us to do differently?

So here are three thoughts to get us going, not just for the Church, but for us all here in Suffolk. And I would love to hear what you think.

First, we have seen in many places a strengthening of our community bonds, and making sure everyone is included.

We have seen a wonderful blossoming of neighbourliness, of connecting and relating, whether across the street when we step out to clap on a Thursday evening, or over the phone to stay in touch.

We have made the effort to reach out to friends and neighbours, and made new friends and met new neighbours in the process.

Let's make building up our neighbourliness and strengthening our communities a priority, not something that happens because of a few people, or happens just when we have time, but involves everyone.

We have been fighting a common enemy – the virus – but as we move forward, instead of being united *against* a common enemy, how about being even more united *for* our shared community?

Second we have all seen just how much people have cared, really cared in practical ways to help those who are lonely, isolated, hungry, troubled, anxious, and sick.

And we have become aware of needs we may not have noticed or known about before.

What would it take for each one of our communities in Suffolk to be even more places where everyone in need was helped?

Where no one was neglected, lonely, isolated, anxious or going hungry, without anyone knowing – and doing something to help?

And there is one particular group of people I think we have seen we really need as a society to pay attention to – both to care for, and to listen to.

The senior members of our communities, living in their own homes or living in care homes, must be a priority for everyone's care – and treasured members of our communities.

Thirdly, we have seen that we can make hard decisions for the good of all, can change our ways of life to protect and care for each other, so we know we can do that now for the crisis we face caring for our planet.

As frustrating at times as it has been, many of us have seen the benefits of not driving everywhere, at the drop of a hat.

We have planned our trips to the shops. And as the restrictions ease, we have thought carefully about whether or not we should drive – or rather walk or cycle.

It would be very easy to rush back to our cars. But there is plenty of evidence of the benefit to our environment as well as to our own well being from cutting down on our driving, and indeed our flying.

And while we may at the moment be cautious about public transport, in the long run, wouldn't a much better, accessible, affordable public transport system across Suffolk really help us and the environment?

Three to start with – I've got a few more, but let's think hard and together to make sure the cost that so many have borne during this pandemic has not been paid in vain.

**Do let me know what *you* think – you can reach me at [bishop.martin@cofesuffolk.org](mailto:bishop.martin@cofesuffolk.org)**