

India a death-trap say church leaders as Covid crisis worsens

Appeals for oxygen and other medical supplies as hospitals overwhelmed



Covid-19 patients are treated in a converted sports complex in New Delhi, on Tuesday

INDIA has become a “valley of death” as the Covid crisis worsens and supplies of oxygen and vaccines fail, church leaders report.

The Revd Moumita Biswas, of the Church of North India, said: “We are in a death-trap now; it has become a valley of death. Before this wave hit, we just knew the numbers — but now it’s our family members, our relatives, our church leaders who have died.”

Bishops have appealed for the prayers of the rest of the world. The CNI Bishop of Nagpur, the Rt Revd Andrew Rathod, said that churches had now closed owing to a lockdown in his diocese, but burial grounds were overflowing.

“We need your prayers so that this situation may change, and the lives of the people are saved,” he said. Covid infections in India have now risen above 20 million — second only to the United States — and there have been more than 225,000 deaths. The Indian government continues to insist that there is no shortage of oxygen in the country, only issues transporting it to hospitals.

Church Mission Society (CMS) partners have described the situation as “devastating”. The Christian Medical College hospital in Vellore, which is supported by CMS, has increased the number of beds that it has available, and has created more ICU beds for Covid patients, but is still having to turn people away, a CMS partner based at the hospital, Harry Searle, said. Churches and charities are responding to the emergency with fund-raising appeals to buy oxygen. The Church of Scotland is sending a £5000 emergency grant to the Church of South India to support its efforts.

Indian churches are supplying people with food, masks, hygiene items, and oxygen supplies, and trying to help the most severely ill to receive medical treatment.

The convener of the Church of Scotland’s Faith Impact Forum, the Very Revd Susan Brown, said: “The numbers infected and dying in India are staggering. As elsewhere, it is the poorest who are suffering most. Our hearts go out to the Churches of North and South India in particular, and we encourage people, if they can, to donate to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal.”

The Church of Ireland Bishops’ Appeal has also released €10,000 in emergency funding to support Covid relief in India. A diocesan representative for the Bishops’ Appeal, the Revd Albert Dawson, called on people to remember the number of staff from India working in hospitals in Ireland as they donated.

“Let us remember the doctors and nurses who have travelled to our country from India and provided care for our citizens, over the last year, in the hospitals and nursing homes throughout Ireland. These are very valued members of our health-care staff, and it would be one way of showing them how much we value their contribution to our society.”

The charity Feed the Hungry has launched an “Oxygen for India” appeal to buy an oxygen generator for the Kachhwa Christian hospital in Uttar Pradesh. The operations director, Gwyn Williams, said that oxygen concentrators and ventilators had also been donated, but, as airspace was limited owing to Covid restrictions, getting them out to India was taking time.

The charity plans to get the oxygen and other equipment out through a network of hospitals in India and also Nepal, where Covid figures are soaring upwards. “Nepal is likely to be hit even worse,” he said. “These village hospitals in India and Nepal have less kit than we’d find in the average home or office in the UK.

“People are dying on the ground every day. Our donors have been very generous in the last few days; every penny is needed. This is our opportunity to help our brothers and sisters around the world. And there is still time to help, as the pandemic is very far from going away in poorer parts of the world.”

The humanitarian agency GFA World called on the world to pray for India. The founder, Dr K. P Yohannan, said: “In my lifetime, I’ve never seen anything in my experience that compares with this tsunami of suffering. A catastrophe is unfolding in front of our eyes — and we’re now at the eleventh hour. We can be sure that God weeps for those who are suffering; for the many who are even now gasping for breath.

“The government of India, and other governments around the world, desperately need prayer for wisdom right now as they confront this unforgiving pandemic.”

USPG is also launching an appeal to respond to the Covid-19 crisis in India. The appeal is aimed at helping hospitals, including the Sarenga Mission Hospital, run by the CNI diocese of Durgapur, to buy personal protective equipment, oxygen machines, and anti-viral medicine.

Multi-million pound campaign launched to build a memorial inside St Paul's to those who've died from Covid

A £2.3m campaign is underway to build a memorial inside St Paul's Cathedral remembering those who've died as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It would see an online book of remembrance set up by St Paul's called 'Remember Me' installed in a purpose-built structure inside the cathedral.

The structure has been designed by Oliver Caroe, the cathedral's surveyor of the fabric, whose mother died of Covid-19.

A crowdfunding site has been set up to help make the memorial a reality. It is hoped it will provide a reflective and tranquil space for visitors.

More than 7,300 names have already been entered into the book as part of the cathedral's Remember Me project.

"Remember Me is for people of all faiths and none, and will be open for entries for as long as is needed. Public reaction to Remember Me has been so positive that St Paul's wants to give it a

place at the Cathedral, so that those who it commemorates become part of the centuries of history to which St Paul's bears witness. St Paul's is fundraising for a new inner entrance and space for contemplation in the Cathedral, in memory of those in the UK of all faiths and none who have died because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For centuries the Cathedral has provided a place of shared memory, to remember and grieve for people lost in war and tragedies," the crowdfunding site stated.

Visitors would be able to call up entries in the online book, including a photograph of those who have died and messages written by their loved ones.

The Very Reverend David Ison, dean of the cathedral, said in a statement: "The physical memorial at St Paul's will anchor the online book in a place where significant events and people have been commemorated for many centuries."

The memorial will be the first of its kind in St Paul's for over 150 years.

God,

We pray for all those who have lost their lives in the pandemic and for this memorial in their honour.

Help those who mourn and may they draw comfort from your word and steadfastness.

In Jesus' name.

Amen



Marriage registers go digital — apart from the paper. And the register

MARRIAGE registers, a legal requirement for churches since 1837, closed for ever on Tuesday, as new regulations came into force, replacing them with a single electronic register.

Clergy no longer have responsibility for registering marriages in church, but are required to complete a marriage document and return it to the registrar, who will enter it on a digital database. Canon law dictates, however, that clergy must also continue to keep a physical register of marriages.



Signing the Marriage Register, print of an 1896 painting by James Charles

Uncertainty about the new process was reflected in the 800 questions submitted to an online webinar run by Church House's life-events team last week — not least about the potential for fines of clergy. The head of the team, Canon Sandra Millar, said on Tuesday that 3000 people had attended two webinars; feedback suggested that “many, many people have been reassured.”

She acknowledged, however: “Because it's a new system, there will always be things that come up in practice that had not been thought about.” An online Frequently Asked Questions page will be regularly updated.

A Home Office statement issued on Tuesday said that the new system was “simpler and more efficient . . . eliminating the need for data to be extracted from hard copies.” It is not paperless, however. Clergy will complete a marriage document before the service — they are encouraged to check the details with the couple at the rehearsal. It must be signed during the service — by the couple, their witnesses, and the officiant — and returned to the register office within 21 days.

Regulations under the Marriage Act 1949 dictate that a priest who solemnises a marriage must also record certain details in a “Register of Marriage Services”. This will ensure that a historical record is maintained, which can be searched by future generations. This regulation remains in force, but the new, simpler register may be completed by the priest after the service. A newly designed hardback book for the purpose is now available from Church House Publishing, although churches may print their own. Existing registers must be sent to the register office, with one copy kept in the safe.

In last week's webinar, Canon Millar reported that her team's research had highlighted the entrance and exit from the church and the exchanging of vows as the “memorable moments” remembered by couples. Couples might have expectations about the signing of the register, however, based on conversations with friends and family. She encouraged clergy to “make a moment” of the signing of the marriage document during the service.

The document is portrait-shaped rather than landscape, and smaller than the previous certificate. Only one set of signatures is required. Clergy are encouraged to use registrar's ink, and Church House has made available for purchase a “keepsake celebration card” to offer to couples to take away with them from the service.

The responsibility for ensuring that the document is returned to the register office within 21 days rests with the cleric, but he or she can delegate this to another person: for example, a churchwarden or a member of the bridal party. This can be done by sending it through the ordinary post. A duplicate should not be kept. Once the registrar has entered

the details from the document in the electronic register, a marriage certificate will be issued to the couple.

Among the concerns raised by those attending the webinar was the potential for fraud: although the marriage document can be accessed only through a password-protected website, the chief clerk at the Faculty Office, Neil Turpin, acknowledged that this was a “potential issue”, but said: “Ultimately, the registration of marriage is the responsibility of the GRO [General Register Office].”

In response to concerns that clergy who failed to ensure delivery of the marriage document within 21 days might be fined, a GRO spokeswoman clarified that a number of stages would precede this: a registrar might issue a notice asking for it to be delivered within a further eight days; if it was still not returned, then the registrar might require the cleric to attend in person, either to deliver it or explain why this was not possible. Failure to attend would be an offence liable to a fine.

Another change that came into effect on Tuesday is that the names of mothers of the couple may now be recorded on the marriage document and certificate, as well as stepparents. In theory, up to eight parents could be listed on the document. The proposal concerning mothers' names was first brought to Parliament by the Bishop of St Albans, Dr Alan Smith, as a Private Member's Bill in 2018. He told the Lords that the existing practice was “archaic and unchanged since Victorian times, where children were seen as fathers' property, and little consideration was given to mothers' roles in raising children”.

The director of mission and public affairs for the Archbishops' Council, Canon Malcolm Brown, said on Tuesday: “Changing practices that go back many years is never straightforward, but we believe the new system changes as little as possible in terms of the couple's experience of their church wedding, and that the clergy will find the new regulations become second nature very quickly.”

The Priest-in-Charge of the Pocklington Wold Benefice, in the diocese of York, the Revd Dr Jacob Belder, said on Tuesday that the new system would make things easier: “There is less paperwork to do, and it takes a lot of responsibility out of my hands. Especially with oversight of nine churches, keeping tabs on each set of registers and making sure they were all correct always felt daunting.

“The new system will make it much easier to centralise the paperwork for a wedding, and I have already been working out with our benefice administrators and churchwardens how we can efficiently process everything. I suppose I also have the advantage of having been ordained more recently — I don't feel like I am so entrenched in the old system that I'm giving up something very familiar to me.”

Being able to give the couple sight of the marriage document before the service was helpful, he said. “Our plan is to find a nice folder to put the document in, so that visually it will be more in keeping with the kind of formality you'd expect at a wedding. All of the couples I have spoken with so far have had no problems with the changes, and were glad to

know there would still be the opportunity to sit and sign something.” The appearance of the document, however, could be improved, he said.

Church House, Westminster, has published suggested prayers to mark the closing of the old registers, as proposed by the director of vocations and director of ordinands in the diocese of Hereford, the Revd Neil Patterson.

An introduction to the prayers notes that the Church has been “closely involved in witnessing and solemnising marriages since the 11th century . . . for centuries it has been our privilege as a church, entrusted to us by the state, to keep these legal records of marriages to welcome couples to marry here, and pray that God will bless and support them in their unions. Today we give thanks for the duty of record that has been ours.”

This is the parable of the European Super League

The failure of the scheme shows that that people power is alive and well, says *Josh Grear*



Arsenal fans take part in a protest outside the Emirates Stadium, in north London, on 23 April. They called for the club's owner, Stan Kroenke, to sell. Arsenal was one of the clubs to announce, on 18 April, that it would be joining the European Super League. Two days later, the club announced that it was withdrawing from the Super League, and apologised to fans

IT IS not often that sport dominates newspapers' front and the back pages, but, over the past few weeks, the

fiasco over the European Super League (ESL) has made headlines around the world.

Twelve of the biggest football clubs in Europe decided that they wanted to start a new midweek league that would net them hundreds of millions of pounds — a league from which they could never be relegated, and in which they would hold all the power. In short, it was a decision by a small group of billionaire owners, serving their self-interest. It would have taken greed in football to a new level.

The announcement on 18 April of the ESL was opposed vociferously by fans, players, and pundits. Within three days of the announcement, and after several clubs had pulled out of the scheme, the ESL was cancelled. Since then, many fans — including fans of Arsenal and Manchester United — have staged protests against the owners of their clubs.

THE European Super League story has highlighted facts about our society. One is how much a story about football could overshadow stories of true injustice. That, to nobody's surprise, a group of billionaires want more money is a bigger talking point than the injustices that continue to thrive in football.

Greed in football is not new. The sport has long since departed from its roots when clubs were founded on principles of community, social inclusion, and solidarity. Much could be said, and has been said, about the transformation of the beautiful game into the bountiful game.

Consider racism, too. It is an incontestable part of football's reality. But, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, footballers across the UK and Europe have, as a demonstration of solidarity with Black Lives Matter, taken the knee before kick-off.

It is great that football players are willing to draw attention to racism in football and beyond, but some players have begun to challenge this. The Crystal Palace forward Wilfried Zaha has said that he will no longer take the knee, because it has not resulted in enough action by the Football Association against racism. "Unless action is going to happen, I don't want to hear about it," he said. Those of us who want football to be the beautiful game must demand action and support those who are brave enough to speak out.

Football, though, is a microcosm of wider society. If we look closer to home, there are still systemic issues in the Church, as highlighted by the BBC's *Panorama: Is the Church racist?*, and the report by the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce, *From Lament to Action*. The reality of racism in the Church is not new or surprising, but it is heart-breaking: the fact that the rot of racism has taken hold in institutions that supposedly reveal and build the Kingdom of God.

The Church should provide the place of the now and the not yet: the presence of the Kingdom in the moment, as well as the movement of people journeying with God to bring peace and justice to our world. As the people of God, we should be standing with the oppressed, championing justice, and seeking peace. We cannot afford to be silent.

AS MUCH as the story of the ESL revealed a collective, callous indifference to injustice, it also gives cause for hope.

Billionaires are powerful. People do not often say no to them, and they are used to getting what they want, when they want it. Much of the coverage of the ESL story was fatalistic: there was no way to challenge this; the club owners were too rich and powerful for ordinary fans to stop them. But stop them they did. In the face of public outrage and organised protest, the clubs withdrew. The league has unravelled.

The story of the ESL should be a modern parable for society and for the Church, in particular. When people overcome their tribalism, work together for a common cause, and start to see themselves not as isolated individuals but as a collective movement, they can achieve the seemingly impossible.

The great thing about this reminder of the strength of people power is that the Church is people, too. The Church, as a movement, can practise the presence of God now, and join in bringing about the Kingdom.

It is easy to feel powerless and fatalistic in the face of the climate crisis, hundreds of years of racism, poverty, and much more. But the story of the ESL reminds us that, together, Christians are the people of God; together, they are powerful. Football is beautiful when we

remember its origins and purpose. The Church is beautiful when it remembers its origins and purpose.

Together, Christians' faith, hope, and determination to see peace and justice — to see the Kingdom of God — is why, if they mobilise, their faith can move mountains.

Josh Gear works in the campaigns and youth team at Christian Aid.

Spanish Catholic church opens its doors for Muslims to celebrate Ramadan

A church in the Spanish city of Barcelona has opened its doors to Muslims who are currently celebrating Ramadan, to eat and pray together.



Current coronavirus restrictions in the city mean that the usual venues where the Muslim community would celebrate the religious festival are closed.

Church of Santa Anna, located in the centre of the city, is offering its cloisters to host between 50 and 60 Muslims every night, most of whom are homeless.

During the celebration of Ramadan Muslims don't eat between sunrise and sunset only breaking their fasting after the sun has gone down with a meal known as Iftar. It is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

"Even with different cultures, different languages, different religions, we are more capable of sitting down and talking than some politicians," told Reuters the rector of the church, Fr Peio Sanchez.

The gathering is organised by the Catalan Association of Moroccan Women. Its president, Faouzia Chati, told Reuters covid restrictions forced her to find alternative spaces that would have good ventilation and enough room for social distancing.

She added that rector of the church, Fr Peio Sanchez, was very open to the idea as he saw the opportunity as an act of interfaith recognition.

"People are very happy that Muslims can do Iftar in a Catholic church, because religions serve to unite us, not to separate us," said Chati.

The campaign has not been welcomed by all though, as people on social media have complained about the initiative. Responding to the criticism, the church said in a tweet: "As always when there is novelty there is criticism. As we are still in a pandemic the Association of Moroccan Women asked us for the possibility of celebrating Iftar for the homeless. Because we can choose to do so, we welcome this celebration. Fraternity is about being welcoming".

Polling station set up in car boot 'after church warden overslept'

A voter has cast his ballot in a car boot after the church warden opening his polling station "overslept apparently".

Toby Porter said he cast his vote in Oxford at 7.25am, and the normal polling station was "up and running" by 7.30am.

He said around a dozen people voted in the car before the centre at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies was opened.

"We found it funny. Everyone was enjoying the novelty," he told the PA news agency.

Laura Lock, deputy chief executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, said some polling stations in cars are seen at each election.

"All polling station staff are trained on how to set up temporary polling stations for cases just like this," she said.

"Unfortunately we do find key holders oversleeping, so every election we see a handful of polling stations in cars until access to the building can be sorted."

A spokesman for Oxford City Council said: "The keyholder overslept and for a short time at 7am electors were voting using the POs' (presiding officers) cars.

"This is standard procedure when a station building isn't open on time and part of the training we give them.

"The key is that ballot papers are ready to be issued at 7am, wherever that may be. The building was open within 15 minutes."



Lift Up Your Voices, Lift Up Your Hearts

Church Music Webinar Tuesday 18 May



Sheep and Lambs Together

Creative and Reflective activities for All Ages

9th May 6th after Easter

Read John 15:9 – 17

Love one another

Cut a heart shape out of card or paper.

Draw, colour, paint yourself on one side, and a friend on the other side.

- Talk about what makes Jesus a good friend.
- Write some of the words on the heart

You could find something heart shaped in your house and hold it or look at it.

Or: Who are your friends? What do you like about them?

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus thinks of you as his friend?

How might having Jesus as a friend help when things are tough?



Editor's note – please share a picture of your hearts, and we will create a montage of St Hilda's hearts, and share in next week's St Hilda's News.

Junior Church

Last Sunday's Junior Church theme was 'Stay Connected' which was really appropriate as we were able to meet for the first time in over four months. The children coloured the leaves - all are quite unique. We used corks to make the bunches of grapes, we were all a little purple at the end. Hidden amongst the foliage are little notes to remind us how to be good fruit.



St Hilda's Parish News

If you have any Parish News you would like to share, then please send them into the Parish Office.

Rev. John Congdon RIP

Rev. John Congdon died on 23rd April of recently diagnosed prostate cancer. He will be remembered by a number of people of St Hilda's as he often took our services between the tenures of Fr. Blood and Fr. Chris, accompanied by his wife Mary. Mary will also need our prayers - she is about 90, and in very poor health herself. Rosemary has known them since John was her vicar in Osterley in the early 1980s.



Canaan Ministries are open for any of your needs. Just simply phone or email them and they will look after you. They also offer a delivery service.

Any other information can be found on their website www.canaanchristianministries.co.uk/

1 Corinthians 16: 14

Let all that you do be done in love.

This weeks services

Sunday Eucharist – 9th May @ 9.30am

This service can be viewed via our Facebook page, our new YouTube channel (St Hilda's Ashford), and Twitter.

Wednesday Eucharist – 12th May @ 9.45am

Tickets can be booked for this week's services via the links on our website and Facebook page or by contacting the Parish Office.

Please remember a face mask must be worn whilst in the church.

Tea and Chat after Sunday Service

We would like to invite you to join us for a virtual Tea and Chat after the service on **Sunday 9th May 2021 at 11.15am**. See below on how to join.

The meeting is hosted by Zoom.

- Download the Zoom app – www.zoom.us
- Click – Join a Meeting
- Enter the Meeting id – **986 0330 3217**
- Enter password – **460858**



Please hold in your prayers and thoughts this week those who are affected by the Corona Virus as well as the family and friends of those below.

The Sick

James Bedford	Peter Garner	Pat Parish	Rev. Peter Taylor
Michael Browne	Eileen Gilbert	June Prentice	Sheila West
Robb Clarke	Alison Griffiths	Margaret Reid	Chick Wilson
Daniel Cohen	Jim Hennessey	Elizabeth Savill-Burgess	Peter Wilson
Rebecca Cohen	Jean Iddiols	Delphine Scrivener	Jo Wood
Mary Congdon	Jane Johnson	Riley Shaw	Erin
Ann Considine	Pat Kyle	Elsie Stone	George
Michael Dixon	Libby Mills	Roy Stone	
Jackie Forsbrey	Raymond Nation	Sandra Swain	

The Recently Departed

	HRH Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh		
Rev John Congdon	Gillian Shepherd	Patsy Forsbrey	Joyce Small
Michael Orchard	Daphne Leader		

Prayer

Almighty God,
 who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
 have overcome death and opened to us the gate of
 everlasting life:

grant that, as by your grace going before us
 you put into our minds good desires,
 so by your continual help
 we may bring them to good effect;
 through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever..

Amen