

SOLIHULL PARISH NEWS

800
YEARS OF
CHRISTIANITY
IN SOLIHULL
2020



TEAM CHURCHES

St ALPHEGE - The Square, Solihull B91 3RQ

St HELEN - St Helen's Road, Solihull B91 2DA

St MICHAEL - Bryanston Road, Solihull B91 1BS



All church services are currently suspended until further notice.

In light of Government guidance around non-essential contact, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have issued advice that public worship is suspended until further notice.

All church buildings are also required to remain closed.

Our usual pattern of Sunday services and other mid-week gatherings have therefore been put on hold at St Alphege, St Helen's and St Michael's until further notice.

If you need help of any kind, please do phone the pastoral care helpline: 0121 661 6343. One of us is on duty each day.

The Parish Office is also still available on 0121 705 5350 or office@solihullparish.co.uk

Daily midday prayer and Sunday services at 10am are available via the website or social media channels, along with recordings of past recitals and Choral Evensong services.

***Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

**The Revd Canon Jane Kenchington
The Revd Simon Marshall
The Revd Helen Greenham
The Revd Dr Sam Gibson**

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THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Visit our Website

www.solihullparish.org.uk

Want to email the Editor?

parishnews@solihullparish.org.uk

Cover picture

'Easter at St Helen's'

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Moving beyond Normality

In recent weeks you might well have heard someone use the phrase, '...when everything gets back to normal...'. They will almost certainly have been referring to the way of life that we knew before the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus – a way of life that is now a memory. It seems bizarre to think that, only a couple of months ago, we could leave our homes whenever we wanted to, enter crowded shops or take a seat next to a stranger on the train. That was normality, and we long for it to return.

And there are other elements of 'normal life' that we miss: shaking hands with a new acquaintance; putting our arm around someone; chatting face-to-face with friends; going to church. These are just a few of the things which enrich daily life and bring out the best in human beings. They are very simple things and, until very recently, we took them for granted. They seem so rare and precious now.

We rightly long for the return of these aspects of 'normal life' - we are social creatures who need interaction with others in order to thrive and grow. And despite the creative use of technology which has enabled us to pray and worship at home in recent weeks, we still long for the experience of physically gathering together as members of a worshipping community.

And yet, there are positive aspects to this new and strange existence: we have begun to talk to our neighbours; we have publicly applauded the work of the NHS; we have used the internet to share messages of hope and support; we have kept in touch with each other more than ever before; we have increased our focus on the isolated members of our communities; we have slowed down. Could these things become a regular part of life once we 'get back to normal'?

In his earthly ministry, Jesus challenged what the people around him considered to be normal. He challenged their idea of who their neighbour was (*Luke 10:30-37*); he challenged their attitudes towards women (*Luke 7:36-50*); he challenged their concept of wealth (*Matthew 19:21-23*) and of power (*Mark 9:33-37*). In these and many other ways, Jesus shone his divine light on the ways and practices of 'normal' life and encouraged everyone to seek the values of God's kingdom (*Matthew 6:32-33*). One might even say that Jesus came to do away with 'normality' and to teach us to seek the new things that God is constantly unfolding in the world.

The Franciscan priest and writer Fr Richard Rohr often describes this process of transformation. In his book 'Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer', he writes:

We have to allow ourselves to be drawn out of "business as usual" and remain patiently on the "threshold"... where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown... This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed... Religion should lead us into sacred space where deconstruction of the old "normal" can occur.

At the same time, let us continue to support and to pray for one another and for all those who are affected by this pandemic. There may still be a long way to go before we can return to our former lives and, in the meantime, there is much for us to ponder. So let us consider the ways in which we might create a new world, in which we and all people can have life in all its fullness.

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Telephone No: 0121 705 3356**

Roundabout

800 Acts of Kindness News

The 800 years celebrations have been put on hold at present but there are of course so many Acts of Kindness being carried out locally and nationally including telephone calls being made to people who may be feeling isolated or vulnerable, donations to local food banks, shopping for others, support for those who are struggling to feed their children when there are no free school lunches, to name but a few.

In Solihull Parish a Pastoral care line has been set up to answer requests for support, and you can read elsewhere about the kind things the Mothers' Union are doing to support their members and others.

It's been wonderful to hear about a project that the Orlinski family have been involved in - making draw-string bags for NHS staff to carry dirty uniform home and put straight into their washing machines. It has been a great team effort by the whole family who have just finished another batch, bringing the total so far to 90! Well done everyone!!



More details of the project are provided below, if you'd like to get involved yourself.

Don't forget to e-mail 800actsofkindness@solihullparish.org.uk to record Acts of Kindness that you've carried out, been involved with or have been on the receiving end of - and we look forward to being able to share those in due course. And do send photos too if you are able as we'd love to be able to share all the wonderful Acts of Kindness being carried out in the Parish and beyond.

Linda Hicks

Get Involved!

Sewing and Knitting to Support the NHS

A Solihull-based midwife set up a group on Facebook at the beginning of April to see if anyone currently at home with extra time on their hands could help provide non-clinical items which would help NHS staff during the current Coronavirus pandemic. The group has grown at a level which was never expected, and the NHS staff have been so grateful for everyone's help.

The group is called 'Midlands NHS Uniform bag Donations', and volunteers across the region are sewing washable cotton bags which NHS workers use to put their uniforms in before they leave the hospital to reduce the risk of cross-infection from their workplace to their home.

From the original request for volunteers to sew uniform bags, members have responded to other needs within the NHS, and are now also creating different types of headbands to reduce pressure from mask elastic on people's ears.

Roundabout

There is also a sister group 'NHS knitted angels Birmingham Solihull and beyond' which has allowed people to use their knitting skills to knit angels which are then dedicated to specific NHS workers as a thank you for all their hard work. The group has also expanded so that people are knitting and crocheting other items such as hearts.

Through this article, I was hoping to make people aware of these two groups so that if they have knitting or sewing skills and time, they can get involved and make a difference in our local community. If you are on Facebook, the simplest way to get involved is to join the groups - type the names of the groups into the search bar at the top of the page, and then ask to join. You will find all the information you need on the page, and lots of helpful people on hand to guide and encourage you. When you have completed items which are ready for collection, please only arrange collection with one of the official named midwives on the page, so that you keep yourself safe.

If you are not on Facebook, but wish to be involved, we will work out a way of coordinating this through the staff team. One of the most-needed sewn items is the washable uniform bag - this needs to be made from fabric which can be washed at 60°C, and ideally should be 18 inches by 12 inches, with a drawstring top, along the lines of a school pump bag. In terms of knitted items, perhaps people might like to have a go at knitting pairs of small hearts, which are then lightly stuffed, and have a finished size of 2.5 to 3 inches. These are used to support bereaved families who have not been able to be with their loved ones during their illness.



If you are able to create some of either of these two items, and have a batch ready for collection, please phone the parish pastoral care line on 0121 661 6343 and we will organise a way for them to be collected safely and delivered to the place they are most needed.



If sewing and knitting isn't for you, there are other ways you can support the NHS, such as the Facebook group 'Hampers for Heroes' donating hand creams and other items to NHS workers.

Many people from our church and school community are already involved in these initiatives, and we also know people who are using donated items, so it is certainly a worthwhile activity. Thank you for your support.

Isabel Baumber

800th Prayer

Gracious God,
we praise you for eight centuries of good news
for the people of Solihull;
inspire our hearts and ready our hands,
that together we may continually proclaim in word and deed
the gospel of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.
- 7 -

News from St Alphege C of E Schools

Closure

I am writing during what is usually the Easter holiday when schools are closed for two weeks. This year, due to COVID 19, all schools were closed two weeks earlier for most children but remain open for the children of key workers.

I want to pay tribute to Mr Morrissey (Executive Headteacher), Mrs Hope (Deputy Headteacher) and all the staff for the amazing work they did in order to close our schools at very short notice, ensuring that plenty of work was ready for children to do at home. This was especially difficult when the Local Authority wanted to know how many children we were expecting to come in, even though the definition of Key Workers was only published on the Friday of closure itself. It was also great credit to the staff that we were able to keep both sites fully functioning right up until the closure.

Many thanks to our parents, who heeded all the advice about only sending children to school if absolutely necessary. We have closed the Junior School site and were expecting 98 children at the infants' site on the first Monday; 34 turned up. This number decreased to 15 on the Tuesday and is now down to single figures. The staff are working a rota, working in school one day per fortnight and at home the rest of the time. Many staff volunteered to be on the rota to cover the Easter holiday period, and Mr Morrissey and Mrs Hope have each spent one week in school and one at home.

Mr Morrissey has posted messages on the schools' Twitter account and these have been much appreciated by children and parents alike. We were looking forward to celebrating St Alphege Day as a Federation on returning after the Easter holiday; it is so disappointing that we cannot do this. The school buildings are very quiet and empty and we look forward to being together as a community once more.

SIAMS Inspection

It is probably rare for schools to look back on an inspection as a time of happier days but, in the current situation, ours certainly was! SIAMS is the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools, and Anglican church schools are subject to these as well as Ofsted Inspections. The inspection looks at the Who, Why and How? of a church school to see how distinctive, effective and sustainable it is in a Christian context. Inspectors must answer one overarching inspection question:

"How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?"

Our Infants' School was inspected in February under a new and more rigorous framework than the last one. At training, schools had been warned that if they had been 'Outstanding' previously, they needn't expect to be so anymore. The inspection looks at seven strands:

Roundabout

1. Vision and Leadership – how the school’s vision holistically infuses and shapes the direction of the school.
2. Wisdom: Knowledge and Skills – how the curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of all pupils.
3. Character Development: Hope, Aspiration and Courageous Advocacy – how the school’s values give pupils confidence to listen, question, explore and challenge.
4. Community and Living Well Together – how pupils and staff are treated, and the school’s place in the wider community.
5. Dignity and Respect – how inclusive and hospitable is the school and its policies.
6. The Impact of Collective Worship – how worship is recognised as the heartbeat of the school, how prayer is used and valued.
7. The Effectiveness of Religious Education – How pupils are challenged by RE and use it to explore theirs and others’ convictions.

The Infants’ School was judged to be Excellent (the new Outstanding!) for the inspection question and also gained Excellent for Strands 6 and 7 which are judged separately. The report says, “The school’s highly distinctive Christian vision, founded on inclusivity and doing the best for every child ... is transforming lives and breaking down barriers to academic success and wellbeing”. It was quite coincidental that the day of the inspection was one when the Infants’ School was in church for their half-termly Eucharist. The inspector was very impressed with the behaviour and participation of the children, and with the way that parents of all faiths and of none went up for communion or a blessing. “This is an outstanding example of school and church coming together to build a vibrant sense of community and mutual respect”. Our links with the church were highlighted in the report: “The partnership with the church is vibrant, mutually beneficial and outward-looking. Clergy and members of the congregation offer strong support to the school as governors and leaders of worship, and in a pastoral capacity. The school supports the church’s mission in a variety of ways, for example in being part of the 800 Acts of Kindness project”.

The children really did themselves proud when questioned by the inspector; it is hard to believe that they are only 4 – 7 years old! When talking about the school vision based on Jesus’s instruction to let the children come to him, one pupil said that for her it means ‘God is never too busy to see people in the world’. Another said that for him it means ‘Don’t exclude other children if they need help’.

We are very proud of the inspection report and can’t wait to reopen again and to continue “building a supportive, inclusive and loving community, which is transforming lives well beyond the school’s doors and enabling all to flourish” (*SIAMS February 2020*).

You can see a full copy of the report at:

<https://www.stalphege.solihull.sch.uk/infant-and-nursery/siams/>

Pam Price

We asked members of our congregation how they were coping with their prayer life and ensuring that their mental health remains in a good way while we are all stuck at home. We also asked for any good news stories that you might like to share...



"On this Easter Sunday, we pray that we may all be aware of the presence of the living Lord Jesus this Easter and in the days ahead. Here are pictures of our Easter cross (in front of our garage door) and the spring corner of our patio!"

"Just been watching Songs of Praise from Gas Street Birmingham which was very uplifting and they also had The Old Rugged Cross from Victoria Hall in Bolton which was very nostalgic. Earlier we had the morning service from Bangor to get our bit of Welsh culture!"



"The Spring flowers and the sunshine have been such a help this week and I have given thanks many times that we are not facing this in November when being shut in would make it seem much worse. I am also thankful for modern technology as we managed a Zoom meeting with our girls and their families earlier today. It doesn't make up for not having them here but at least we were able to be together and share a few minutes and hear what the children had been doing. We look forward to normal service(s) being resumed!"

"So far Ethan and I have embraced the time we have spent together. Having worked full time 5 days a week for many years it has been a joy to get to spend 24/7 with each other.

I have bought a guitar so that I can accompany Ethan with his and learn together and enjoy making music. We have created our own school called Sausage School which generally works well for the mornings. We have had a little half-term break but back to it soon!

I have also been working on my own music: a friend and I are working on our 3rd song together which I will record once lock-down is released and I can get to my studio friends! Best wishes to everyone in this troubling time. Look forward to getting back to some sort of normality soon!"

"Being a keen user of the Lord's Prayer, usually I find myself concentrating on the 'normal' verses i.e. 'Forgive us our trespasses', 'Lead us not into temptation' (or as I put it, 'Keep us from temptation'), 'Deliver us from (all) evil' [This includes natural and man made problems] and being of a scientific mind, I end up giving more thought to 'For ever and ever'. Come the virus, with its panic buying (by some), combined with self isolation and the realisation that one can't just nip out to the shops, I have found that the previously glossed-over verse 'Give us this day our daily bread' actually starts to mean something - especially when the morning toast is in doubt! All those years when 'daily bread' was never a problem, and if it was, the issue was whether one was able to get the right brand with the necessary 'bits' taken out or put in. If the Virus can teach us to appreciate once more the basic necessities of life then perhaps something good might come out of this world wide pandemic."

Roundabout

"Just keep counting my many blessings!! Lyons and others in Knowle been very helpful. Lovely seeing the Archbishop in his kitchen. Long way to go I fear, but many younger people are helping us oldies out with shopping etc."

"I will keep this short as the most positive thing for most that has come out of this unfortunate situation is that it has brought family together. We must all have hope and faith and stay united."

"Well I was sent this picture recently but I didn't agree...
I am still using my calendar, even in the lock-down and my diary is helping me keep some structure in my life.

Sundays: prayers and services on the radio, TV or web.
During the month my book club, a french class, a U3A French group.

Prayer requests especially for friends and people in the NHS.
Birthdays, family catch ups, virtual cuppas or drinks via FaceTime with friends.

It is also about hope. That life will return to normal. That we will soon meet our church family, dear friends and our much-missed family. That in due course we will fill up our diaries for the rest of 2020."

"In normal times I edit and circulate the quarterly rota for chalice assistants, servers and welcomers at St. Michael's. To give some mental stimulus to those on the list I now compile and circulate a weekly list of anagrams on a given subject, such as female names, countries, etc. If anyone would like to share in receiving this stimulus I will include them in the mailing list (free of charge!) if they contact me (Robin Soper) on 0121 709 3504 with their name and e-mail address."

"FAITH.

- F** - Feel good about yourself and maintain your spiritual, mental and personal standards.
- A** - Allow yourself time away from the news to help reduce anxiety.
- I** - Initiate a new routine and try to stick to it.
- T** - Talk to family and friends including of course fellow parishioners.
- H** - Have some exercise, go for a walk even around your garden or flat and try and get some sunlight.

KEEP THE FAITH."

"Being on furlough has been something of a luxury so far. I've loved having time to get jobs done in the garden and to be able just to sit there and notice the changes occurring in nature day by day. Being at home has also brought new challenges and achievements, including continuing a Pilates class at home with the help of Zoom and recording myself singing "Dear Lord and Father of mankind" to add to other voices, including many from Solihull Choral Society, to make a joint recording put together by our director, Oliver Walker."

"Time spent at home during the lock-down has given me the opportunity to create a Prayer space at home which I have wanted to do for a long time but have never found the time. During my reflections as part of the Retreat in Daily life I realised that being neither a 'lark' nor an 'owl' midday is the best time for me to spend time in prayer. The opportunity to stop at midday every day and join in with the Parish midday prayers online has become an important part of my prayer life and I hope that having established this pattern I will be able to continue to pause in the middle of each day to reflect and spend time with God."

**Biggest waste of
money this year?**

2020 diary

Roundabout

"Just had a ¾-hour walk around local roads and most gardens are looking very good."

"Well, we have successfully celebrated Easter thanks to the enormous efforts of the clergy team and the admin staff. I have got quite used to sitting on a one to one basis for prayers and services, but I have an uncanny feeling that the people taking the service can see me and so the prayers and services have been very special. A huge thank you to you all."

"Like so many I have had to take a cut in salary to help protect the company I work for, and have now been put on furlough. This gives me an unusual amount of time, but also obviously causes some anxiety about my job. One of the ways I find to deal with this is to go for daily walks by myself or together with my wife walking mostly around Olton Mere but sometimes just around the local roads - this really helps me clear my head and reboot, which keeps me going. I love photography and I use some of my time to find different subjects to capture, it's my way of having a focus (please excuse the pun!). I now have more time to get in contact with those I have lost touch with, a simple phone call can make so much difference to a person's day. I am also learning to be thankful for what I already have, not to take for granted the simple things in life - and keeping mindful and grateful to those men and women who are putting themselves in harm's way to help save and protect us all: we owe them our gratitude and will always be in their debt. It will be some time before we get back to any form of normality, but ask yourself should we expect to return to 'normal'? The answer surely should be no, this is our one rare opportunity as a nation, and as a global society to stop and reflect on who we are, how we treat others, the impact of our actions, to cherish our freedom, our environment but more importantly to be a Christian person in our daily life showing compassion, humility but above all love for one another."

"While I've been on furlough, one of the things that I've had the opportunity to do is to set up a Facebook page for Solihull Parish Puppets:

<https://www.facebook.com/Solihull-Parish-Puppets-100101881668162/>



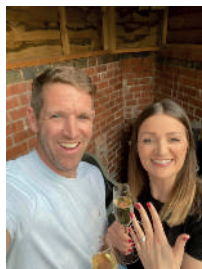
Please can all Parish News readers who are Facebook users visit our page, like and share?

The photograph here (from the Facebook page) shows Ruthie out in our garden enjoying the sunshine on Easter Sunday. Ruthie is particularly lucky because she's at home, and not forced to hibernate at St Helen's with the other puppets!"



Engagement

We are delighted to announce the engagement of Catherine Price, daughter of Pam Price, to Edward Emmett, youngest son of John and Jane Emmett. Congratulations from both families and all your friends. We hope to be able to celebrate very soon!



Recollections of a Lancastrian Easter

As a chorister at St Andrew's Church in Ashton-on-Ribble, Easter Day in the mid-1940s would have been celebrated as most other Sundays with Mattins and Evensong, with Sunday School in the afternoon. The choir had a good reputation and was active in local musical festivals.

On such an important festival there would no doubt have been special music with well-chosen anthems. Services of Holy Communion were held somewhat sparingly in this 'Low Church' parish.

The church would have been full and the singing impressive, but it is not the music or the liturgy which stays in my mind. For the following day was Easter Monday!

In the latter days of the war chocolate was a very scarce commodity. There were no chocolate Easter eggs. But there were highly decorated hard-boiled eggs which were to provide the chief entertainment of Easter Monday.

Some held competitions to identify the best decorated egg, but the principal activity was reserved for Avenham Park in the centre of Preston. This had a large area of grass and a particularly steep slope for the essential activity of egg rolling.

Those unfortunate enough to have been denied this pleasure should know that large numbers of small children rolled their eggs repeatedly down the slope until they collided with another, cracked and could then be eaten!



This seemed to have been a peculiarly Northern custom since I never heard of it when I moved down to the London area. In the North East and especially Durham and Northumberland it is called 'Pace Egg Day'. It is clear that 'Pace' is a corruption of Pasque, or the Latin Pacha, as a metaphor for Easter (and perhaps the breaking of the eggs for the Resurrection?).

It is said to have very ancient origins – back to the crusades or the Norman Conquest. Perhaps in confirmation of this, I read this last week from a journal of the celebrated Burgundian village of Puligny Montrachet that in the early years of the nineteenth century Easter Monday was *"the occasion for communal rejoicing...children rolled brightly painted Easter eggs down the steep meadows and through the vines..."*.

And so the practice was a good deal more widespread than I had imagined! Perhaps readers who have relevant experience could add to this?

Malcolm Owens

Diana Mitchell MBE RIP

Diana Mitchell died in the early hours of Saturday 21st March 2019. She was a faithful member of the worshipping community of St Alphege over many decades. As was illustrated in the March Parish News (and also in the photo shown here), she had just celebrated her 90th birthday.

Born in Silhill Hall Road in Solihull, she was baptised in 1930 in St Alphege where she was a regular worshipper, joining in many of its activities. She had a deep Christian faith. She trained as a nurse at Birmingham General Hospital and, later, in midwifery at Loveday Street. Her career encompassed being Matron of New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton and subsequently having charge of all midwifery services in Solihull and Marston Green until her retirement in 1985.



In retirement, Diana tried to attend the Eucharist at St Alphege every day and was a faithful member of house groups over many years. As her health problems increased and she was more confined to home she continued to say the daily offices praying daily for the many people who were on her prayer list. These included many of the children whom she had seen grow up at St Alphege whom had moved away to university and then onto careers elsewhere. She was always interested in how they were doing and remained outward-looking almost until her death.

Diana broadened her faith by going on many of the pilgrimages organised by St Alphege to Walsingham and on the pilgrimages to the Holy Land in 1972 and 1986. It was on the first of these Holy Land pilgrimage that she met Gordon Mitchell whom she married five years later. Sadly, it was only to last ten months as Gordon died, following surgery.

Service to others was the hallmark of Diana. Quietly, she helped many people who she came into contact at St Alphege or elsewhere. For over 20 years she was a Samaritan. Her husband, Gordon, was a founder member of the Abbeyfield Solihull Society. Diana joined as a volunteer and her role expanded over the years into the area and national Abbeyfield organisation. She was awarded the MBE in the 2000 Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to the Abbeyfield Solihull Society. Later she became a resident in the Abbeyfield House in Ashleigh Road, which she always hoped to do when the time was right, and then a resident at Hampton House in Hampton Lane.

In this time of national emergency, her funeral at Robin Hood Crematorium took place with only a few mourners on 8th April. A Memorial Service will be held in St Alphege at a later date.

Everything Diana did was done with enthusiasm, kindness and dedication. Hers was a life well lived. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Will Davies

Mothers' Union Helping during the Pandemic

St Alphege MU is co-ordinating a group of volunteers from amongst our members to do shopping and deliver provisions to those who are unable to go out during the 'stay at home' regulations. This is permitted under Government guidelines which ask family, friends and neighbours to support people who need help. Social Distancing practices are being observed at all times, of course, and no deliverer will be entering anyone's home.

Elaine Diskin is the first port of call for anyone needing help, and I'm pleased to say that eleven of our younger members have volunteered to help. Currently we are shopping for five households and could handle more. You don't need to be a member of MU to benefit from this. Elaine can be contacted by telephone on 0121 705 3265 or 07884 214817 or by email to elainediskin@hotmail.co.uk.

Keeping in touch during the Coronavirus crisis is very important. We have set up groups headed by committee members who are contacting members who are housebound and will welcome a phone call just for a chat. Those who are housebound or living alone can help this important ministry by phoning each other. If you know of anyone who you think would appreciate a call, and don't have their phone number, call Chris Thorp (0121 243 4340) or Susan Leach (0121 270 6132) who will seek their permission.

Susan Leach

COVID-19 – A MESSAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM MOTHERS' UNION WORLDWIDE PRESIDENT SHERAN HARPER



"My beloved MU Family across the oceans, and from near and far, I greet you with the love and courage of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour because He is our strength, our hope and our solid rock.

So much has been happening recently as COVID-19 is declared a pandemic and governments are advising that we take the necessary precautions to avoid the spread of the virus. There is so much we have to come to terms with in such a short time.

One of our faithful members, Dianne, went to deliver groceries to her mum who is self-isolating after recent travel. She was in tears as she dropped the groceries at the doorstep and watched her mum through the window with no chance of a hug.

There are so many similar stories including those of people who are ill or afraid, lonely or isolated.

And in times like these I encourage you to **take heart** and **do not fear** because the Lord, your God is by your side - an ever present help in times of trouble."

From the St Alphege Register

Due to the coronavirus lock-down, there have been no baptisms, weddings, funerals, memorials or interments in the past month.

Names taken from the Chantry Book for Remembrance in May

Edith Feldman
Geoffrey Starbuck
Tony Davies
Marie Davey
Chris Davey
Paul Bloodworth

Reginald Hobbs
David Geoffrey Cox
Barbara Ferguson
Christine Jukes
Peter Walford
Leslie Hodges

Peter John Mitchell
David Chambers
John Mark Taylor
Douglas Hale
Mark Metcalfe

Worship Notes May 2020

Major Festivals

May offers many important festivals which we would usually mark in our churches. The most important in our calendar include **Ascension Day**, when we recall Jesus' entry into heaven and his promise of the Holy Spirit, and **Pentecost Sunday**, often called "the birthday of the church" when God poured out his Spirit upon people of many nations.

In our 800th year, we especially give thanks for the gift of God's Spirit in calling all of us, including our brothers and sisters of other Christian churches, together in holy mission to the world. This is expressed particularly for us in our care and love for all in Solihull, and reflected in our parish strapline: "growing disciples, building community, transforming lives."

Under present circumstances, we will be recording and streaming services to mark these important days, inviting you to observe them with your loved ones at home. Although we are apart physically, we are always joined together as God's people.

Saints' Days

There are many notable saints' days in May too. On 4th May, we remember the **English Saints and Martyrs of the Reformation Era**. During 16th and 17th centuries many faithful people, both Catholic and Protestant, died for their beliefs under different regimes. This is a chance for us to honour their memory and what we feel is important in their convictions, while also praying for the peace and unity of God's church in our present times, where we are no longer enemies but partners and friends.

On 26th May we also remember **Augustine**, the **first Archbishop of Canterbury**, who was sent by Pope Gregory to evangelise the Anglo-Saxons. This reminds us of the ancient, deep roots of our church life in this country, and the call to share the good news of Jesus with all around us. Please pray for the mission of the church on this day, and keep these feasts with simple prayers in your home if you can.

Worship at Home

Parish Services

Regular features on the Solihull Parish Facebook page are:

- Members of the Clergy, Readers and staff are offering Midday prayer by video at 12 noon daily (excluding Sunday)
- Sunday worship at 10am and 6.30pm
- Family activities – there are currently two videos (making a palm cross and telling the Easter story with a piece of paper) – although these were created for specific dates, they can still be used.

Details of how to access the Solihull Parish Facebook page were provided in the April edition of the Parish News. If you don't want to go on Facebook, you can access the latest services through the home page of the parish website www.solihullparish.org.uk or through YouTube. Using YouTube will also enable you to see a number of past videos.

For YouTube, type www.youtube.com into the navigation bar at the top of your page on the internet, then type '**Solihull Parish**' into the search bar. Alternatively, you can just try searching search for '**Solihull Parish – YouTube**' using an internet search engine such as Google or Yahoo.

Daily Prayer

If you want to mark particular feasts at home go to

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

Clicking on "Morning Prayer: Contemporary", for example, will give you an order of service you can use (selectively, if you wish) including the Bible readings, psalms and any special prayer too, such as a Collect for a feast day. It is a wonderful resource and very simple to use. This is also available as an app for your smartphone or tablet.

Music Recitals : St Alphege Church at 1:10pm

Recitals are suspended until further notice.

Every Wednesday at 1.10pm we will try to post video clips of varying lengths of past recitals on the Friends of St Alphege Music Facebook page to create a kind of virtual recital.

If anyone would like step-by-step instructions about how to get on to Facebook, please email Isabel on isabelbaumber@btinternet.com.

Any voluntary donations to Friends of St Alphege Music



The Guardians of St Alphege Parish Church

FLOODLIGHTING

The Guardian's Floodlighting Scheme is available for anyone who would wish to celebrate or mark an occasion, or to commemorate a date. The cost is £8.00 for 2 hours; £14.00 for 4 hours. Please give 14 days' notice.

During these very difficult times and worries regarding the containment of coronavirus, for anyone who normally pays by cheque or cash and are concerned how they can do this, please contact me on 0121 706 0520, or by email at sheilaepayne@aol.com. Please also contact me if you require any further information.

Sheila Payne (Scheme organiser)

The Church was floodlit to remember the following:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 8 th April | In loving memory of Ron Soden on his birthday. |
| 10 th April | In loving memory of Mary Friswell. |
| 11 th April | Cecil Campkin, remembered with great affection on this your birthday. |
| 16 th April | In loving memory of Mabel Victoria Florance. |
| 22 nd April | Anniversary of the marriage of Diana and Gordon Mitchell. |
| 24 th April | In loving memory of Vivien Soden. |

St Alphege Pre-School

We welcome you to apply for a Pre-School place for children who will turn 3 in the academic year beginning September 2021. The closing date for applications is 31st January 2020. Application Form and Admissions Policy are available online (paper copies can be requested). St. Alphege Pre-School offers highly experienced and qualified staff. The last Ofsted Inspection result rated us 'Outstanding'.

Little Treasures (baby, toddler and pre-school age)

Every Wednesday in term time in the OBH : 1pm until 2.30pm. Children accompanied by parent/carer. Drop-in session, no need to book, just turn up!

Little Movers (in the academic year the child turns two)

Every Monday in term time in the OBH : 9.30am until 11am. Children accompanied by parent/carer. Drop-in session, no need to book, just turn up! The activities are aimed at children who are approaching 2 years old and is an ideal opportunity for them to develop their physical, social and language skills.

Further information available : www.stalphege-preschool.org.uk or email Pre-School Manager, Meryl Homer : manager@stalphege-preschool.org.uk

Music Matters



Firstly, I hope that all readers of the Parish News are keeping safe and well, and know that they can contact people within the church and choir community if they need help at any time.

Life has been very different since the last issue of the magazine. Churches and schools have been closed, taking away the normal weekly structure for our choristers – we had a very different Holy Week to normal.

We have started having regular choir rehearsals via a video-conferencing platform called Zoom. It has been a learning experience and it's certainly not possible to run a normal rehearsal, but it is great for us to be able to meet up and keep learning together and the sense of community going.



We have contributed to online services by finding choir recordings of liturgically suitable music from past services and also by creating new tracks using individual recordings created by choristers at home, which Joe then mixes to create a virtual choir.

We are posting videos of previous recitals at the normal Wednesday lunchtime recital time slot of 1.10pm, and may have some new material to post over coming weeks, but do keep an eye on the choir Facebook page if you usually enjoy the recitals.

As a way of trying to reach out into the local community, we are currently in the process of creating a recording of 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' as a tribute to the NHS and to all keyworkers. This recording will include pictures drawn by children from all over the parish, and we are very grateful to everyone who has taken part. We will update you on the video in the next issue of the Parish News.

Isabel Baumber

St Alphege Church of England INFANT & NURSERY, and JUNIOR SCHOOLS

Anglican parents are encouraged to consider these schools for the education of their children. The schools offer an excellent education incorporating Christian values.

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For further information please consult the website.

www.stalphege.solihull.sch.uk

You may have been wondering where I had disappeared to over the last few weeks or you may have heard, but just to clarify: at the end of March I was sent home from hospital having been amazingly well cared for by the staff at Solihull and then Heartlands hospitals after a very small heart attack. This was not as dramatic as it sounds and I am very grateful to Paula McClenaghan who, very gently but firmly, persuaded me to go and get the strange squashing feelings that I was getting on left side of my chest, checked out. After lots of tests including an angiogram it was decided that the small amount of damage would be best treated with medication and I was sent home.

I'm also hugely grateful to Sarah Marshall who stayed with us at the Vicarage, for the first week to take care of me (keeping me in order and making sure I didn't do too much) and the children. I was told to take four weeks off work which given the current situation at least hasn't caused too much disruption! I'm pleased to report that I am now feeling well and increasingly stronger.

It has been really good to talk to some of the St Helen's congregation on the phone as I've been recovering. I would like to say a huge 'thank you' to Phil, Jean Fewins, Chris, Beryl and Barbara who I know, as well as others, have also been keeping in touch with our church family.

The times we are living through are indeed putting us in a completely different place, even as we are confined to the place with which we are most familiar. We will each find ourselves dealing with 'social isolation' in unique ways and will notice ourselves experiencing a range of different emotions, both encouraging and troubling. Whatever those emotions are, please know that the God who knows each one of us completely and who loves us absolutely, fully understands and accepts us, as we are, moment by moment.

The day before writing this, whilst preparing lunch, I was listening to the album '10,000 Reasons' by Matt Redman. It's a while since I've listened to it and the words of the song 'Never Once' struck me as incredibly appropriate for this time:

*Standing on this mountaintop
Looking just how far we've come
Knowing that for every step
You were with us
Kneeling on this battle ground
Seeing just how much You've done
Knowing every victory
Was Your power in us*

*Scars and struggles on the way
But with joy our hearts can say
Yes, our hearts can say
Never once did we ever walk alone
Never once did You leave us on our own
You are faithful, God, You are faithful*

You can listen to it yourselves on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/r2CpU39tM0c>.

I am sure many of you have discovered by now the services that are being posted online from many churches, especially from our own Parish. Details are elsewhere in this magazine. I very much look forward to being involved in one of these services myself, very soon.

Wishing you peace and the knowledge of the love of God, through Jesus Christ, from whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we can never be separated.

Helen

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St Michael

Given the fact that all public worship and events have been suspended for the last couple of months, and that (at the time of writing) a date for the end of the 'lockdown' situation is currently unknown, this month's report from St Michael's is rather different!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of St Michael's for all that they have been doing to support each other in recent weeks. The ways in which this has been done include:

- a weekly news and prayer email from me to the congregation;
- a St Michael's WhatsApp group which is a means of exchanging greetings, messages, requests for prayer, encouraging videos and songs;
- lovely Easter cards sent through the post;
- many emails and text messages;
- countless kind and supportive phone calls (the old technology still comes in useful!);
- waving to each other from a safe distance on our daily walks!

In addition to these methods, several members of St Michael's have also been working on collaborative music-making! The way this works is as follows:

- one of the St Michael's musicians records an instrumental track on piano or guitar;
- that track is emailed out to other musicians and singers;
- individual musicians and singers record their instrument or voice whilst listening to the original track;
- those new tracks are sent on to another musician who mixes the tracks together to create a final 'master' track.

We're not quite ready to produce an album(!), but this has been a really good use of both technology and music talent and has yielded lovely results. I offer my thanks to all those who have participated in this venture.

Until we can gather for worship again, we will continue to connect with and support each other in these creative ways (and perhaps we'll continue them even then!).

In the meantime, take good care of yourselves and each other.

Simon

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Enquiries are welcome for the use of the Hall for social gatherings, christenings, anniversaries, meetings, etc.

Visit the website on:

www.solihullparish.org.uk/church-hall-hire

or contact the Parish Office:

Tel: 0121 705 5350 / 0121 270 9740 Email: office@solihullparish.org.uk

A Therapeutic Tale

As some may know in the last 3 years I have been retraining as a play therapist - I have almost completed my Post-graduate diploma and am beginning to work in local school supporting children with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. During the lock-down I have not been able to meet with my clients but have been keeping in touch via WhatsApp.

As part of my work I write bespoke therapeutic stories that speak into each child's individual situation in a metaphorical manner. I wrote a story for this time of fear and anxiety around the global pandemic and share it with you now.

Sarah Marshall

Brambles, Nettles and Other Nasties

This is the house that Jack built.

This the bramble that grew in the garden of the house that Jack built.

This is the thorn as sharp as a needle

That scratched the girl who lived in the house that Jack built.

This is the root that belonged to the bramble that reached long and deep and spread out and choked the garden of the house that Jack built.

This is the berry so juicy and sweet that grew from the bramble that grew in the garden of the house that Jack built.

This is the crumble all purple and hot that was made and shared by the girl who lived in the house that Jack built.

This is the nettle that grew in the garden of the house that Jack built.

This is the sting so sharp and sore that pricked the girl who lived in the house that Jack built.

These are the tears that she shed as she howled and pruned the garden of the house that Jack built.

These are the roots that spread and helped the nettle to grow and sting the people that lived in the house that Jack built.

These are the bees and butterflies that drank from the flowers of the many nettles that lived in the garden of the house that Jack built.

These are the veg that the insects helped to grow that lived in the garden of the house that Jack built.

And this is the salad so crisp and fresh that was eaten and shared by the people who lived in the house that Jack built.

This is the sickness that started small and grew and grew and came to the town of the house that Jack built.

This is the sickness which got into our lungs and made us cough. It kept us inside and closed our school.

This is the sickness that meant Dad lost his job and Mum got sad who lived in the house that Jack built.

This is the sickness that closed the parks, that stopped the hugs and changed our lives for weeks and weeks.

This is Jack who drew a rainbow. Who emailed his friend, who Zoomed his gran who lived in the house that Jack built.

This is the Mum who shopped for her neighbour. This is the Dad who played in the garden and helped me to read. This is the family who found new ways of being together in the house that Jack built.

And this is the sky all clear and blue, the garden filled with life anew

Sometimes hard things have hope shining through. In yours and the house that Jack built.

Prayer as an Activity of the Heart

Just before 'lock down' I was away on a conference with other Pioneer ministers and, as a part of the learning, we were asked to think about what was in our 'Rule of Life'.

For those that haven't heard this term before, one common definition of a 'Rule of Life' is as follows:

'A rule of life is a commitment to live your life in a particular way. It is meant to be crafted with prayer and discernment, in partnership with God, as you consider the way God made you and the values He has inscribed upon your heart.'

(sacredordinarydays.com/pages/rule-of-life)

For those who are immediately recoiling at the word 'rule', fearing legalistic connotations, please be assured that 'rule' is just a way of expressing "a means whereby, under God, we take responsibility for the pattern of our spiritual lives."¹ And, the point of the exercise at the conference was a reminder that, whether or not we have written anything down on paper and labelled it our 'rule', we all have (and are working to) a 'Rule of Life': that is, we are all committed to living our life in a certain way that is particular to us, and based on our priorities.

While being encouraged to share my thoughts with my neighbour at the conference, I was reminded that just *some* of my priorities – and therefore my rule of life – include(s) the following:

- Attending midnight service on Christmas Eve
- Attending Sunrise service on Easter Day
- Use of Advent and Lent for increased study and/or prayer activity
- My daily 'cup of tea with God'

Obviously three out of four on this short list (part of a bigger 'rule') are seasonal and, it's fair to say, Lent this year was like no other that any of us have experienced before. But it did serve to underline for me the importance of the fourth item on the list – my daily 'cup of tea* with God'. (*Other hot beverages are just as valid. ☺)

Some years ago I had a specific challenge from God: in this instance he pointed out to me that, while I was willing to carve out time in a busy timetable to have coffee with my friends, I wasn't doing the same about spending time with him. He was right – I was convicted. The very next day, as my first drink of the day, I had my very first cup of tea with God. (It's so long ago that I can't remember why it began first thing in the morning, but it may have had something to do with a book of daily reflections that someone had given me, entitled 'Breakfast with God'.)

Ever since then, my first action of the day is to put the kettle on and sit with God for the time it takes to drink my first cup of tea. For those who are thinking that that doesn't sound very spiritual, we need to remember that prayer is an activity of the heart as well as the head: this is a heart activity². Having a cup of tea with God means spending time with God. For this time it's just me (or you) and Him!

It's worth noting that the simplicity of a cup of tea with God does take some practice and some getting used to: at first, if you're anything like I was, your mind will probably wander, possibly rushing ahead into what needs doing in the rest of the day. It may also feel like 'wasted' time. Just try to remember what you would do if a family member or friend was sat with you: you would probably give them time to speak, and – hopefully! – you wouldn't be checking your phone every couple of minutes or have the TV on at the same time. If intrusive thoughts become a problem then have a notepad by the side of you and jot a brief note to action later. You might also like to use a word or a phrase from the Bible to help you focus. "Be still and know that I am God" is an obvious one!

Some of us have been completing a 'Retreat in Daily Life' during Lent. For the first week I replaced my cup of tea with God with my prayers for the retreat but, after that first week, I included my retreat prayers later in the day: I missed my cup of tea with God too much! Why not give it a go yourself? You never know, your relationship with God might benefit from it too!

Thanks for listening!

Suzette. ☺

1. Page 4, 'Finding a personal Rule of Life', Harold Miller, Grove Spirituality Series (S8)
2. Taken from 'Personality & Prayer', by Ruth Fowke, ISBN No: 0 86347 209 5

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What the ear cannot hear
The brain cannot turn over

What the lips do not say
The mind cannot fret over

What the nose does not smell
The stomach cannot retch over

Which all goes to show
I need a complete make over.



Full Stop

My life came to a full stop.
No way forward
No way back
Nothing.

I was at a standstill
No new ideas
No new thoughts
Nothing.

I was suspended in time
No bells rang
No songs for singing
Nothing.

Then a friend came by
And touched my arm
No words passed
But there's peace now

Where there was
Nothing.



God laughs with Joy

At the flight of a bird
Dipping and calling
At the turn of a leaf
On the light breeze falling
And with you and me
When we rise in the morning
And spend each day
With His bright light guiding:
As we come to our rest
In His love abiding
God laughs with Joy.

Rosemary Owens



CHURCH 4 FAMILIES

Holy Week and Easter 2020

Holy Week and Easter with children and families has been very different this year from what had originally been planned! It was especially disappointing to have to cancel the Easter Journey event for schools from across the Borough, palm cross making at St Alphege junior school, the Journey to the Cross event at St Alphege infant school and the Good Friday -Exploring the Easter story service. It has been wonderful, however, to find lots of different ways of exploring the Easter Story together!

Palm cross making



Solihull Parish is one of the few parishes that still makes palm crosses instead of buying them in readymade. The process usually starts with the Children's Ministry team teaching Yr 5 at St Alphege junior school how to make palm crosses and the following week Yr 2 from the infant school walk up to the junior school and each yr 2 child is paired with a yr 5 child who then teaches them how to make a cross. The session is usually a wonderful mixture of chaos and joy!

To add to the palm crosses made by the school children a wonderful team of volunteers from across the Parish generally meet on the Friday afternoon before Palm Sunday to make palm crosses to be distributed at the start of the Palm Sunday services. As this could not happen this year Linda Hicks put together a video teaching everyone how to make a palm cross from a sheet of A4 paper. The response was wonderful with many people getting involved.



Paper palm crosses on display alongside other symbols of hope for passersby to see.



Josh and Alexa with their palm crosses.



Bella and Leo holding their crosses.

Good Friday - Exploring the Easter Story



Instead of coming together to explore the Easter story at the interactive service which had been scheduled to take place at 9.45am on Good Friday morning, families instead joined in with an online video when Linda Hicks told the Easter Story using one sheet of A4 paper. It was lovely to see families posting their responses online:



Fletcher and Rowan both enjoyed the story, making the cross and thinking about new life.



The whole of the Orlinski family got involved with the activity!



First Communion Preparation

Please pray for the children in our Parish whose First Communion preparation has had to be put on hold. The children were sent a Holy Week quiz to complete and they will talk about the answers when they are next able to meet together as a group.



We were able to share with our Messy Church families resources to do Messy Church at home on Good Friday and Easter Day.

We loved Alivia and IVY's Easter Garden!



We also challenged families to take part in a Messy Church Easter Bonnet competition to be judged by West Midlands mayor, Andy Street. The challenge was to use recycled materials from home or the garden



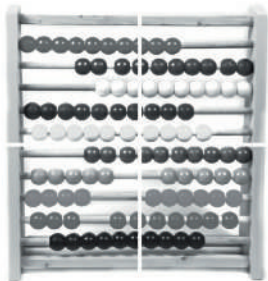
Darcey made her Easter crown and Marley his Easter bonnet from materials found in their garden.



Toby and Ethan proudly wearing their Easter bonnets.



Jack and Daniel created pictures of the Easter story.



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Youth Stuff

Despite the unprecedented situation, Solihull Parish Youth activities are still continuing, albeit virtually! Each weekday at 4pm we hold a youth session via Zoom. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday the sessions involve fun, fellowship, games and chat. On Tuesday and Thursday the sessions are Bible based. These allow the youth 'meet', interact and support each other during this difficult period. We look forward to the time when we can resume activities in the Youth Room.

For more information contact Joe Minall: j.minall@solihullparish.org.uk

Keep safe, God Bless

The Youth Team

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The Virus and the Prophets

The Coronavirus was beginning to bite deeply, and the Prime Minister took those drastic measures to prevent its spread. We entered the extraordinary period of “lock-down”. Even our churches were closed.

On the Sunday before that happened, the preacher in an evangelical church in the Midlands told his congregation that the virus was God's judgement. A lady from that church told me about it a few days later, and she posed the leading question, “What do you think?” I was not entirely caught off-guard, because I had indeed been reflecting on this very question as the crisis spread around the world. I had thought that, if there were any hellfire and damnation preachers still around, they must be having a field day!

In the Hebrew scriptures that comprise our Old Testament, there is plenty of writing about God's wrath and punishments, God's retribution in response to sinful behaviour. Some of this spills over into the Christian scriptures, our New Testament, especially into that holy fantasy, the Book of Revelation. But taking the New Testament as a whole, there is a very considerable shift away from that kind of language. In particular, in the writings which record the life and teaching of Jesus, the Gospels, the emphasis is generally on what Saint Paul calls in Galatians “the fruits of the Spirit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*Galatians 5:22*). The “you shall...you shall not” attitude of the Old Testament is gently smothered by the more creative tone of “you are...blessed, forgiven, healed” of the New Testament.

In the Christian faith, the New Testament does not replace the Old: Jesus was careful to point that out (*Matthew 5:17*). The two must go hand-in-hand: and particularly in times of calamity and crisis, we need to listen most carefully to the voice of prophecy. The calamity brought about by the Coronavirus event is by no means unprecedented in world history. People living in biblical times had to undergo catastrophes at least as severe: floods, drought, food shortages, epidemics, and the persistent threat of armed violence and foreign subjugation.

Against that kind of backdrop, it is true that the prophets often make use of language that speaks of divine wrath and retribution. But this is always coupled with a persistent clarion call to repent. Just check out the references at the end of this article and you will see what I mean. The people's sinfulness may be the cause of the calamity, or it may not: in any event, the innocent suffer with the guilty. But the clear message is given that, in times of crisis, people must come to realise the need for self-appraisal and inner truth. They must understand that confession and repentance for sin and failure are vital as a preliminary to finding a way through the darkness.

Focus

In the Church of England we have our strong points. Traditionally these have been mainly pastoral care and ministry, and social interaction: these in addition to the teaching and maintenance of the faith, and devotional prayer and, as the well-known hymn puts it, worshipping the Lord “in the beauty of holiness”. What we have not been so good at is

listening to, interpreting and proclaiming the prophetic voice with its insistent call to repentance. Even during the season of Lent, the focus is more on cosy group activity than on self-appraisal, repentance, and facing our shadow-side.

The Gospel of Mark is generally thought to be the earliest of the four. Here, in the first few verses, at the very start of our Christian story, the dominant figure is John the Baptist, calling the nation to repentance. "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (*Mark 1:4*). No such prophetic voice had been heard in Israel for 400 years, but the people immediately recognised John for what he was, a prophet in the old tradition. And then comes Jesus with a similar message, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is come near: repent, and believe in the good news" (*Mark 1:14-15*). Both John and Jesus (as I guess did also a number of their fellow countrymen) could foresee the coming of a catastrophe. In their case, this would be the annihilation of the state by the Roman forces, a vision which later caused Jesus to weep over Jerusalem (*Luke 19:41*).

As I said earlier, the teaching of Jesus is characterised by compassion and forgiveness. There is, however, a notable example of his echoing the old prophetic style of utterance. This is in *Luke 13:1-5*, where two tragic happenings are referred to, namely, a massacre by Pontius Pilate of some worshipping Jews, and considerable loss of life following the fall of a tower in the Siloam district of Jerusalem. The standard teaching of the time was that those who died must have suffered as a result of their sins. Jesus refutes this, but immediately adds a call to repentance: "Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did". In this connection, it is also worth having a look at the story of the blind man in *John 9*.

Significantly, the followers of Jesus repeat the call to repent when they set out on their missions (the disciples in *Mark 6:12*; Peter and Paul in *Acts 2:38*; *3:19*; *17:30*; and *26:20*). During the calamitous Coronavirus episode I have frequently heard a call to prayer from various quarters in the Church; but if there has been a call to repentance, then I must have missed it.

Martin Tunncliffe

Some Old Testament references.

- *Isaiah 1:16-17*; *45:22*; *55:7*; *59:20*.
- *Jeremiah 8:6*; *Ezekiel 14:6*; *18:21*; *18:30*.
- *Hosea 6:1*; *Joel 2:12-13*; *Amos 5:4*; *Zephaniah 2:3*.
- Also the book of *Jonah*, in which the whole story hinges on the idea of repentance by the citizens of Nineveh.

Note that the words "return" or "seek the Lord" are often used as a calls to repentance. In the prophetic writings the need for repentance, both individual and national, is paramount. It is clearly implied in the frequent doom-laden descriptions of the consequences of sinfulness.

Why I'm a Christian

The quick answer to the question "Why are you a Christian?" is that I was brought up as one; I've always believed in God, and I can't really imagine not being a Christian. From which you will gather that I am not able to provide a testimony with a blinding 'Road to Damascus' moment of revelation. Rather, my story is more a gradual build-up of experiences that have helped to affirm and strengthen my faith along the way.

As I grew up (in Richmond upon Thames), I went to church with my family – giving me the opportunity to learn about the faith, including Bible stories, Christian doctrine, and (to some extent) how to live as a Christian. For some reason, as a teenager, I never really got to the stage (which seems to affect many) of finding church boring. My interest in the church services and the liturgy was maintained particularly by being a server (a male-only role at our church in those days!), and by having a friendship group which was formed mainly from the church youth group and from fellow teenage members of the servers' guild.

It's worth mentioning that another thing that kept me interested was that our parish in Richmond (like Solihull parish) had three churches each with their own distinctive traditions of churchmanship and style of worship. But the servers' weekly rota moved us all around the three churches each month. Since that time, I have always found that a wide range of different approaches to corporate worship have helped to draw me and keep me closer to God in different ways – whether a simple prayerful said service with a small group, or a huge praise-filled Christian festival with musical worship led by a rock band (and with long testimony-driven talks). The churches that I have attended over the years have varied between the extreme Anglo-Catholic and the extreme Evangelical (all ostensibly Anglican, but the two extreme ones just mentioned almost certainly breaking all sorts of ecclesiastical canons in terms of what they (respectively) did and didn't include in their services!).

So why do I believe in God? I'm afraid, being a mathematician, that I'm going to bring a certain amount of logic to play here – although obviously faith and experience play a large part! It's always made sense to me that God exists. His existence is apparent in the beauty and complexity of nature – the more I find out about the way everything fits together, and how everything in the universe seems to rely on everything else – the more astounding it all seems. If you found, say, a clockwork watch lying on the ground, ticking and telling the correct time, you wouldn't assume that it had been 'created completely by chance', with all the various metal ores fashioned into cogs and springs by some mysterious quirk of fate, and then assembled together into a correctly working timepiece by 'natural forces'. You would assume that somebody had made it. And yet we and all of creation are orders of magnitude more complicated than a clockwork watch! When people are discussing the meaning of life and the existence of God, it doesn't make sense to think that beings capable of asking such questions 'just happened' to come into existence.

And why do I believe in Jesus? Because not believing in him is harder than believing in him. If I believe in a creator God with whom I can have a personal relationship, then I need a channel by which I can relate God to human dimensions. And given that Jesus indicated clearly that he was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, it makes no sense to disbelieve him. No human being has had nearly the kind of effect on world history as Jesus has (including for example being the ongoing basis for our calendar). No serious historian denies that Jesus of Nazareth existed (there is more historical attestation for his existence than there is for Julius Caesar and many other ancient figures). I have not seen any successful refutation of the Gospel narratives or of Jesus' resurrection. The C.S. Lewis trilemma – Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar, or Lord – rings true, and for me it must be the last of these.

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"Thy Kingdom Come" is a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus.

Since its start in May 2016, just three and a half years ago, God has grown Thy Kingdom Come from a dream of possibility into a movement. In 2019 Christians from 172 countries took part in praying 'Come Holy Spirit', so that friends and family, neighbours and colleagues might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

This praying together has been across our diversity and differences as every person, household and church are encouraged to pray in their own way. Whilst an astonishing 92% of people said they were praying for family and friends to come to faith in Jesus, and 40% of those taking part in 2019 did so for the first time, we recognise there is much more we can do together to help Thy Kingdom Come be fully in the lifeblood of the Church.

During the 11 days of Thy Kingdom Come, it is hoped that everyone who takes part will:

- Deepen their own relationship with Jesus Christ
- Pray for 5 friends or family to come to faith in Jesus
- Pray for the empowerment of the Spirit that we would be effective in our witness

After the very first Ascension Day the disciples gathered with Mary, constantly devoting themselves to prayer while they waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Like them, our reliance on the gift of the Holy Spirit is total – on our own we can do nothing.

Through the centuries Christians have gathered at that time to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit. 'Thy Kingdom Come' picks up this tradition. Over the past three and a half years more and more worshipping communities have dedicated the days between Ascension and Pentecost to pray 'Come Holy Spirit'. We are praying that the Spirit will inspire and equip us to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with our friends and families, our communities and networks. It has been amazing how many varied ways there have been in which people from every tradition have taken up this challenge. The effects have been remarkable.

It is our prayer that those who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ and his love for the world will hear it for themselves, and respond and follow Him. Specifically, we again invite each and every Christian across the country to pray that God's Spirit might work in the lives of 5 friends who have not responded with their 'Yes' to God's call.

Whether you have joined in 'Thy Kingdom Come' before or not, we invite you to take part this year – along with churches from over 65 different denominations in 178 countries around the world.

"In praying 'Thy Kingdom Come' we all commit to playing our part in the renewal of the nations and the transformation of communities." - Archbishop Justin Welby

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Calendar and Prayer Intentions for May

1	Philip and James, Apostles	Birmingham Cathedral community	Glebe Road
2	Athanasius of Alexandria, Bishop and Teacher	Christians working in universities	Hillfield Mews
3	Easter IV	The National Health Service	Hillfield Road
4	English Saints & Martyrs of the Reformation Era	For reconciliation between churches	Hollings Grove
5	Feria	Jane, Rector of Solihull	Holly Oak Grove
6	Feria	Those in national and local government	Hollyberry Avenue
7	Feria	The elderly, lonely or vulnerable	Hollyfield Avenue
8	Julian of Norwich	For a deeper prayer life	Homer Road
9	Feria	The Office and parish staff team	Hunningham Grove
10	Easter V	Doctors around the world	Huntley Drive
11	Feria	Helen, Team Vicar of St Helen's	Kelmarsh Drive
12	Gregory Dix, Monk and Scholar	For scholars and students of liturgy	Kelvedon Grove
13	Feria	Simon, Team Vicar of St Michael's	Keresley Close
14	Matthias the Apostle	All called to church leadership	Kilsby Grove
15	Feria	Those in chronic pain	Kinchford Close
16	Feria	Andrew and John, assisting priests	Kingsbrook Drive
17	Easter VI	Nurses and healthcare workers	Kinsham Drive
18	Rogation Day	All who live in Solihull Parish	Kirton Grove
19	Dunstan, Abp of Canterbury	Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury	Knightcote Drive
20	Alcuin of York, Deacon	The Province of York	Ladbrook Road
21	Ascension Day	The town and borough of Solihull	Lady Byron Lane
22	Feria	Linda, Director of Children & Families Ministry	Langford Croft
23	Feria	Healing and mercy for ourselves	Langtree Avenue
24	Sunday after Ascension Day	Hospital porters, cleaners and cooks	Laxton Grove
25	Venerable Bede, Scholar	Vocations to Christian learning	Libbards Gate
26	Augustine, First Abp of Canterbury	For the evangelism of England	Libbards Way
27	Feria	Sue, Associate Priest	Lighthorne Road
28	Feria	Her Majesty the Queen	Links Drive
29	Feria	Charlotte, Parish Ordinand	Linton Avenue
30	Josephine Butler, Reformer	All who live in poverty	Linwood Road
31	Pentecost Sunday	The 800 th anniversary celebrations	Littleton Croft

The Church prays for the community daily: please include these topics in your personal daily prayers.

Let us Pray

God of love and light,
In this time of fear, give us your peace.
In this time of isolation, give us your presence.
In this time of sickness, give us your healing.
In this time of uncertainty, give us your wisdom.
In this time of darkness, shine your light upon us all.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you taught us to love our neighbour,
and to care for those in need
as if we were caring for you.
In this time of anxiety, give us strength
to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick,
and to assure the isolated
of our love, and your love,
for your name's sake. Amen.

For those who are ill

Merciful God,
we entrust to your tender care
those who are ill or in pain,
knowing that whenever danger threatens
your everlasting arms are there to hold them safe.
Comfort and heal them,
and restore them to health and strength;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For hospital staff and medical researchers

Gracious God,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.
Strengthen them with your Spirit,
that through their work many will be restored to health;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Christian community

We are not people of fear: we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed: we are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs
For as long as it takes
wherever you call us.

Back to Normal

“Back to normal” is a phrase that I have often heard during the Coronavirus crisis. I have used it myself more than once, fervently looking forward to the time when I could travel again, visit my wife in the Care Home, shop in peaceful surroundings and, above all, give and receive hugs.

I should add to that small list “Go to church on Sundays”. The closure of places of worship felt like a body-blow. That really was unprecedented. Even in times of persecution, Christians have met together for worship, often secretly and maybe in mortal danger under unfriendly regimes. “Back to normal” certainly means for me “Back to church”.

But what sort of Church will it be?

On March 17th 2020, at the start of the crisis, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York sent a brief but significant letter to all Church of England clergy. It read as follows:

Being a part of the Church of England is going to look very different in the days ahead. Our life is going to be less characterised by attendance at church on Sunday, and more characterised by the prayer and service we offer each day.

This is a defining moment for the Church of England. Are we truly a church for all, or just the church for ourselves? We urge you sisters and brothers to become a different sort of church in these coming months: hopeful and rooted in the offering of prayer and praise and overflowing in service to the world.

A different sort of Church, and in a different sort of world. Reflecting on that letter, I began to realise that there will be no “back to normal” after the Coronavirus pandemic, however much we desire it. During the early stages of the crisis, I heard on BBC Radio 4 an interview with an Oxford University historian. He strongly asserted that, in the future, people will look back on this time as a major defining moment in world history, rather as we think of BC and AD. In a hundred years from now, people will refer to BCV and ACV, before and after Coronavirus. The Archbishops’ letter seems to be saying the same thing with regard to the Church of England.

What Will It Look like?

Many years ago, my wife and I had a holiday in Pennsylvania, and we spent a couple of days in the Amish area. We were fascinated by these remarkable people who resolutely follow an 18th century rural lifestyle. They do their best to keep themselves politely distant from the modern world and its technology, managing without cars, telephones, and most of the modern conveniences that make life comfortable and which we take for granted. They farm expertly and successfully without tractors or modern fertilizers.

The Amish way of life is defined by their religion, which is historically based on the 18th century Baptist movement. Every Amish person is a churchgoer, but they have no church buildings. They are organised in small districts, and the people of the district worship together once every other Sunday in one another’s properties, using their own houses and/or farm buildings. This means in practice that “your turn” to act as church host comes round once a year. A few days before the Sunday, your neighbours will help you prepare by cleaning, moving furniture and other stuff around, planning meals etc. The principal service during the Sunday consists of prayer (some of it in silence), hymns, readings and at least

one lengthy sermon. Holy Communion is celebrated twice a year, but communal eating during the fortnightly Sunday service is an integral part of the proceedings.

That is just one example of a "different sort of Church". I certainly don't hold it up as a model for a possible future Church of England. I somehow feel that a three-hour sermon and hymns that might go on for twenty minutes are not likely to commend themselves to British churchgoers! Nor, come to that, going to church dressed in 18th century costume. But there are some elements of the Amish way that are worth careful thought. For example:

- the entwining of their faith with their everyday work and style of living;
- their absence of need for special buildings;
- their natural domestic interpretation of the well-known Biblical text "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (*Matthew 21.1*, quoting *Isaiah 56.7* and *Jeremiah 7.11*);
- their deep questioning of the true value of innovative modern technology.

These are topics, among others, that could well be addressed by 21st century Christians as we prepare for a different sort of Church in the years that lie ahead.

Martin Tunncliffe



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How to beat coronavirus:

Stay at home. Keep your distance. Wash your hands. Have a good theology.

Wait, a good what?

Theology is our understanding of the nature of God. This in turn influences the way we see the world. In times like these, when life as we know it has been turned upside down, it's crucial that we have a good Bible-based theology.

To help, we've put together answers to some of the questions that Christians might be wrestling with at this time:

Will God protect us? Why is this happening? Is the virus God's judgement? Does sin cause illness? Are these the end times? And, how should the church respond?

And the church, of course, means all of us. We are one in Christ, and no amount of social distancing can sever that connection. Speaking of which...

Will God Protect Us?

Having the right theology can save lives. Literally.

Most churches around the world have stopped meeting in person – for obvious, sensible and necessary reasons. Some, however, have not, citing their belief that God will protect them from the virus. This is bad theology, and it might cost lives.

God does protect. God does heal. Yet we are his hands and feet, and it's vital that we play our role, listening and acting upon the advice of experts.

I trust God with my health – but I also try and make sure that I exercise and eat well. If I break my leg, I'll pray for healing – but I'll also go to the doctor.

Trust God, but take action too.

Why Is This Happening?

To answer this question, we need to go back to the beginning.

God created a world that he declared to be very good (*Genesis 1:31*) – a world in which everything exists in harmony with God. Relationship with God, with others, with ourselves and with the rest of creation is central to God's loving purposes.

After those relationships go wrong, the Bible then tells the story of how God works to restore them – a plan that finds its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus.

Poverty, conflict, suffering, climate change – all these are the result of those broken relationships. The Bible is clear that God, people and the natural world are deeply interconnected, so if one aspect of that is broken then everything will be impacted.

As hard as it is to hear, the outbreak of coronavirus is not a 'natural disaster'. It is a disaster of our own making. Viruses jump species and get into humans, and environmental destruction makes this more likely to happen as people are brought into closer contact with virus-carrying animals. Deforestation, mining, animal trafficking and unsustainable farming practices are all likely factors at play.

Is This God's Judgement?

God's original intention was peace between all things – but this is not how we're living. He created a world in which everything is connected, and there are natural consequences when those connections are broken.

This doesn't necessarily mean that God 'caused' or 'willed' the pandemic – it is to recognise that the brokenness of creation ultimately causes us harm.

In some cultures, misfortune is seen as directly linked to that person's sin. But biblically, these links are rarely as simple as that. For example, in the story of Job, Job's suffering is not a result of his sin, but of the existence and work of Satan.

In *Luke 13:1-5*, Jesus is told about Pilate's massacre of some Galileans who were in the process of offering sacrifices. He responds by pointing out that those who were killed were not greater sinners than those who were not killed. And he makes the same point about the people who were killed when the tower in Siloam collapsed.

Jesus is clear that the existence of disasters doesn't mean that those who are affected by them are worse people than anybody else. Such events should never be an invitation to judge others. God's ultimate nature is love (*1 John 4:16*). He is a God of infinite grace, compassion and mercy. God cares deeply about humanity, and about you as an individual – so much so that he gave up his Son for you. Any suggestion that coronavirus is some kind of divine judgement is fundamentally at odds with God's character.

Does Sin Cause Illness?

In *John 9:1-5* Jesus meets a man who was blind from birth. The disciples ask about the sins that have caused this blindness – was it his sin or that of his parents? But Jesus tells them that his blindness has nothing to do with sin. Not only that, but it provides an opportunity 'that the works of God might be displayed in him'.

The Bible does present links between sin and suffering in a broader sense. Our physical suffering is part of a chain of brokenness from *Genesis 3* onwards. Also, there are lifestyle choices we can make that either promote or neglect our health and wellbeing. However, there are no biblical grounds for directly linking a person's illness with their sin. Even when Jesus heals the paralyzed man in *Mark 2* saying 'your sins are forgiven', he did not explicitly say that the sins were the cause of his paralysis. And nowhere else does Jesus heal by saying 'your sins are forgiven'.

Illness must never be used as a basis for stigmatisation and rejection. The Pharisees did that – Jesus didn't. His message was one of acceptance, inclusion and compassion for all.

Are These the End Times?

Widespread conflict in the Middle East. A plague of locusts spreading across Africa. Flooding around the world. Surely these are signs of the end times?

If there's one thing that we can say for certain, it's that no one can know for certain. If Jesus himself did not know when the end times would be (*Matthew 24:36*), who are we to try and say?

It is important to keep a wider perspective throughout all of this. Christians have been trying (and failing) to predict the end of the world since the early days of the church. Although the word 'unprecedented' keeps being brought up, this is not the first crisis of this scale – indeed, there have been far, far darker times in human history. The great plague of the 14th century

is estimated to have wiped out nearly two thirds of Europe's population. I'm sure they were convinced that the end times were upon them too.

War, disease, natural disasters – these are, sadly, nothing new. Jesus said his return would be sudden and unexpected, and he said we were to ignore anyone who thought they knew about specific dates and times, likening people who look for scare-mongering stories to vultures (*Matthew 24:28*).

The answer is that there is no clear answer, and that we should ignore those who think they have one.

How Should the Church Respond?

The church should be the light of the world (*Matthew 5:14*). As the shadow of coronavirus falls across the land, the church's mission is to shine as brightly as it can.

We must follow Jesus in showing God's love, bringing healing to a broken world and responding to people's needs: economic and emotional, spiritual and physical, both locally and globally.

We Can and We Must Act

When Ebola ravaged West Africa in 2014, it was local churches that helped lead the fightback. In Sierra Leone, Christians used video and radio broadcasts to spread vital health messages. Tearfund trained pastors and gave them phones so they could call people suffering with Ebola and pray with them. Churches gave practical help to people in quarantine and church members provided food, water and toiletries.

We are already seeing the church rising to the challenge of coronavirus. In many communities around the world, it is Christians who are coordinating local care, creating neighbourhood WhatsApp groups, dropping off food and toiletries to those who are self-isolating, and being there to provide emotional response.

In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh – the largest refugee camp in the world – life is becoming even more miserable. Sanitation and hygiene facilities are already inadequate, and the streets are narrow and crowded. But Tearfund's church partners are distributing hygiene kits and leaflets to educate people about handwashing, social distancing and recognising the symptoms.

Creating a Better World

If we lean deeper into God's love, choosing faith instead of fear, we may find that new opportunities emerge. There is the potential for communities to come together more than ever before; for families to re-discover themselves; for busy people to slow down and build a rhythm of rest into their lives; for people to reconnect with God and his world; for nations to re-tune into God's word; for churches to learn how to use digital technology to enhance ministry; and for us to develop more local, environmentally-friendly economies.

One day, we will make it out of this crisis. But what sort of world do we want there to be on the other side? Can we repent of the world we have created, and instead look to build one without such a huge gap between rich and poor – a world where we live in harmony with creation, in which we understand that the well-being of one is bound up with the well-being of all?

In Christ, there is always hope. We can let that hope motivate how we live our lives today as we hold on to God our rock. And, with the love of Christ in our hearts, let us continue to reach out with compassion and determination.

***Dr Ruth Valerio (Leader of Tearfund's global advocacy and influencing work)
Gideon Heugh (Senior Copywriter in Tearfund's communications team)***

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The Whole Company of Earth and Heaven

We seem to be living in a very strange 'virtual' world now, in which nothing seems quite real. The U3A (University of the Third Age) to which I belong is experimenting with various ways of maintaining contact. Book groups trying a 'Zoom' group call, or members of the curry club all eating their meal at the same time in their own homes. All this is to try to maintain some sort of contact with each other. The parish is trying this on the parish website and Simon Marshall has some short but excellent reflections on the St Michael's website. Please visit this if you haven't already done so. (www.stmichaelspage.com).

A few years ago, we held the Prayer of Stillness in St Michael's Chapel which sadly had to cease. Martin Tunnicliffe, who was instrumental in starting and running this group, suggested we try a 'virtual' Prayer of Stillness on a recent Wednesday. So, a small group of us, having been contacted by e-mail previously with necessary information, took our time of stillness between 3pm and 4pm in our own homes.

Although we obviously were not physically together there was in a very real sense, a feeling of being together, in that we knew each of us was contemplating and praying at the same time in our respective homes.

It is very regrettable that we are unable to come together to worship or pray, but it is important that we remember that as members of Christ, we are acting as part of His Body in everything that we do. Even in our private prayers we are joined to the whole praying church. Luther had something useful to say about that in the simple instructions on prayer which he wrote at the request of his barber (of all people) who wanted to know how an ordinary working person could pray.

He gave this bit of good advice:

"Consider that you do not stand or kneel by yourself, but that all Christendom, or all devout Christians, are with you, and you amongst them in harmonious prayer which God cannot despise."

In my own prayer life, although I occasionally use the modern 'Daily Prayer' my main staple diet is from the Book of Common Prayer. Here, the order for morning and evening prayer assumes that there is a congregation present. The fact that I may be saying this office alone has never troubled me. It is a reminder that I am joining with Christians everywhere. I find that a comfort, for not only am I praying in the midst of 'angels, archangels and the whole company of heaven', but my Christian brothers and sisters the world over are also with me in my prayer time.

Paul Smith

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For Your Diary



All Corporate Eucharists and meetings of St Alphege Mothers' Union are cancelled while the social distancing measures are in force to reduce the spread of Coronavirus.

We will be keeping in touch with our members during this difficult time and will be offering help to those of you who request it.

If you need help now contact:

Elaine Diskin on 0121 705 3265

or Chris on 0121 243 4340 or Susan on 0121 270 6132.

Keep safe - keep well - and please follow the Government guidance.

WIVES' FELLOWSHIP

At this time, it is uncertain when we will resume our monthly activities. However, the Bridge Club is still booked for our AGM and Supper on Friday 10th July at 6.30pm - so here's hoping!
In the meantime - watch this space.

KEEP CALM - WASH YOUR HANDS - CARRY ON SAFELY

Carol Caldicott 0121 705 3168



On 8th April, the Women's Theology Group had our first meeting over Zoom, when we interviewed Jessica Dalton, who works for the Methodist Church and is a Methodist local preacher. Jessica shared with us some of her reflections on Matthew 28 and the women at the tomb.

If you would like to join us but are not on the mailing list, do e-mail womenstheology@gmail.com and we will send you an invitation!

Charlotte Gibson

SOLIHULL PARISH SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding Coordinator

Viv Dobson

vhdobson@gmail.com

07960 783636

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**CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE JUNE EDITION OF THE PARISH NEWS
MUST BE IN BY FRIDAY, 8TH MAY PLEASE.**

Email to parishnews@solihullparish.org.uk or leave in the Parish Office

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