

Parish of Great Chesham: News from the 7 Churches

The prayer course has proved a rich blessing for those who have taken part; and I can see God's spirit at work in the lives of our church family. Please do continue to pray for us as we join in with God's Spirit at work!

St John's Bellingdon

Outwardly Bellingdon seems much as it always has – the trees, Captain's Wood and Ramscoat Wood are a mass of new spring green with Bluebells are scattered across the ground. There are lambs in the field behind the church and the spring birds including a freely ranging peacock have reappeared. But, of course, inside everything is changed! The Tin Tabernacle is closed and we're 'staying safe' in our homes. But the church goes on and we have a recorded service on YouTube available from 10.00 each Sunday. Church members still help with readings and intercessions, and we still have visiting speakers – but we do have to plan ahead to be ready with recordings and to negotiate the labyrinth of music copyright rules!

Now, as we move well into Spring, we're just starting a new sermon series on the Beatitudes and looking at how they guide us towards being the people God wants us to be. We're following the chapters in a book by John Stott as this means those in our church community without internet access can follow the same series.

We're looking forward to the day when we can return to the Tin Tabernacle but until then we'll worship from our homes and serve each other as we can.

St. Mary's Church

At a recent staff meeting, we were reflecting that lockdown seems to have brought to light hundreds of expressions of compassion and interconnectedness across the St. Mary's church family. Our congregation and those known to them have shared in the bereavements, employment uncertainties and loneliness that has accompanied the unfolding situation. But these have been met by a deeply encouraging resolve to come closer together despite the obstacles to grow in our dependence on Jesus. A large proportion of the church family tune in live for our 10am webinar, and we are hoping to relaunch the 7pm service over Zoom in June. The monthly prayer meetings and small groups have also switched to Zoom and have been a deep encouragement and reminder of all that is fixed and certain in Jesus. It has been particularly good to see so many coming together to serve: recording reading and prayer videos; playing, recording and producing music (which will hopefully be appearing in other services across the parish too) and helping each other in practical ways.

Dear friends across the Parish,

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"
Psalm 133v1

As we share news from the districts this week, it is good to be reminded of the importance and the blessing of the unity of God's people. In these days when we can't actually come together in person, it is good to know that we are united as a Parish. The apostle Paul reminds us that we don't create unity ourselves, but we have it through faith in Jesus: *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* Eph 4:4-6

Unity doesn't mean uniformity of course. We are 7 church families, with our own flavours and styles, which is why it has been good and important to maintain those distinctives in our online worship, and in our own ongoing discipling and pastoral care. I'm so very thankful to God for all the ways he has been at work in the churches, and for the energy and creativity demonstrated by so many.

Our unity is given, but Paul knows our potential to divide, and so he exhorts: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* Eph 4:3 It has been a joy to see that unity kept in the Parish in the past weeks; with the regular Parish staff team meetings, the joint services in Holy week, the synergy of three churches doing Sunday services together, and the regular sharing of ideas and information across the team. We continue to look ahead to the future, and it is anticipated that, subject to the lock-down, an announcement about the new Team Rector will be made both in Chesham and the candidates current church in late-June with his first Sunday in Chesham in mid-September

This weekend we will be celebrating VE day, and giving thanks for the defeat of an evil tyrant and the establishing of peace in Europe that has lasted for 75 years. We don't take this peace for granted, for we know the destructive potential of fallen human hearts, but we thank God for it, and pray that unity might be maintained amongst the nations, especially in these days in which we all face the ongoing global challenge of Covid 19.

Psalm 133 ends by reminding us that when we as God's people live together in unity, *"there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore."* We can enjoy God's blessing, even in these most challenging of days, as we remain together in the Parish. Do enjoy news from the districts, and let's use them for our prayers...

With love in Christ, *John Shepherd*

Christ Church

Rev'd Beryl Stannard gave the sermon at our Ash Wednesday service which was joined by many Christians from the parish.

During Lent we had a positive course run jointly with St George's. Lockdown resulted in three sessions being successfully run via Zoom. Based on Simon Read's 'Followers of the Way' a follow-up course is planned for the future. We hosted the World Day of Prayer in March. Including displays of art, costumes, jewellery and clothes, the church was decorated with flags and Flame Lilies, the national flower. The motivating service, "Rise, Take Your Mat and Walk" was written by ladies in Zimbabwe and we prayed for that country and its people.

Since lockdown, we have joined St Johns, Ashley Green, to provide Morning Worship on You Tube. The Vicars lead the service whilst hymns, intercessions, readings and the peace include members of the three congregations.

Wednesday afternoons see many of the Christ Church family joining for a cuppa and a chat online, this is proving very popular; with various pets making guest appearances!

Emmanuel Church

Greetings from Emmanuel – we've been seeking to maintain the normal rhythms of life for the church family as far as possible, when everything else is changing. Our Sunday services at 10am and 7pm continue with the help of Facebook and Youtube. Homegroups, prayer meetings, midweek ladies and youth Bible studies and prayer triplets carry on with the wonderful assistance of Zoom! Pastoral care continues informally, and in a more structured way, with the whole church family playing a part. We were deeply saddened by the sudden loss of Martin Osborne, though thankful for his life of faith and humble service, and we are aware of the particular pain of those losing loved ones in days of social distancing. We've tried to look outwards by encouraging church family to be good neighbours, sending volunteers to work with the Storehouse project, and we plan to run a "virtual" Messy Church to stay connected with fringe families, and are running an online Christianity Explored course. Like everyone, we long to be back together in person – but only the Lord knows when those days will return.

Hope Church

The location of Hope Church at the top of the Pond Park/Hivings area has meant that a sense of community continues as those that can get out visit the local shops and see other people, albeit holding conversations from a distance. For those who cannot leave their homes the leadership and other congregation members are keeping in regular telephone and letter contact. We praise God that all the congregation are well. The Easter blessing boxes were gratefully received by many in the local community.

We broadcast our recorded Sunday service from our website and on Facebook and are using Zoom for other meetings. These include church prayers three mornings a week, the monthly evening prayer time, home groups, an Easter Experience aimed at children, leaders' meetings and a well-attended men's breakfast.

Jonathan Berry is making slow but sure progress and we continue to pray he is restored to health in the coming months.

For your prayers, among our plans is an online Messy Church in May, part of the development of our presence on social media.

St George's

Like Churches across the land, we have been closed for several weeks. We were able to have one 'Silent Prayer' Sunday before those too were prohibited. We were able to socially distance, but it was deemed unwise to continue.

We have been able to communicate and worship by electronic methods – a sharp learning curve for some. Like the parish, we have taken to Zoom meetings. We have also set up a Whatsapp group for the congregation, and also one for Rev Simon and the wardens, which was overdue.

We have also set up a small team tasked to check by phone on the welfare of each member of the congregation. This appears to be well-received, although adjustments continue. They report weekly to Simon regarding any issues that are mentioned where assistance may be offered.

The fact that we are a small congregation is helpful here. That is not to say that we do not face challenges in the next few weeks or months. We are taking steps to address these as they arise.

St John's Ashley Green

It seems almost paradoxical that as soon as the lockdown restrictions were announced, the world around us burst forth with new life, as flowers sprung up, dormant trees came first into bud and then new leaf, and the birds sang God's praise. In a not dissimilar way, in spite of the present darkness we live under and the challenges it brings, I see evidence of God at work in and through the life of our church family. Though our building may be closed, it has been so encouraging to see God's people being Church to each other and the wider community as they join in with God in love. We have teamed up with Christ Church and St George's to provide a weekly online service, serving both regular church family and beyond; our enlarged pastoral care team is offering much needed support to many; through partnering with the Ashley Green Community Association we are offering practical help and support to the wider community.