

Baptists and Methodists together at Hampton Methodist Church



June 2020



© Millie Marotta Ltd 2020

Hampton Methodist Church, Percy Road, Hampton, TW12 2JT
Hampton Mission Partnership is a member of Churches Together around Hampton
Church website <http://www.hamptonmethodistchurch.org.uk>

Brothers and Sisters in Christ

What a lot has happened since I last wrote the letter for this magazine. The world has quite literally changed around us. We are finding new ways of being church and new ways of doing community and all the while trying to keep safe. There are some people who seem to sit lighter to the rules than we do (I write this as the Dominic Cummings scandal breaks) and others who in obeying the lockdown rules are concerned that the government's roadmap is moving too quickly. Yet mental health concerns are significant and those people who scornfully say "It's about the money" are perhaps being a little naïve. And yes, I am fully aware that by the time this is published I may regret writing that!

We are I would suggest coming face to face with one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves as Christians: the relative significance of "me" and "we" and the balancing of individual rights and the common good. People at the park, at the beach, even at a funeral are all behaving in ways which seem appropriate to them and yet have been criticised because of lack of social distancing, of spatial awareness and of common sense. We have scenes such as the ones we saw of Brighton Beach over the bank holiday weekend looking like something from the summer of 1976 and also we have a friend of mine who, married to a Royal Marine, needs to take her young children to visit their father deployed at Poole, and the beach is the only option they have.

So it is, I would suggest, with our faith. We come to worship, and in times of dryness are supported in that worship through the members of the Church, and when we are struggling with what to make of a particular issue, the thinking of our own denomination may help us. However, we must also take personal responsibility for our relationship with Christ, our reading of the Bible, prayer, meditation and seeking to understand God better. In the same way as no self-respecting teenager is going to be moved by our irritation at a perceived flouting of the rules, no church member is going to be interested in whether we think they should pray more, or don't do enough Bible Study. What we can do is look to our own practice. In so doing, we show those who need a model what it can look like; we practice the right ways ourselves and we keep our own spiritual and physical health good. Jesus very rarely told people off. When he did it was for hypocrisy (the Pharisees) or his own inner circle who had given him the right to do so. What he did was show us through his life, death and ultimately resurrection what it was that he was teaching and who it was he wanted us to be.

What would Jesus do in the face of what comes next: the choices about re-opening the churches and how we do it and when? I'm honestly not sure as to the detail and I will be led by the specialists working on it across the faith communities. But this I know. Jesus came that we might have life in all its fullness and whatever it is that we are called to do next and however that might be lived out over the coming months, we are called to ensure that it is life-enhancing for all. Fullness of life may not mean a visit to our favourite café, but it might mean baking a cake and sending it to a friend in appropriately safe ways. It may not mean meeting for Messy Church, but it might mean sharing the Messy Church activities and messages on social media. It might not mean seeing our grandchildren for a little bit longer, but it might mean that they discover the joy that we knew of receiving an unexpected card or small gift through the mail. In the face of all that covid-19 brings to us, let us respond creatively as those who serve the Creator God.

God bless
Vicci

Getting used to living differently

Who would have thought the last time I wrote that things would have changed so much in such a short time, and no one could have predicted what has happened. Although it is sad not to be meeting regularly at church for all our usual activities, it has opened up a new world of doing things differently. We have learnt new skills; been forced to take stock and reflect at home; it has made us realise and consider what is really important and how to keep the essential things going. Our diaries full of all those important dates and appointments have been cleared and it can feel like the rug has been pulled from under our feet. Our calendar on the wall of our kitchen is remarkably blank, with meals out with family cancelled; wedding parties cancelled and meetings cancelled.

When the lockdown first happened the leadership team ensured that everyone would be contacted regularly to make sure they were coping and to ascertain if they needed further support. Some of us have been meeting on Zoom on a Friday at 5:30pm for regular mini worship and bible study/reflection. This is led by Revd David Priddy from Ashford Baptist Church and has been a wonderful event to look forward to each week, to see others and spend some time together. We have a Partnership WhatsApp group to keep in touch with news and share inspirational videos and messages with each other to keep our spirits up and remind us that God is with us at all times. Mark and Paul have been producing a devotional blog each week for us to read alongside the circuit worship sheet with hymns/songs, bible readings and comment along with prayers. This can be used at home while you consider that everyone else is worshipping together at the same time on a Sunday. Geoff has been producing some lovely modern worship songs to go with the service sheet and blog and hopefully we will have some of these when we get back to worshipping in our building again. We thank all those involved in producing these valuable resources.

This extended downtime has certainly given us the opportunity to do all those jobs we put off because 'we are too busy'. So far, I have cleared out a towel cupboard, Tupperware collection (freeing up two kitchen cupboards), glass and crockery cupboard and a sheet/linen cupboard. Very therapeutic to clear out and recycle all those items that seem to have been there unused for so long, and now I just have the things I use regularly and much more space. I also seem to have saved more money by not meeting friends for lunch or stopping off for a tea/coffee after a dog walk; I really miss this though. Travelling less means my car has not needed petrol for at least two months and I still have half a tank left. So no lunches on a Monday after TEM at Plenty, no breakfast baps at Squires at the weekend and no café stops at Eight on the River in Molesey after a riverside dog walk; we will appreciate these little pleasures so much more when we are allowed to do them again.

Obviously, there should have been leaving events planned for Vicci which will be unlikely to take place now and all the other summer events we might have had planned may not take place. However, there are plans for one day when we are allowed back into the building and this will be something to look forward to and celebrate.

I don't know when we will be back in our building; but I do know that the halls will have been decorated with a fresh coat of paint and no doubt will look so much better. So that will be a lovely new start.

Pam Harrison

Members of the Hampton Mission Partnership will be saddened to hear of the deaths of the Reverend John Salmon and Mrs Margaret Mortimer since we last went to publication. Although neither were members of our church, we have enjoyed John's preaching on many occasions and Margaret's leadership at Teddington Methodist Church, both as senior church steward and as pastoral secretary, made her a familiar face at Circuit Meetings and events. They will both be missed and we remember their family and friends in our prayers at this time.

Testaments for extra time

We are often reminded that "It's a small world". The pandemic has powerfully highlighted this in a dramatic way. Yet it is often the small incidents that cause us to recall this old saying.

In the Autumn of last year, I was attending the monthly meeting of the Richmond Borough Branch of the Gideons when the meeting was informed that our National Office had received a request for New Testaments from a football club in our Borough. We were asked if any of us knew a certain Paul Barker, who was the Chaplain of the club in question. I thought I'd better own up! A small world indeed.

The Gideons, (as we were then called - we are in the middle of a name change) not only give Bibles and New Testaments to hotels, care homes, prisons and schools but also will provide New Testaments to organisations and sports clubs, with the badge of the Club on the front cover.

Working with Paul we had 200 New Testaments printed, complete with the Hampton and Richmond Borough Football Club badge attractively placed on the front. Paul thought that it would be a great idea to have the New Testaments presented on a match day. So, we arranged for the Chair of the Richmond Branch formally to hand over the 200 New Testaments. Once again, the old adage of it being a small world came to mind, for the Chair of the Branch is none other than Janet Wright from Christ Church Teddington, who is a hard-working member of the Extra Mile team. Janet and her husband Trevor are also well known at Hampton Mission Partnership as they often join us at the Fish and Chip Film Night and at Café Arts.

Paul kindly arranged for Janet to present the New Testaments on Saturday 29th February. However, the weather took a turn for the worse and the game was abandoned due to a water-logged pitch! But just like his Gospel name sake Paul persevered and arranged the presentation on Saturday 14th March. Janet, Trevor, and I presented the New Testaments to Paul, Team Captain Luke Ruddick, and player Sam Cox. Amazingly, Paul had handed out the first 100 before kick-off. His reward was that all the players asked to be included in the pre match prayers! Praise the Lord.

That day turned out to be significant to all the football fans at Hampton, for it was the very last game the club played before Lockdown. I realise that the absence of the games is incredibly sad, but it does mean that all the players have extra time to read the Gospel!

Mark Gilks



Grace Has Led Me Home

Purpose of God's Divine Grace

God's divine grace provides us with regeneration and sanctification. It inspires virtue in the midst of temptation, courage despite danger, and it spurs us to excellence when mediocrity appears to be the new standard of the day.

Story of Grace Lived

I read a story of a little boy who mistreated his classmate. When the principal was notified, he came to speak to the little boy. Instead of being apologetic, the boy was unrepentant, even recalcitrant. Of course he caused the offence. He was ready to take his punishment. So, the principal decided to teach the child about grace. The principal instructed the teacher to get a belt and bring it to him. The little boy held out his hands to receive the licks. But the principal gently moved him to the side. Soon, the principal's hands were swollen from the beating of his hands. The teacher counted each time he struck the principal. The little boy was confused, bewildered and very sad. He even exclaimed, 'Hey! That was my punishment.' He began to weep. The principal gently replied, 'Yes. But today, I took it for you. That's grace.' The grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ demonstrates this same grace. The grace exhibited is not only something given to us, but it works through us. It regenerates us in such a way that, like the principal, we can suffer loss on behalf of another. This takes me to the hymn, Amazing Grace.

Amazing Grace for the Traveller

I truly love the hymns. I could listen to and sing them several hours a day, each day, and never get tired. I hear the hymns and, if I close my eyes, I see the loving faces of the elders who raised me, who celebrated God through physical impairment, financial stress and social trauma. Amazing Grace is precious to me because it tells the story of where humanity strays away from God – "saved a one like me." It also tells of where we are reunited eternally with God "when we've been there 10,000 years." Yet, the notion of grace that surrounds the traveller, the sojourner, I think that hits me even more intimately. It says:

"Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. 'Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace shall lead me home." Getting to church is not by accident. We don't get there because our bodies are healthy or the car is working. These things help. But we regularly come through dangers – a truck that nearly hit us, or a sick person who doesn't manage to pass on his infection to us. We are distracted in our driving and look up just in time ... Sometimes, snares may keep us from coming to church because we are exhausted, we need to prepare for Monday, and our fatigue is real. Our challenge is to come through those snares to honour God's presence in corporate worship each Sunday.

Despite all of this, God's grace brings us through so that we can worship together and encourage one another. I celebrate the with-ness of God in that verse. It moves us from what was to what will be. God has kept us safe – and the grace of God will lead us home.

For someone who has lived in various countries, I know what it means to walk in God's grace. Relocating to the United Kingdom this time was a challenge and continues to be a challenge. To top it off, I have always looked forward to Black History Month, but, in recent years, have been far away from churches which celebrate it and recognize its importance. In a word, I feel lost. I want to hear the sombre but hopeful, reflective songs which have shaped my existence. It is a way of honouring my ancestral mothers and fathers, their faith, their sacrifice, their love of God.

God's Amazing Grace at Hampton

Coming to Hampton Mission Partnership was not by accident. I was warmly greeted from my very first visit. This is a church rich with pastoral gifts of love, fellowship and compassion. When we shared on the theme, Given Grace to Give Grace, we explored the way God's grace is blocked when we behave unjustly with one another. In our readings, we also identified an example of one who received grace but refused to extend it to his slaves. I presented this sermon, because I felt strongly that, although this is not the typical Advent sermon, it would be relevant to the church right now!

Ever conscious of the time, I sang a verse of Amazing Grace acapella to usher us into our time of sharing. From the song, I went to prayer. At the conclusion of the prayer, and before I could speak again, someone loudly began singing another verse – quite spontaneously. The rest of us joined in as time divested itself of wings. All was still while we sang together. The person who led us into another verse would later meet me with tears in his eyes to explain. But he didn't need to explain. The passion for God was very evident. I told him that I really appreciated him being led by God's Spirit as he continued the atmosphere of worship in ways which were needed.

As my mind and spirit began to reflect upon the profundity of a spontaneous response to a song that means so much, a song whose melody emerged from the belly of a slave ship, I smiled. Coming to the UK has literally cost me everything I had. The snares or traps all around me have been bruising and painful. Perhaps others in the church have also felt a bit lost, no longer rooted or secure. I would say to them, "If you are operating outside of your comfort zone, these snares and traps can put a strain on even the most stalwart Christian. When I experience the sincere and genuine love of God, as exhibited by the people of God, it brings me comfort as perhaps it will for you."

Within that moment of sacred space, when we all reflected on God's divine and amazing grace, I felt God's presence anew. I realized that I was just a little bit more secure than before. I was no longer quite as lost. In short, God had led me home.

Revd. Dr. Nash (known to us as Nash!)

A research project...started but not completed!

Towards the end of February, I joined a small group of folks who had volunteered to undertake some research under the Shared Learning Scheme between the U3A and Kingston University. The project was to be based on a bequest to the University of the Cary Ellison Theatre Programme Collection. Cary Ellison (1915-2002) was an interesting character who began his career as an actor before joining 'Spotlight', the directory of actors used by casting directors throughout the country. Thus helping to launch the careers of such stars as Diana Dors, Joan Collins and Felicity Kendall. In the '50's there were about 250 repertory companies doing weekly turnarounds, mostly employing 10-15 actors. Few managers or agents visited provincial theatres but Cary began making twice yearly trips outside London. He collected the programmes which he had annotated with comments about each play, actor and director.

We each had to decide what approach and subject we would research and I had managed two visits to the archive department in the new, tall building of Kingston University, 'The Town House'. I had decided to concentrate on The Theatre Royal Windsor and then perhaps pick a playwright, director or actor to investigate. John Counsell (1905-1987) who was an actor, director and theatre manager ran this theatre and its in-house repertory company from the 1930's -1980's. He would sometimes include historical notes and pieces of interest in the programmes.

In 1959 he wrote: - 'Twenty-one years ago on 21 March the company at the Theatre Royal first opened its doors to the public.' 'I consider three events helped most to establish us on a firm basis and made it possible for us to build up to our present happy position. First, the visit of their Majesties King George VI and his Queen to 'The Rose Without A Thorn' six weeks after we opened and this put us on the map as far as the public were concerned. Secondly, in May 1940, Ivor Novello appeared with the company in 'I Lived With You' which put us on the map as far as the theatrical profession was concerned. Finally, the war revolutionised theatre-going habits and many who had previously only considered going to the West End turned to us for their entertainment, and have remained, with their children, the backbone of our audiences ever since'

I was interested to learn a little more about John Counsell during broadcasts for V.E. Day. He joined up in 1940 and became a Colonel, ghost writing reports for Gen. Eisenhower and was given the responsibility of drafting the Surrender document for the Allies to sign with Germany in 1945. I am not sure when this piece of research will be completed but I hope that you enjoyed reading this information.

Margaret Thorn

Getting to know Graham and Margaret Coster

Margaret was born on the 3rd September 1939 meaning that two events happened that day, one good and one bad. On the Channel Island of Guernsey Margaret was born to Percy & Doris Le Noury to a very uncertain future and war was declared by Britain.

With the fall of France, the authorities of the various Islands put into operation the evacuation of mainly mothers and children to the mainland of England. They left on the last boat from St Peter Port comprising Doris, Gordon and Margaret Le Noury, and her Auntie Wilma and cousin David, arriving at Weymouth where the Le Noury family was put on a train arriving in the North West of England at the town of Burnley where they lived for the next five years.

When the war on the continent finished, we then returned to Guernsey to restart a new life, with a different accent to her father, sounding more like Gracie Fields than her father and other folks who went through the occupation of Guernsey. That meant that her 6th birthday for the first time was with her father and family. Education was on the whole not a very happy experience, leaving school at the age of 14, starting work at a ladies/children's clothes shop for 11 years.

In 1963 I met Graham who with three friends had come to Guernsey, meeting at an open-air meeting held every Saturday in the summer in St Peter Port. On 29th April 1964 we were married at Lislet Methodist Church where I was in membership, on a lovely Spring Day, spending our honeymoon on the Isle of Wight. In July 1964 I was baptised in a Baptist church with three other friends.

We came to live in Acton [a bit different from Guernsey], becoming a member of Chiswick Baptist where Graham was a Deacon, having two children Anne and Ian. In 1969 we moved to Hampton Hill becoming members of Teddington Baptist. In the next few years our family grew with the birth of Paul and Ruth. We now have eight grandchildren: - Josh, Benjamin, Thomas, Becky, Lauren, Rachel, Olivia and Kieran with five years difference between No1 and No8.

And so to Hampton, although we lived in Hampton Hill where we had a strong home group. We were approached to join the Hampton Prayer Meeting as Teddington Baptist Church were praying about a church plant in Hampton, which happened in 1992 after our children for various reasons had left home. We moved to Hampton, selling our five-bedroom house for our present one in Station Close. [3 bedrooms]

In the ups and downs of daily life we have seen that some of the churches have closed i.e. Lislet and Hampton Baptist. But God is in control as we with you have started a new venture in the Hampton Mission Partnership as we witness for Him in these difficult days.



Margaret Coster

Dick Rich, maker of the Hampton Baptist cross

You may remember before the lockdown, the cross that came from Hampton Baptist was at the front of the church, next to the table on which the symbols of Lent were placed each week. This cross was made by Dick Rich.

Dick's early background was Christian as his family were very involved with their local Congregational Church. In the late 1940s he was in the British Army and was sent to Israel to be a buffer between the Arabs and Jews.

In Jerusalem the 5-star King David Hotel in which the Senior British Officers and other Senior Government staff were housed, became a target for a Jewish terrorist gang, who attacked it with a horrendous result. Their job was to rescue the injured and take away the dead bodies; not a very pleasant task. He was an engineer by profession, and loved to tell you how an engine works, and what did this, and what did that. Just ask Jean or Margaret!

He came to Teddington Baptist Church through someone who befriended him, and when the question was being explored about a church plant at Hampton, he became a part of the group. A number of TBC folks were going to Israel, and Dick went with a group led by Bill Miles [Senior Pastor] at TBC and Dick was baptized in the River Jordan 'just as His Saviour was'.

When HBC became a Baptist Church i.e. self-governing, Dick offered to make a cross which we gladly received, and it stood in the Chapel as a reminder of what the message is about. He was a regular attender at the Home Group we had for older folks, which Tim Haley our Pastor had asked Margaret and me to oversee when we both retired from Tear Fund.

Now to one of the comments he made. (He had a very gruff voice):

'I'd rather have a woman that preaches God's Word than a man who rejects it.' Sad to say the church his family were connected with had lost its way regarding this. Another comment he made was when I asked at the first meeting of the home group how they would like to look at God's Word, with a booklet or any other way. 'What is wrong with looking at the book as a whole?' said Dick. So we did, starting with Genesis and it took us 18 months!

Dick had a Love for the Lord, for His Word, for his fellow Christians and for His Chosen People. Dick was a man who never lost his faith in God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit but he lost faith in those who deny God's Word. One day we will meet him again when we will be for ever with the Lord.



Graham Coster

Go out and tell the story – a creative re-working of “And can it be?”

As many of you know, I spent a significant part of my recent sabbatical writing hymns based on the theology of John and Charles Wesley. In order to do this, I worked my way through the old Hymns and Psalms (the blue Methodist Hymn Book) and stopped at every Wesley hymn along the way and wrote one for that. I also wrote new tunes for the new words. The discipline of doing it in this way was both helpful and hard. Helpful because it didn't let me off the hook and hard because some of the Wesley hymns are so iconic that it seems a cheek to even consider re-writing them. “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”; “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” and “And Can it Be?” all gave me terrible difficulties and yet in wrestling with them I came to understand both their faith and mine better. Isn't that what it's all about? Here are the words for a new hymn based on the theology of “And can it be?”

Go out and tell the story, tell it to all the world
How he left his throne in glory to redeem our sins on earth
I don't know why he did it or how he made me free
Or why the King of all the world should die for me.

I can't explain God's logic or why Jesus should die
I only know he did it, I can't imagine why
The King of all Creation should give us such a gift
To freely die for all of us that we might live

He poured out all his power, his strength and majesty
Appeared on earth a baby with a babe's fragility
He lived and worked among us and perfect though he lived
We killed him on a cross and so refused to live

We built a wall between us; we did it then and now
Denied God's call on all our lives; refused to recognise
That God created all of us, calls us to follow him
But we go on our own way rejecting him

But he has broken down that wall, releases us from death
Jesus came to pay the price for everyone on earth
Our sins they are forgiven us; our chains have broken free
And now we hear our Saviour calling Follow me!

Vicci

A Time to Reflect

Those of you that use Facebook will be familiar with events from your past popping up from time to time. The events can be far ranging, and the appearance on your Facebook page can prompt you to reflect on that time and what has happened since.

On 17th April, this happened to me. That day in 2009 was my last day working for American Express. After nearly 30 years service the company decided that my role was no longer required, I was being made redundant. Unfortunately, this is the fate that many are facing in the current uncertain climate.

As I reflected on my Facebook post from 11 years ago, I also started to think about what has happened in my life since. But before I share that journey with you, I need to go back around 30 years. At that time, we were members at Teddington Baptist Church. Rev Bill Miles, who was the pioneer for planting a Baptist church in Hampton, was the minister. I recall going forward for prayer following an evening service and Bill prophesied that I would serve God in later years.

Now, I am a firm believer that we can serve God in whatever we are doing and wherever we find ourselves. But Bill's words seemed to suggest that there was something more specific I would be doing. I hadn't got a clue at that time what this could be. I had a very demanding job and a young family to contend with, so Bill's words were filed somewhere in the back of my memory bank.

I guess many of you are familiar with the words in Jeremiah 29:11 –

“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”

It's worth noting that in this verse God says, “I know” and not “here are my plans for you”. It is on a need to know basis, and 30 years ago I didn't need to know what He had in store for me in the future.

So fast forward to the spring of 2007. Tim Haley left Hampton Baptist and his role as chaplain to Hampton & Richmond Borough FC. Eventually I was appointed as Tim's replacement at the football club. Was this what Bill Miles was referring to?

Jumping on again to 2009. Following my redundancy, I started to wonder what I was going to do with myself. I didn't have to wonder for too long as the “plan” started to take shape. In the beginning I did some voluntary work for a local charity, African Revival, and spending more time helping out at the football club. After a while I was asked to take over running the bar, as the bar manager was taken seriously ill. Then in the summer of 2011 I applied to become a part time chaplain at Heathrow Airport and commenced work there in October.

All my chaplaincy experience was to be a stepping stone for me to have the privilege of serving as a chaplain to London 2012, which was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Throughout all this time I served the local church in various leadership roles. Little did I realise that when I was appointed as an “Elder” of Hampton Baptist in 2013 I would have a major role in setting up the Hampton Mission Partnership.

This is why God said, “I know the plans I have for you” and not “this is what I have lined up for you.” If I knew what the plans were for the last few years, I would have said, “No way – you've got to be joking”.

Redundancy can feel like your world is crashing down and the end is nigh. But for me it was the beginning of a new chapter. It was the next stage of His plan. What next? Only God knows. All I know is His plans are “to prosper and not to harm.”

I thank God for Bill's prophetic words all those years ago. When we hear a prophetic message, we often expect to see action almost immediately. We need to be patient, remember Isaiah spoke about the

coming of the messiah over 600 years before Jesus was born, patience is required, after all it's God's plan not ours!!

Currently both of my chaplaincy roles are in a bit of limbo. Hampton and Richmond's last game was on 14th March and I have not been at the airport since Thursday 18th. Like most of our lives, chaplaincy has gone virtual, which is quite a strange experience, but I have to believe it's all part of His perfect plan!!

Paul Barker

Life in Lockdown

I used to do a lot of drawing and painting when I was a child, but after leaving school and starting work, it all came to a stop. In recent months while visiting my son and his family, my daughter-in-law and my four year old grandson spent many weekend afternoons with colouring books, pens and pencils. I started joining in and found it very therapeutic!

After we were put into lockdown, I saw a poster to colour in the Daily Mail celebrating our N.H.S. heroes, so I thought I would have a go at colouring that. I bought a set of gel pens and spent several days carefully colouring it in. I was very pleased with the result, and the poster is now displayed in my kitchen window and now also on the cover of this magazine! A dear friend has given me a couple of lovely adult colouring books, so I will have plenty of pictures to colour to fill my time!

Maggie Sollors

The LoveNHS poster was created by Millie Marotta. A pioneer in the global colouring movement, Millie's intricate illustrations are inspired by a love of wildlife and a fascination with the natural world. She works from her studio by the sea in a little corner of West Wales and is the author and illustrator of a number of bestselling colouring books, which include Millie Marotta's Animal Kingdom, Tropical Wonderland and Curious Creatures (Batsford). To learn more about Millie's books, download free colouring sheets (including the LoveNHS poster) and to view an ever growing colouring gallery of coloured artworks from her books visit:

www.milliemarotta.co.uk

Congratulations!

Huge congratulations to Bron and Tim Coveney on the early arrival of Nerys Bessie Anne on 22nd April weighing 5 lb 12 oz, a sister for big brother Dain.



MY SISTER IS NOT A STATISTIC

Tomorrow, when the latest Deathometer of Covid is announced in sonorous tones,

Whilst all the bodies still mount and curl towards the middle of the curve

Heaped one atop and alongside the other

My sister will be among those numbers

among the throwaway lines

among the platitudes and lowered eyes,

an older person with underlying health conditions,

A pitiful way to lay rest the bare bones of a life.

MY SISTER IS NOT A STATISTIC

Her underlying conditions were

Love

Kindness

Belief in the essential goodness of mankind

Uproarious laughter

Forgiveness

Compassion

A storyteller

A survivor

A comforter

A force of nature

And so much more

MY SISTER IS NOT A STATISTIC

She died without the soft touch of a loved one's hand

Without the feathered kiss upon her forehead

Without the muted murmur of familiar family voices gathered around her bed,

Without the gentle roar of laughter that comes with memories recalled

Evoked from a time that already seems distant, when we were connected by the simplicity of touch, of voice, of presence.

MY SISTER IS NOT A STATISTIC

She was a woman who spanned the seven ages.

A mother

A grandmother

A great grandmother

A sister

A friend

An aunt

A carer

A giver

MY SISTER IS NOT A STATISTIC

And so, she joins the mounting thousands

THEY ARE NOT STATISTICS ON THE DEATHOMETER OF COVID

They are the wives, mothers, children, fathers, sisters, brothers,

The layers of all our loved ones

If she could, believe me when I say, she would hold every last one of your lost loves, croon to and comfort them and say – you were loved.

Whilst we who have been left behind mourn deep, keening the loss, the injustice, the rage.

One day we will smile and laugh again, we will remember with joy that, once, we shared a life, we knew joy and survived sadness.

You are my sister..... and I love you.

Dorothy Duffy

4th April 2020

This beautiful, poignant poem was written at the height of the pandemic in the UK following the death of Dorothy's sister Rose 'Billy' Mitchell. I don't know Dorothy or Billy but to me it speaks for every one of the thousands of lives lost to this cruel virus. It is reproduced here with permission.

Liz W.

Nite Prayer-with Malcolm Duncan

Malcolm Duncan leads Dundonald Elim church in Belfast. He is an international speaker, author, broadcaster and government adviser. He is theologian-in-residence for Spring Harvest and Essential Christian.

Back in March when the country went into 'Lockdown' Malcolm started 'Nite prayer' via Facebook. He broadcasts every evening at 10:00pm. The prayer meeting is watched by not only people from the UK but people all around the world. He prays for current situations, people in particular need, government, in fact anything that is a pressing need each day. The Lord's Prayer is said every evening and at the end of the prayer time there is always some music, often songs by the worship group from his church or hymns/worship songs sung by Malcolm, who has a lovely tuneful voice. Those watching are encouraged to join him in the singing.

There is a 'scrolling comments box' where you can offer prayers for others or request prayers. Sometimes Malcolm's wife Debbie joins him and they both pray. It has become a regular part of my day and a lovely way to end the day. He writes beautiful prayers (Niteblessings) that are posted on Facebook. You can find Malcolm Duncan by searching by name on Facebook.

Wendy Salmon

'Good Grief' by Malcolm Duncan

When Malcolm Duncan wrote his book 'Good Grief' in 2019 he had no idea that the time of publication would be around the time of 'Lockdown.' The world is currently going through a sadness and sorrow that could never have been predicted six months ago.

Malcolm Duncan is no stranger to grief. He lost his father in 2002, a nephew in 2014, his brother in law in 2015 and his mother and brother in 2016. He and his wife also lost a child and so too did his son and daughter in law.

His book is helping many people. He describes it not as a 'self-help manual' but rather a book that will help you navigate your way through sorrow and loss. Sorrow, loss and suffering are all a part of life, so must therefore be a part of our faith. Grief comes in many ways and if we learn to navigate our way through it, we will discover something that will give us hope and deepen our faith. In the midst of grief and sadness God is present.

Malcolm uses a number of Biblical images to help us in the process of grief. In Psalm 23 v4 it is described as 'walking through the valley of the shadow of death.' In Job 16 v16 'my face is red with weeping and deep darkness is on my eyelids.' Psalm 107 v 10-14 and Psalm 139 v 11-12 talk about darkness and shadows.

Understanding grief as darkness is not a bad thing. God can help in the midst of darkness. He sits with us even when we can't see or feel Him, He is there.

Malcolm explores images of grief - describing it as a 'squatter', that needs to be dealt with. Something that arrived uninvited, unwelcomed and unwanted. Grief can be a jumbled journey-we don't travel in straight lines as we go through it.

The story of Lazarus in John 11 is explored-it is full of meaning for us-we go through death and out the other side. Christ has conquered death, it is not the end, does not have the final word. Christ is enough. Malcolm uses two helpful quotes from the Northumbria community 'Celtic prayer for daily living.'

'Do not hurry as you walk with grief; it does not help the journey.

Walk slowly, pausing often.

Do not be disturbed by memories that come unbidden.

Swiftly forgive and let Christ speak for you.

Unfinished conversation will be resolved in Him. Be not disturbed.

Be gentle with one who walks with grief. If it is you, be gentle with yourself. Swiftly forgive; walk slowly, pausing often. Take time"

There is much more that I haven't explored here so do read it for yourself. I recommend this book to you; it has been very helpful to me and many others.

Wendy Salmon

Goodie bags for carers

On Friday 22nd May we distributed 900 goodie bags to staff in care homes for older people across the Borough of Richmond. Each goodie bag contained hand cream, lip balm, chocolate, biscuits, a scented candle in a holder, a hand written thank you note, and a postcard with the "Footprints" poem on the front and a note on the back saying that the bags were sponsored by churches across the Borough of Richmond, who were praying for them. (Including Hampton Mission Partnership and Teddington Methodist Church.)

We want to thank you all for donating to this initiative. We raised £2,475 from donations from churches and individuals within those churches. Thank you so much. We have about £30 left over which we will put towards PPE for care home staff. Staff were so appreciative.

We received this lovely email from a carer which sums up the responses we have been getting: "Thank you so much for your thoughtful, caring gift. It is perfect - Vaseline for the dry lips after a shift wearing a mask, hand and nail cream for the hands that are repeatedly washed and the sweet treats, always appreciated. I lit the scented candle last night and relaxed. Your prayers and the message card mean so much. Bless you all and thank you." Thank you to everyone who helped make this happen.

Tina English
Director of Embracing Age
www.embracingage.org.uk
www.carehomefriends.org.uk



Wendy and I joined a Facebook group called, 'Scrubs for Epsom & St Helier', set up to make PPE for anyone employed as a health professional or carer, part of the 'For the love of scrubs – our NHS needs you' campaign. 1100 scrubs, 318 gowns, 120 tabards, 3800 bags, 4121 headbands/mask adaptors and 944 caps have been made so far. Picture is of Wendy's caps and bags and my mask adaptors. Liz W.

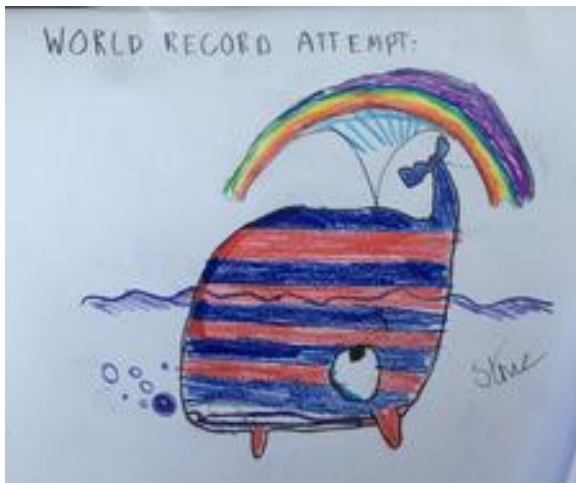
Life in Lockdown

We've been thinking and talking a lot about what has happened and how we feel about it, good and bad. As part of that, Struan wrote a poem about how things have changed and thinking about what we'd like the world to be like as lockdown starts to be lifted.

We've also been doing online drawing with Rob Biddulph, a children's author and illustrator. The penguins and whales were drawn with him following his draw-along class on YouTube. The whales were drawn in the world record attempt for the largest online art class and to raise money to support charities working in response to the pandemic.

Inspired by Struan's RSPB magazine we painted a picture of a seabird colony. It was our first time experimenting with proper paint - acrylics - which was great fun. The picture reminds us of wonderful holidays visiting Struan's Grandpa Fisher in North Berwick, which is home to the Bass Rock. We often go at this time of year and love to go out and see the puffins, kittiwakes, gannets and guillemots before tucking into lobster and chips at the harbour. Yummy!

Bronwen and Struan



Lockdown

Lockdown, lockdown, what's it all about?

To save ourselves and save the NHS without a doubt

Doctors and nurses work round the clock to save lives

Postal workers, supermarket staff all hear our cries

Life must go on and so they do their bit

While we over 70s on the sofa sit

Lockdown, lockdown, what's it all about?

Lockdown, Lockdown, what's it all about?

On line shopping, gardening but don't go out

Walk or cycle once a day

But don't meet family and friends they say

No clubs, no church, no lunches out

But Thursdays stand at the door and clap and shout

Lockdown, lockdown, what's it all about?

Lockdown, lockdown, what's it all about?

Daily updates from Government with figures and graphs

Contact with friends and family via WhatsApp for laughs

When will it end, we don't yet know

But end it will, it must be so

Once Boris is back the message will go out

Lockdown, lockdown, it's all finished we'll shout

Hazel Greasby

Blood donor sessions

The next opportunity to donate blood at Hampton Methodist Church is on 24 July. For full details and to see what appointment slots are available, look at the NHS Blood and Transplant website

<https://www.blood.co.uk>

They are also seeking people who have recovered from Covid 19 to donate blood plasma as part of a clinical trial to help with the national effort against the virus.

Ladies in lockdown...or how Ladies Guild members have coped during the last 10 weeks

Ladies Guild last met on 3rd March when we enjoyed an interesting talk about Eel Pie Island. Little did we know this was to be our last meeting until who knows when. Due to age or health problems, most of us were forced to self-isolate, so I decided to keep in touch with everyone via regular emails or telephone calls, as not all of us are familiar with other ways of communicating.

This also gave me an opportunity to contact and check on members who have moved away, including Sue Cundle and Olive Nattrass. Sue and Ron were coping well and Sue reported that she has recovered well after her major heart surgery late last year. Olive was in good spirits and going out for her own shopping. Plans for a big family celebration for her 90th birthday on 24th May had to be put on hold. However, from the lovely photograph, we can see that she did manage to mark the occasion.



Our emails...well, we have tried to tell of how we are coping, some 'new' activities we have enjoyed, a few moans and attempts to amuse and encourage each other. The following are a few excerpts from the messages which have gone to and fro, with members permission to publish, of course.

From Jenni on 2nd May: - 'Thanks for the newsy emails. It's great to catch up with everyone. I have been keeping myself busy with crosswords, jigsaws, reading, gardening and plenty of walks. Also the odd wine evening with friends through Zoom and keeping up with family also through Zoom and video calls. My Italian evening class has continued via Zoom so am keeping in touch with fellow students. We have a Linden Road What'sApp group which is great with people keeping in touch with one another and helping each other out. A real morale boost.'

From Jacquie on 20th April: - 'Despite living with my 21-year-old grandson, Luis, the past four weeks have proven to be pleasant and uncomplicated...so far! Luis goes out for exercise and that allows me to let loose in my open plan lounge to fling myself about in exercise without embarrassment, to the gravelling voice of Rod Stewart and the jolly thumping tunes of Barry Manilow. Hardly classical but the old CDs have rekindled my youth and my energy.'

Those few grey days really brought it home to me how grateful we must all feel to see the sunshine which keeps our spirits up at such an extraordinary time in our lives. I hope, when this pandemic is over, that people will remember to act as they are now with such generosity of spirit and compassion for one another in the new future, whatever that turns out to be.'

From Terry on 18th April: - 'Well, just a note from my prison cell. It's very hard going in solitary confinement especially as I don't know what my sentence is! I do go out perhaps one morning a week, down to Waitrose at Hersham. Donning a mask and rubber gloves and feeling like I am going into battle, fighting for a bag of flour. Waitrose kindly has a slot especially for the elderly and vulnerable. There they come so brave with limps, walkers, sticks etc. How brave our generation is. Well my dears, please keep safe. We'll meet again, don't know when. May God look after you all. Never did I think I would write anything like this.'

From Terry again on 28th April: - 'One thing that made me smile a day ago was that I ventured into my local bank (yes, we have one) for some cash, and never did I imagine that I would be mistaken for a Bank Robber! I was wearing a mask and rubber gloves. Just missing my toy gun! Going back to my outing to Waitrose (especially for us oldies) everyone is well behaved and talkative but the conversation is so boring. During the war it was rationing, evacuees, when you were born etc. Can't wait for more interesting topics. On a more serious note, we salute all the brave people who are tirelessly working to keep us going, so many of them. There is no other country like ours for their generosity. We actually have a new little hero – Captain Tom.'

As for myself, I sent an account of our carpet saga...For some time we have had a problem with carpet moths, and decided to replace those in the lounge, hall, stairs and landing. The old carpets were removed on 20th March and the decorator came on the 23. New carpets were due to be fitted on 3 April. Then came the announcement that all shops would close, so no carpets! To make matters worse, all our dining room furniture had been put into the conservatory and so was out of use, as is the conservatory. Not that we could invite anyone for a meal during lockdown. The main problem has been negotiating the stairs and avoiding getting our shoes stuck on the carpet gripper rods. There's certainly no walking up and down with bare feet! Fortunately, we have spent most of our time in the garden.

Thinking of gardens, most of us have spent more time than usual in our gardens. It has been lovely to enjoy the peace without aircraft and to listen to the birdsong. The birds seem less wary of our presence and it has been a delight to watch them collecting food for their young. Also, we have seen more butterflies and different bees. I will finish with two anecdotes concerning squirrels; at least one is actually about squirrels.

One evening I saw three squirrels chasing each other around the lawn then two went up in our pear tree and snuggled up together on a branch. I thought they were a pair but it became clear that it was an adult grooming a young one. They went much higher in the tree and the adult jumped across to a conifer, a distance of several feet. The youngster followed towards the end of the branch but would not make the same leap. Three or four times the adult jumped back, encouraging the youngster to follow, but it just could not try. Eventually the adult gave up and picked up the young one in her mouth and jumped across – no mean feat as the young one was nearly as big as her and the height about 15 feet above the ground. It was one of those occasions when you really miss not having a camera to hand.

The other squirrel story began one morning when I looked down the garden with my binoculars and told Brian that there was a dead squirrel on a flower bed. He said, reluctantly, that he would have to dig a hole to bury it. It rained that day so the squirrel remained on the flower bed. Next morning the squirrel had moved a short distance and we presumed that a fox had picked it up. When I went to investigate, I came back to tell Brian that a hole was not required – it was a grey squirrel coloured hat which a fox must have found and deposited in our garden. Someone local will never know what happened to their warm furry hat!

Some other matters of concern have been our hair, dentists and difficulties getting online delivery slots. Some of our number usually go to the hairdresser every week and have tried DIY trims. At least two have resorted to DIY dentistry (though only temporary fillings) and most of us have registered successfully for home deliveries. We have taken up knitting again, got the sewing machines out and baked lots of cakes when we could find the flour. We also probably have the tidiest drawers and cupboards and the neatest gardens that we have had for years. Such a shame that no one can see them. I am pleased to report that as I write we have all avoided the virus and look forward very much to the time when we can all meet once more.

Janice Thompson

Lockdown Life in Devon

Written after 10 weeks of 'Lockdown Life', I thought you might like to hear about three examples of what could perhaps be termed 'positive unintended (or unexpected) consequences', silver linings among the dark clouds of Covid-19.

The first concerns the time of year. As the start of Lockdown coincided with the onset of spring, this proved to be the perfect time to see amazing displays of wild flowers in the beautiful countryside of rural mid Devon. John and I used bikes for our daily outings, and cycling along the tiny lanes provided the ideal opportunity to observe and appreciate the flora and fauna in hedgerows, fields and woodland. There were swathes of pretty primroses during the early days of Lockdown, later replaced by carpets of bluebells. As the weeks progressed, species I didn't recognise appeared and I would take photos and look them up – white stitchwort, stunning early purple orchids and gorgeous, dainty Devon violets. Foxgloves rose resplendent and ox-eye daisies, like crowds of yellow and white smiling faces, flourished in the unusually hot, sunny weather of April and May. Butterflies became abundant and it was a privilege to have the time to 'stand and stare', to learn how to identify a Small Tortoiseshell or a Painted Lady and to marvel at the delicate lime green Brimstone.

My second example concerns shopping during the pandemic. I've never particularly enjoyed supermarket shopping, but the added complications of queueing, sanitising and following one-way systems round the aisles as part of Lockdown regulations made the experience even more sombre. However, it was an essential activity and I also volunteered to shop for others. Mostly this involved getting the items, taking them to the person's house, knocking, standing well back, saying a few words, then departing. In one case, however, it developed into more than that.

This recipient will be 90 in October, her late husband was a Methodist Minister, she was a local preacher for 50 years and, although now struggling with mobility, has the sharpest mind and memory of anyone I know, is vivacious and retains a great sense of humour. Lockdown had sadly deprived her of her usual visitors and she was missing human contact. On the first occasion when delivering her shopping I carried out the standard knock, stand back and depart procedure. The next time it developed into knock, stand back, have a chat, go. As the weeks went by and the 'chat' became longer I was concerned that it entailed her having to stand at the front door for too long, so I suggested she brought her 'walker' into the hall and sat on its seat while I perched on a shooting stick down the garden path. (Oh how we laughed at the absurdity of the situation!)

When Lockdown guidelines permitted meetings outside with one other person, I went 'round the back' and we shared conversation more comfortably on the terrace, using garden chairs 2m apart. She tells hilarious anecdotes (such as the time a sheep wandered into the chapel during her sermon and had to be herded out by the stewards; or the occasion when, gesticulating too wildly to emphasise a preaching point, she knocked the hat off her head!) I count it as a privilege, an unexpected consequence of Lockdown, to be able to spend time with such a special person, forging a deep bond together in the love of Christ.

My third and final illustration of something positive emanating from Lockdown concerns church life. Crediton Methodist Church opened 128 years ago and the interior underwent a much-needed refurbishment last year. We'd celebrated with a fantastic opening ceremony and been enjoying worshipping in the new space for just six months when the pandemic struck and we had to lock the doors. The two IT experts within our congregation who had worked so hard to install the new screens and sound system now rallied round to create 'Church on the Web'. They contacted everyone and helped them connect by phone, tablet or computer so that we can now meet and greet each other online and take part in a service every Sunday morning. We may laugh at the odd strange camera angle focussed on someone's knees or providing us with a close up of their lounge ceiling light, but comments from one couple brought home to me an unexpected bonus of Lockdown. During farewell greetings a couple I didn't recognise appeared on our screen, frail and elderly, sitting side by side on their sofa, filling

up with emotion as they explained how much they'd appreciated the service. Health problems had long since prevented them from being able to attend church so this had been the first time they'd participated in morning worship together for many years. They were so grateful. A silver lining and a wonderful blessing during these uncertain times.

Hilary Everitt



Victory in Europe celebration memories

I was approaching 7 years of age and living in Cromer Road, Tooting when Victory in Europe was announced. It was a time of great celebration; I can only remember war and bombing up until then.

Houses were decorated with bunting, trestle tables lined the streets laden with wonderful food, including plates and plates of sandwiches, jelly, blancmange and fairy cakes. There were cups of tea for the adults and cordial drinks for the children.

We had a huge bonfire at the end of our street at the T junction with Seely Road. The heat was so intense it melted the tarmac on the road and blistered the paint on some of the houses, and the fences and hedges had to be hosed down to stop them catching alight. The celebrations carried on well into the night with the adults dancing the Conga up and down the street and around the lampposts.

I don't remember who cleared up afterwards but it wasn't me!

Colin Greasby

Under African Skies

The process of leaving Africa, Johannesburg, the City of Gold, eGoli, has felt in many ways like a period of mourning. What had grown into an assurance that this was the place that we were meant to be, where we had made our home, our friends, our church, was in a moment pulled away. As quickly as the change from violent electric storms that flashed around us to bright blue sky and sunshine, what we knew and loved was pulled away. This must be a mistake, we thought (denial), this cannot be happening (anger), what on earth can we do? (depression), why us? (bargaining) and, finally, acceptance. This was meant to be. It was not at all how we had thought it was meant to be, but we had to trust that God had a plan for us.

We had at first put down tentative roots for 2 years only, which grew to 4 years and then onto 6, and we were setting ourselves up for a more permanent life. In February 2019, we sat in the large garden of the house we had just bought in Parktown West, one of the oldest areas of Joburg. Built in 1924, it was in touching distance of the fledgling mining settlement that became the modern city of Johannesburg. We felt at home. Reuben was happily settled in a school nearby, and Joseph would be joining him there the following year. We had a large circle of friends, we relished the outdoor lifestyle and weather (and had even acclimatized to the cold Joburg winters), we had become part of a new church in nearby Braamfontein, and we had even adopted a dog and a cat. We had a deep sense of inner comfort; although we would always miss our family and friends in other parts of the world and, although we lived, as everyone in Johannesburg, with an inbuilt sense of caution and level of alertness in the face of the reality of crime, we believed that we were in a place that God wanted us to be.

That was in February 2019. In September 2019, Adam was told, completely out of the blue, that his job would be finishing in December. That was when the mourning began, although at that stage, we still needed to find out whether there were other means for us to stay (for a foreigner, no job means no visa, and therefore no right to remain). It was not until December 2019 that we were fully aware that the South African doors had all but closed, and that we would be returning to the UK. It meant that we would have to make some difficult decisions about how to manage an international move, while trying to minimize the impact on the boys; of particular concern was Joseph, who was due to start school in January 2020 and who we knew would be hugely behind his peers at school in the UK, having missed nearly 2 years of formal education.

It is always easier to make sense of something after the event, although it is not always possible to know the real reason for something happening. Looking back, even at this time of huge upheaval, when we were contemplating a house sale, an international move, a UK move (Adam's previous office in Leeds had already confirmed that they had no position for him), school moves, pet moves, a change of church, there were clear signs that we were under God's protection. For a start, Adam had the luxury of being able to choose between several jobs offered in London, which meant that we could move in with Dad (who was, as ever, kind and generous in offering his hospitality). He was able to start his new job in Shoreditch the day after the technical end date of his old job (and he had been able to take the final month off in order to sort everything out), and his mum and sister had booked to come and see us over the period he was returning to London. That meant that I had them with me for a couple of weeks after he had left. We had already decided that I would stay in SA with the boys until Easter, to enable them to complete the first term of 2020 at school and sort out the house, the cars, the pets etc. Even before he left, there were moments sent to test us! For example, only 4 days before he flew back, a pick up truck bashed into the back of our car at a red traffic light and we then had to go through the rigmarole of police reports, insurance claims etc.

The period between the beginning of February and the end of March 2020 felt to me like one of the hardest I have had to cope with, trying to manage the boys' normal school lives, with all the attendant activities, while juggling the advertising of various pieces of furniture we wanted to sell, setting up transporting our pets, making arrangements to sell both cars, and a variety of other rather mundane activities. I remember saying to more than one person (jokily), that if anything out of the ordinary were to happen, it would push me over the edge. We had been having regular loadshedding at the beginning of the year (when power is cut to areas of the city on a rotational basis in 4-hour slots) and, suddenly one afternoon, the power went out at 4pm which was not what was supposed to happen according to the

schedule. We had got quite used to this over the years, but somehow, that time was a time too many for me. No power again – just at the time I needed to cook dinner, get the boys ready for bed, clear up etc. We got through it with a meal cooked on the BBQ and our camping lights all over the house (the boys are used to wearing their camping torches to bed). Then I sat in the dark with my headtorch on, and a glass of wine by my side, and thought again that any other disruptions would push me properly over the edge.

I am glad that I did not know then what subsequently happened. Everything was set up for us to leave just before Easter; the house would be packed up, the animals would be collected, and we would move into a serviced apartment for the final few days while we said our goodbyes. Precious friends of ours had organized parties for both boys to say goodbye to their friends. Suddenly, in the space of a few days, everything was thrown in turmoil. On Monday 23 March, the South African President announced that the government were imposing a nationwide lockdown to take effect at midnight on the evening of Thursday 26 March. The following day, we decided that the boys and I needed to return to the UK early, just because we did not know what would happen and we did not want to risk being trapped in SA beyond Easter. The only flights we could get back were on Friday 27 March, which was after the lockdown had started, but the airlines were still flying nonetheless. Or at least, that was the idea. It was not until Wednesday evening when I got a Whatsapp from a friend of mine who said that the government had now decided to ban all international travel from Thursday at midnight, regardless of whether the travellers were foreigners who would be leaving not to return. She said if I could not change my flight to an earlier one, then I would not be leaving that week.

I felt physically sick. I could not really believe what I was hearing. The house packers had already cancelled the house move for a couple of weeks time, and I had already heard from the pet agency that no airlines were flying animals any more. Quite apart from the fact that I knew there were no available flights before Friday (because we had already tried that), I did not see how I could leave the animals and the house as they were. I walked around the house that evening for some time (luckily the boys were asleep), unable to settle or properly collect my thoughts. In a moment of desperation, I literally fell to my knees in prayer and asked God to protect us and, if possible, to move mountains. Then, I got up and felt calmer, and watched TV for an hour or so before bed.

And this is when the miracles started to fall. At 10.30pm, when I was in bed and about to turn out the light, my mobile rang. It was the travel agent who had found us the Friday flights. She explained that she had managed to book us onto a Lufthansa flight via Frankfurt leaving the next day (the Thursday evening, just before the lockdown at midnight). In spite of the late hour, she had managed to get the necessary authorization from Adam's company. I could not believe what I was hearing. I can tell you that I fell on my knees again, before I jumped up and started running around the house packing and sorting our things out. I was sticking labels on furniture, indicating what should be shipped to storage and what to Hampton, and who was buying which items (but had not picked them up yet). I was filling suitcases, trying to work out what documentation I needed, all the time aware at the back of my mind that I would never be returning to the house. For another miracle that had already happened, but which I had been a little too stressed to appreciate, was that we had found a buyer for the house. Amidst all the panic of the lockdown, on the Monday of the lockdown week, we had received a formal offer to purchase our house, which we had decided to accept. And we thank God now that he prompted us to do that. I knew that we would not be returning to our home, but I also knew that it was an aspect of the move that had been taken care of.

The following 48 hours were, apart from losing my Mum, probably the hardest of my life. There were so many practical issues to be sorted out before we left for the airport in the afternoon, but we also needed to come to terms with leaving our home, and our friends, and everything that we loved. Emotionally, it was far too much to deal with. But again, I was surrounded with God's protection at every turn. A couple of the boys' school friends and their mums, good friends of mine, came around to say goodbye. This was a blessing because, of course, the boys' leaving parties had both been cancelled in the face of Covid-19. Our friend from church, who was living in our cottage, offered to take care of everything for us. She would look after the pets, arrange for our car and various pieces of furniture to be collected, sort out all the paperwork for the house sale, and supervise the packers once they were allowed to operate again. We will never forget her kindness. I had numerous messages from friends, acquaintances, people from

school whom I had regularly seen at drop off and pick up and who had found my number on the school database; all of them were telling me they were thinking of us, and asking how we were doing, and offering all sorts of help. It was truly mind-blowing. It was bittersweet confirmation for me of the depth our roots had reached in Joburg and, consequently, how heartwrenching it was to dig them up.

On the morning of Friday 27 March, we finally arrived in Hampton. We had made it through chaotic airport scenes during the last dash to leave SA before the lockdown, and we were home. Ironically, Dad was not to arrive home until he managed to get a flight back from Australia a couple of weeks later, but we are now able to live in that family community of give and take. We have given 4 extra people, a cat and a dog (which miraculously managed to fly to us at the end of May), lots of noise and help with all the shopping (plus a few other things). Dad has given his home, his amazing cooking (a weekly cake, homemade soup, Sunday dessert, and various other meals) and many jokes to his grandsons (they are now beginning to understand his sense of humour, or the lack of it?).

In the meantime, our car in SA was collected and our house has been packed up, and our house sale should go through by the beginning of July. I have just heard that the boys have places confirmed in Hampton Infants and Juniors. There are still things that need to be sorted out, not least where we will end up living in the future. But there can be no doubt that there is a bigger plan for us than we could ever have imagined. A year ago, as we sat in our Parktown garden under thorn and jacaranda trees, and said to ourselves, "We love it here; we have never loved a place so much," we would never have believed that, a year later, we would be putting down our roots in Hampton, in a house that hold so many important memories for me. No longer under African skies, but who knows where we will be next year? It is probably best that we cannot see into the future. Living in the moment with hope in a certain (albeit unknown) future is more than enough.

Ruth Lancaster

The Bike Project

This Project was started in May 2018. We collect second hand adult and children's bikes in any condition these are then taken to The Bike Project which is based in Herne Hill in London. The bikes are refurbished by a team of mechanics and given away to refugees and asylum seekers. The Bike Project also run group cycle training for refugee women-to inspire and empower them to feel the freedom of their very own bike-perhaps for the first time in their lives. In the two years that we have been running the 'Bike Hub' at our church we have donated 335 bikes to the Bike Project.

This week the communications officer at LBRUT wrote a press release about our project which was released Borough wide. Cllr. Gareth Richards, Richmond Council's Cycling Champion said:

"The Hampton Bike Project is a fantastic initiative providing refugees and asylum seekers with an invaluable mode of transport. Bicycles can provide a vital mode of transport to help refugees and asylum-seekers access local services especially for those who might have to travel a considerable distance to access these services. It can also provide a great form of independence for newly settled refugees and asylum seekers to help them integrate into communities. With members of the public being urged to avoid public transport where possible at present, this scheme also helps those who might depend on such services, to enable and encourage more people to cycle."

This press release resulted in a massive 'wave of donations' - 108 bicycles were donated on 6th and 13th June! So please keep giving your unwanted bicycles and spread the word too.

Wendy Salmon



WhatsAppened During Lockdown!

We hear all too often these days about the evils of social media, how it can be abused, spread 'fake news', and addict us so that we neglect to live our lives. Just for once, I wanted to give an example of social media as a force for good, and how it has for me reinforced a sense of community spirit that has helped me enormously through the challenges of lockdown.

When Cooper my retriever was a puppy I got to know all sorts of dogs and dog owners over on Hampton Common, as we stood and chatted in the evenings and watched our dogs play. As summer ended and the nights drew in, a couple of us wondered if it would be a good idea for us to stay in touch over the winter, mainly so that we'd know if any other walkers might fancy a walk after dark, so we wouldn't have to walk alone. And so the Hampton Common Dog Owners Whatsapp group was formed. In the last two years it has gone from strength to strength, with more and more people being linked up. Apart from a couple of hiccups it's a simple whatsapp group so has no 'group rules' as such, so we've learned the hard way not to post political or controversial stuff - it's been a joy. We've been able to alert other dog owners to hazards and opportunities - mouldy bread in the nature reserve! the big lawn mower is out! watch out for grass seeds in your pooch's paws and ears! Lidl has waterproofs on offer this week! - and reunite several people with their keys, sunglasses, dog leads etc. We've also helped to locate lost dogs, as we now have a wide network of people out and about in the local area all day keeping an eye out. You may also notice dog walkers out on the common with litter pickers, trying to keep the common safe for dogs and children. On a personal level, I have made truly wonderful friends, who lend me a sympathetic ear, or a helping hand with my boisterous dogs; we share recipes, cake, and even do a bit of clothes swapping! This week, they've been trying out my orange drizzle cake, while I've been enjoying their homemade Danish pastries and elderflower cordial from flowers picked on the common - I'm looking forward to being shown where to find fresh horseradish and wild garlic later in the week! And none of us can resist sharing a cute photo of our dogs, or of anyone else's dog, as well as funny jokes and memes we find on other social media. And when I reached out last year to see if anyone could help my teenager Charlie earn a bit of extra pocket money (and get out of the house!!) they helped by offering to let him walk their dogs, clean windows and cars etc, which was such a huge step for him, as many of you will understand.

Lockdown has made it even clearer how much the group means to me and to others. We have been able to support some of our group members who are shielding, by doing their shopping, taking their dogs (and cats!) to the vet and, on one occasion, raising enough money through a Just Giving page to pay for surgery for one unlucky and uninsured border collie who'd swallowed half a tennis ball. It gives me great satisfaction to see new firm friendships being formed, and it has made the isolation of lockdown so much more bearable knowing that someone has got your back. I am one of the lucky ones who has been out to work throughout lockdown, but I know how much it has meant to know that you will see a smiling (socially distant!) face or two when you are doing a lap of the common. We are a motley crew - our ages, backgrounds, life choices, political views, sense of humour - but we are united in our love for our dogs and, when it comes down to it, love is what it's all about.

Emma Gale



Baby Basics

We have decided to continue to serve the increasing numbers of families in need in the area during the pandemic. Our volunteer team is continuing to work hard and new policies have been introduced regarding Health and Safety.

The most significant change is that we are not accepting any donations, and we are purchasing everything we need. We have received some large corporate donations in the last year and it is inspiring to see how God is providing for us to support others. We have also received a huge number of donations via our Amazon Wishlist and Facebook posts. We also raised money at the Soup Lunch in January.

We are urgently looking for another volunteer for the team. If anyone would like to get involved please do contact me or one of the team. We need assistance with managing stock in the storeroom, communications and publicity (Facebook, Christmas cards, newsletters etc.), undertaking coordination of referrals (answering emails and telephone and liaising with the team) on a rota basis. A full Annual Report will be published shortly, please ask for a copy if you wish. Mary Somerville

The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile has continued even though our volunteers are no longer able to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays. When the lockdown first happened, we thought we would just be able to meet demands that were urgent, but really all our referrals are urgent. So, we had tentative emails coming through saying 'are you still open?' We were able to say 'yes' and gather together some items required. Helena and Wendy have made this possible by being flexible and working together to make up referrals and meet professionals at the church to collect items. Obviously whilst practicing social distancing and going at different times and days.

We have had enquiries from Acton, Southall, Stanwell, Hounslow and Kingston recently and some have been new professionals just hearing about us. We have also been actively supporting the mother and baby unit in Hounslow with prams and cots for new born babies and baby milk. The fabulous staff at Waitrose had baby milk donated and filled two trolleys full to walk down the road to the church to deliver, where Wendy was waiting for them having heard from Sarah at the Hygiene Bank that they were coming.

Being short of cots I put out a post on Facebook and got the offer of two local cots which I collected to fulfil two referrals. We have also applied for two sources of funding, one from a Waitrose award scheme, sadly not successful this time round but hopefully in the second round. The staff at Waitrose Hampton (other stores may also be available) have been a source of fantastic support to us nominating us for various things and helping us where they can. We have also set up an Amazon Wish List of items we are usually short of, so we will see what that brings.

Grateful thanks to Helena and Wendy who have kept going through all this difficulty working around problems and finding solutions. Without their input families would not have this support. We also need volunteers to help with The Extra Mile. We are a small team of workers, but when I move away we will also need someone to answer referral emails and ensure that the team know what referrals need to be made up as well as liaising with professionals for collection; so if you feel you can offer time to help this essential work in the community to the glory of God, please let myself or one of the team know. Pam Harrison

For the last few years, Baby Basics and The Extra Mile have run an immensely successful soup lunch in late January. This has raised funds but also been a good place for all those who have a heart for these projects to meet and to introduce others to what we are doing at Sunbury and Hampton. Next year, Hampton will be hosting the event but it has become clear to us that it can't be soup and puddings in a crowded church hall, much as we look forward to that happening again one day. There will still be requirements around social distancing for a considerable time to come and it seems sensible to consider something different next year. Look out in the autumn when news of exciting fundraising plans that you can all be involved in will be released.

The Hygiene Bank Hampton – Tackling Local Hygiene Poverty

The Hygiene Bank is a national, grassroots community-based project where people in a community come together to collect toiletry basics. All these products are collected and then sorted by type, e.g. shampoo, bodywash, toothpaste, nappies etc. These are then distributed back locally within the community via a network of charity partners.

Local resident, Sarah Allen, became the Hampton area's Project Coordinator for The Hygiene Bank charity in January 2019 and now supports 7 local charities with toiletry donations. She says: "Not being able to keep clean can damage self-esteem and sense of worth. Many struggling families will choose to put food on the table over buying toiletries. Our aim is to end hygiene poverty as we believe that everyone deserves to feel clean."

The Hygiene Bank was originally founded in 2018 by a lady called Lizzy Hall from Sevenoaks, Kent. It began when Lizzy organised a collection of toiletries from her friends and family to take to her local FoodBank. It became apparent to Lizzy that hygiene poverty was a significant issue that needed more attention, so she set up The Hygiene Bank.

The Hygiene Bank & The Extra Mile

The Hygiene Bank Hampton has been supporting The Extra Mile with regular toiletry donations for a year now. At Christmas, they ran the 'It's in The Bag' campaign where the public were encouraged to donate a handbag filled with toiletries and some nice treats. The Extra Mile gave these bags out to referrals last December which meant that some mums had at least one present on Christmas Day.

Donation Drop-Off Points, TW12

You can take new and unused toiletry donations to:

- Boots Pharmacy (3 Station Approach, TW12 2HZ)
- Birdie Bikes (7 Wensleydale Road, TW12 2LP)
- Dexters Estate Agent Hampton (93 Station Road, TW12 2BD)
- Hampton Hill Pharmacy (173b High Street, TW12 1NL)

Other drop off points set to reopen soon are:

- The Book Shop (52 Ashley Road, TW12 2HU)
- SkinFit Face & Body Clinic (177 Percy Road, TW12 2JN)
- Paws for Coffee (41 High Street, TW12 1NB)
- Ember Yoga Studio (44 High Street, TW12 1PD)
- The Little Gym (94-102 High Street, TW12 1NY)

Donations Needed

Shower gel, shampoo & conditioner, toothpaste & toothbrushes, deodorant, nappies & wipes, shaving gel & razors and sanitary products. New and unused only.

www.thehygienebank.com

Facebook and Instagram: @THBHampton & @TheHygieneBank

Magazine editors: Willem Sandberg and Liz Windaybank