

Letter to WSAM churches

23rd April 2020

Dear Friends

I hope that you are all well, that your homes are still feeling homely and that your gardens (those of you fortunate enough to have one) are full of life and colour, birdsong and hope! I'm lucky here that as well as our small garden at the manse, we also get to enjoy looking at the church garden, which is lovely. I also have lots of seeds germinating in pots (most of them re-purposed from our recycling) on our windowsills - there's nothing like watching things germinating and starting to grow.

A few days ago a (young) friend of mine posted a very beautiful close-up photo of a flower online. With white petals shading to pink at the edges and a yellow centre, it had appeared in their lawn, which they were about to mow, and they weren't sure what it was. In fact it was a daisy, basking in the sun - so small and common that most of us hardly notice them, but when you really look at them close up... absolutely gorgeous! I was reminded too of making daisy-chains with children, and the joy that these little wild flowers can bring.

Did you watch Songs of Praise last Sunday? As well as including my favourite hymn(!) and coming from Strawberry Fields in Liverpool, it was interesting to me (with my URC Equalities Committee hat on) because this week's episode looked particularly at inclusion. There was a Methodist Local Preacher who is profoundly deaf, and leads worship in British Sign Language, with an interpreter. Have you ever been to a service like that? We are becoming more used to seeing sign language interpreters accompanying certain news reports and other things on TV, but the idea of worship being primarily in BSL, delivered by someone whose first language that is, and only secondarily translated into spoken English - that might feel strange, but it is a step further in inclusion and in using all the talents that God has given us. There was also a URC Minister, a friend of mine, who is transgender. They spoke about their experiences and how important it is to ensure that absolutely everybody can find a church community which will be safe and welcoming to them. There are, sadly, many reasons why people may be unable to come and worship freely with others, and some of them are related to disability. One of the unexpected pluses of the current situation has been the number of people who have expressed their joy that they have been able to participate in worship and in other church activities because they are now taking place online; sadly issues of mobility or geography or the set-up of the church building had previously prevented these folk from being physically present. I hope we can continue to get better at making our churches - both in worship and in fellowship - more accessible to everybody, whatever their needs. There must be ways to make room somehow for all.

Something I read recently reminded me of Audrey. It was a slogan:
"The World Has Not Become Any Smaller - Pray Big!"

It does seem that our news broadcasts and our own horizons have tended to shrink in the last few weeks to include largely the things that are happening close to home. Inevitably, perhaps. But the world hasn't become any smaller, and there are things to learn about, to pray about, and to give thanks for, across the whole of God's world. Did you hear about the wildfire that destroyed 10,000 acres of Poland's largest National Park, home to moose and beavers, in recent days, as Poland suffers a serious drought? Or about the millions of people in Syria, threatened by famine? Equally, did you hear that ordinary New Zealanders gave nearly half a million dollars to a fund to help feed zoo animals during the lockdown? May we remember the whole world in prayer, and take time to learn about what is happening, and how God is working, in areas beyond our own communities. If you want some suggestions for prayers, try those on the Christian Aid website.

Church family news

Thank you again to those who have been in touch with me this week - I really appreciate hearing from you. I know most of us don't have any very exciting news to share, but it's nice to hear people's voices; and after all, sometimes 'no news is good news'. A big thanks to those who are distributing these letters to friends who don't have access to email, and to those who are enabling the online 'after church coffee' and games evenings which seem to be filling a need in Pulborough, particularly.

I asked last week whether anyone would like a hymn book in order to follow the words of hymns which I suggest for Sunday's worship, or which you hear used in services broadcast on TV or online. A number of you responded and hopefully have now been re-united with a hymn book, but if anyone else would like one, please just let me know. I find them a wonderful source for prayers at any time.

A request particularly for families with children (whether they 'normally' worship with us or not!) - would you like suggestions of either suitable worship resources or other activities included on the Sunday Bulletins, or have you found enough for yourselves?

Liz has heard from the daughter of Jack who was a member at Pulborough and will be remembered by many in the group. The bench outside the doors of the church is in his memory. She wanted to send her love to all of us.

These letters and Bulletins, with some details removed for confidentiality, are now being added to our church websites so that they are more easily and widely accessible.

God Bless you all, and please, be kind - to yourself and to everybody else.

Anne Lewitt