

Letter to WSAM churches

30th April 2020

Dear Friends

I hope that you are all well, and managed to soak up a bit of sunshine before the weather changed. Thank you to all those who contacted me this week, especially those who commented on the Songs of Praise episode which focussed on inclusion. It seems that a number of us have an interest in sign language - perhaps we'll follow it up at some point.

One thing I wanted to mention (well, everyone else is...) was what we may be looking at in terms of worship and church life as the lockdown gradually lifts - whenever that is. There is apparently a resource being prepared by the URC nationally to help churches start to think about this, and hopefully it will be available in the next couple of weeks. Of course the future is always unknown, and to some extent the suggestions below are just speculation. They are, however, things it is worth starting to think about now, so that we can find the best ways to cope - in worship, in pastoral care and in fellowship - as the situation changes. We want to be able to meet and worship with our friends again; but we also want to keep them (as well as ourselves) safe.

Much as we might all like to go back to exactly how it was before, preferably sooner than immediately, it seems fairly clear that that won't happen. For one thing, people above a certain age may continue to face certain restrictions for their own safety; and realistically, that may mean many of us. Social distancing looks set to continue for some time, and this will affect any return to worship in our buildings. We will probably have to space worshippers much further apart; and (bizarre and sad as it sounds) we may be forbidden from singing, as singing is apparently one of the most effective ways to spread the virus.

I don't have a crystal ball to tell you what will happen, but I can promise that I and all the elders will make sure that you continue to be kept in touch with us and with each other, whether by phone or email or Zoom; and that worship will be enabled and encouraged, whether in person or remotely as it has been for the last few weeks. I think it just has to be a case of 'watch this space'.... and remember that God is with us.

Church family news

This week there is a great deal of news, both happy and sad - thanks to all those who have passed it on to me. Please keep all the people mentioned in your prayers.

One of the (sadly many) things which I am not very good at is remembering people's birthdays. Fortunately, however, in each congregation there seems to be at least one person who does have that talent, and in 'normal' times these days get celebrated appropriately, often in song. I am aware that at the moment significant dates are sailing past unacknowledged, and I can only apologise and hope that we can make up for it with interest next year.

One date that has not gone unnoticed is John and Beverly Walsh's Golden Wedding Anniversary. We send them our hearty and heartfelt congratulations, and hope that they manage to have a very special day, albeit not quite the way they originally planned.

On a sad note, this week we learned of the death of Jeanette's daughter (Karen's sister). Our thoughts and prayers are with them and with all their family at this time.

Douglas, one of our regular preachers, also died at the beginning of this week. We remember his wife and son in our prayers.

Julia has been in touch with a number of those who regularly lead worship in Billingshurst, and has heard from (so far) Gordon, John, Jon, Linda and Norma. It's good to be able to report that all of them are fine, as are their immediate families. Much gardening seems to be being done!

Revd Bernard Thorogood, remembered by some of us from when he was General Secretary of the URC between 1980 and 1992, died a couple of days ago in Sydney, Australia, where he retired more than quarter of a century ago. He was 92. Before his stint as General Secretary of the URC he had been General Secretary of the missionary organisation CWM, and was responsible for bringing it into its present form where all churches are equal partners. He was held in very high esteem as a wise and compassionate church leader and will be fondly remembered by many.

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, please be kind - to yourself and everybody else - and keep in touch.

Anne Lewitt