

Letter to WSAM churches

15th April 2020

Dear Friends

I'm glad to know that some of you have been able to get out for your daily exercise, to enjoy the sunshine and the growing signs of Spring. I'm finding that I am more aware than usual of each development - the opening, one by one, of leaves on different species of trees (and that wonderful fresh and translucent quality which the tiny, new leaves have as they gradually unfurl and grow) and the proliferation of flowers in so many colours. I have replaced the daffodils that I was bringing into the house with vases full of wild flowers and foliage and find them both beautiful and encouraging! The lovely blossom on fruit trees is also a promise for the future, which we need at the moment.

For those not able or allowed to go out, I hope that in this quieter world you can at least have your windows open to hear the birds singing their hearts out, particularly their choruses at dawn and at dusk.

I know there has been some concern that recently I haven't been able to be involved in anything which would have required me to be out and in contact with others, much as I would normally have wanted to. As I mentioned, briefly, in my first letter, this is in order to protect my health. I have a history of lung problems, including multiple bouts of pneumonia, from childhood onwards. These affected my ministry in Leeds, and I was really pleased to find that the less-polluted air here made breathing much easier; however it is obviously important that I avoid this virus if at all possible. Therefore I am working from home - available by phone and email, and trying to produce these regular letters and Sunday Bulletins of worship and news to support the members and friends of our church families and keep everyone together and in touch.

One of my concerns is that as far as possible everyone should be able to worship. We are all different, and find different things helpful - but I know that one thing many have missed is the opportunity to sing familiar hymns. Even if they are included in broadcasts on TV, radio or online, it is difficult to join in without the words. Also I find that the words of hymns can make wonderful prayers, easier to pray sometimes than finding words for ourselves. For these reasons I have been wondering whether we could make sure that those who want to borrow a hymn book from church (where they are obviously doing nothing at the moment!) could do so. I know that some of you already have your own books, which is great, but if you don't and would appreciate one, please let me know. I think that we will be able to do something about it (safely) in Billingshurst, and if there is a demand in Pulborough and Petworth I will try to work out ways of delivering them there too.

Another concern is our outreach to the wider community - both to those who have some regular contact with our churches (such as through the Pulborough Craft Cafe or the Billingshurst Dementia Cafe) and those who live around us - our neighbours and friends. I know I have mentioned before the possibility of using our church Facebook pages more - which has worked well for some other churches but doesn't seem to have taken off much here. How many of you use Facebook? Let me know whether you think there is any point in pursuing this further. Another thing I am hoping to do over the next few days is to work out ways of making (and regularly changing) posters with thoughts and ideas, to go in the noticeboards alongside the road here in Pulborough. Again, let me know what you think, and whether this might work for the other churches too.

Church family news

Thank you again to those who have been in touch with me this week, by phone or email, as well as to those organising online coffee and chats and games. I know (because I hear about it) that you are staying in touch by phoning each other too, and I think it is brilliant that we are able to support and encourage each other, with care and concern and with humour and cheerfulness.

One group of friends who are very much part of our church family are the preachers who come to lead worship in our congregations, and also the members of their families who often come with them. Over the years we build relationships as we worship together, and it is good when we can keep in touch, as our pulpit supply secretaries try to. Ellen has been in touch with some of these preachers over Easter, and received the news that Douglas has been very ill for some time now. Please include him and his family in your prayers. On a previous occasion when he was unable to come to us, you may remember that his friend John stepped in to lead worship. John and his wife have both been ill, but are now recovering. We think of them too.

Last week quite a number of us were able to join a livestream of Audrey's funeral. Although there were only three people actually there in person, the service was very moving and the tributes which the minister read out were a wonderful reminder of the breadth and depth of Audrey's interests, and the strength and practical application of her faith. We will also arrange a service locally as soon as we are able.

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, keep safe and keep everyone else safe.

Anne Lewitt