

Letter to WSAM churches

11th June 2020

Dear Friends

It feels odd that through most of March, April and May I was able to imagine many of you sitting in your gardens in the sun, but now that we're into June we're stuck indoors a lot of the time. Let's hope the sun soon returns, and that in the meantime our gardens and fields get the rain they need.

One of the hard things about the lockdown has been that our churches, normally hubs of hospitality and activity, have had to be empty and largely unused (although the food bank has continued to use part of Petworth URC, which is great). So I was pleased this week when the church garden here in Pulborough briefly provided sanctuary to a little grey dog. I spotted him out of the window and went to investigate. He was very friendly and happily let me clip on a lead and read the tag on his collar (well, ok, there were a few dog biscuit bribes involved as well). There was no answer on the phone number, but soon afterwards, while we were sitting on the Manse doorstep wondering what to do, his worried owner appeared on the other side of the road. Having crossed that busy road once, luckily the attractions of the big church garden had stopped his explorations and kept him safe.

We're hoping that over the next few weeks our gardens - both church gardens and the larger gardens of some of our church members - may make suitable, safe, outdoor venues for small groups to meet for fellowship and perhaps prayer or Bible study. While the government has made some concessions for churches to open for private prayer, this isn't something which most URCs usually offer - our buildings were designed and built as places for people to gather for worship together, and in our tradition private prayer was expected to take place at home. At the moment indoor spaces are much higher risk for infection, so we will wait until it's safe to gather together for worship again, and in the meantime see what we can do with small garden meetings.

All our lives we go on learning - new technology, new ideas, so many new things... This last few months have been a steep learning curve. And sadly some things we are learning now, we should have been more aware of before. Black Lives Matter. They should always have mattered, but we haven't always been aware of how they have been undervalued and denied both justice and equality. So we must continue to learn. There are lots of books to read, but if you want something to listen to instead, I would recommend some of the talks recorded at previous years' Greenbelt Festivals, and available free here: <https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/talks-archive/#blacklivesmatter>

I heard some of them the first time around, sitting on the grass in a field with hundreds of other people, but they have an even more immediate relevance now.

Looking to the future

Following the request from Synod that Elders do an assessment of each church's current financial and congregational health, Elders Meetings were held at Pulborough and at Billingshurst. It isn't possible to hold Church Meetings at the moment, but we will try to keep members in the loop, with separate documents for each church possibly being circulated where appropriate.

Online worship is one of the things which we were totally unfamiliar with a few months ago. Since then, many of us have experienced either meetings or worship online, often via Zoom, and some who were doubtful to start with have come round to appreciating it. So a group from Pulborough are intending to experiment with a short online service of some sort, this coming Sunday evening (14th) at 6pm. If you would like to be involved in any way, please let me (Anne) or Karen know, so that you can be included and invited.

Hymns

My choice of hymns each Sunday is still producing plenty of comments, just as it does in normal times! Please bear in mind that there are particular restraints at the moment - as well as my usual criteria (that they have helpful, relevant words and a singable tune) I am now also deliberately restricting my choice to those in Rejoice and Sing (so that most people have access to the words) and to hymns which can be heard on YouTube, to provide a musical accompaniment for those that want it! These restrictions have limited the possible choices, and those of you from Pulborough are particularly likely to notice this as the use of the projector and screen mean that your usual repertoire is wide. Please bear with me, and I'll try to listen to all constructive comments!

News

Nobody has passed me any news in the last few days which they want to share with the whole church community - remember, I can't write anything here unless I'm told it myself first, and also given permission to share.

Have a good weekend, and stay in touch - with each other and with me.

Anne Lewitt

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.