

Pastoral Letter

May 2020

Dear all,

Times have been very unusual for us all over the past couple of months while adhering to the lockdown because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I'm aware that it will have affected different people in so many different ways. For some life has been very isolated and has become increasingly boring because of not being able to meet up with others in the ways they have been used to, for others life has been absolutely hectic because of their job or because of trying to juggle children's school work while also working from home, for others there's been the uncertainty of being on furlough and wondering whether there will still be a job to go back to, and I'm sure there are many more permutations that I haven't mentioned.

Jenny Stephens, the daughter of Bill Stephens of Prestwood, who is a Minister in the United Church of Canada, asked in her YouTube broadcast from Wesley United Church in Cambridge, Ontario, last Sunday (17 May) <https://youtu.be/dGIP5LcBSyg> what will we carry over if and when the pandemic is over.

I thought that was an interesting question to address so I'd like to outline some positive benefits of lockdown that I have experienced, not all of which I will be able to carry over but some of which I do hope will continue.

- Looking out for neighbours. One of the real silver linings of this crisis has been the way in which people do seem to be looking out for one another. It's one of the things that church members have mentioned to me in some of the phone conversations I've had, and is something Heather and I have done in relation to our neighbours.

- The appreciation of keyworkers expressed on a Thursday evening, acknowledging the debt that we owe not just to medical staff but also the others who have enabled our lives to function during the lockdown. Helen Cameron, the District Chair, in her sermon on the Amersham YouTube Channel (https://youtu.be/L_twgdJaJUU) also on 17th May has quite rightly raised questions about the low pay of many of these keyworkers. I hope the lesson has been learned about valuing all in our society, and not just those who earn plenty of money.
- Exercise. Taking walks out in the fresh air at some point most days has been good.
- Spending time with family. As a family we had already discovered a fantastic card game based on Monopoly called Monopoly Deal and we've been enjoying playing that on a nightly basis at 9.30/10.00 each evening.
- Using video and video conferencing software for the first time. I have just signed up for a Theological Book Club series being run by the District for Ministers via Zoom. Having seen how good some of the video conferencing software is I hope it will cut down on travel needed in the District and also open up other hitherto unthought of possibilities.
- Worshipping together on a Sunday morning with my wife while watching services on YouTube. For the first time in the almost 20 years of our married life Heather and I have been able to sit together at services on a regular basis. It's something we've never been able to do before because we started going out together when I was already a

Minister. Obviously this won't be able to be carried over once services resume but it's been an unexpected benefit of lockdown.

Are there some unexpected benefits of lockdown that you have experienced in the midst of all the difficulties and concerns?

It's good to remember that God is with us despite the difficulties that we may have had to face, that we've been able to keep in touch with each other and we've still been able to worship God despite not being able to meet together in the same way we've been used to.

Lastly I do hope you and your loved ones are keeping well. I am aware that a few people connected with my churches have had Covid 19 in varying degrees of severity (as well as quite a number of children and grandchildren of church members). There is one person in hospital who is still recovering and our prayers are with her and with all who are being affected by the pandemic.

Nigel