



the arena Weekly

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newsletter

St James' Vicarage,
1a Arlington Square,
London N1 7DS

vicar@stjamesislington.org

020 7226 4108
07989 281123

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Dear All,



WHAT IS A CHURCH FOR? I ask the question because there have been several articles in the Church press this week (I read the Church Times and the Tablet each Friday) which have been asking 'in what ways has Coronavirus and the lockdown changed our thinking about what we want from our churches today?'

As you might expect answers differ quite sharply. The following are the extreme versions but they offer a quick summary of what I have read: View 1: 'Church people need a Church building'. They take us away from the ordinary things of life and they give God space to talk to us and help us on our way. It is much easier to 'think God' (ie pray) if we are in his house. View 2: We ought to leave old, expensive and inflexible Church buildings behind and go and find God in the places where people live and work, looking after the needy and showing the love of God in much more practical (and home centred) ways.

Of course common sense would tell us that we should be doing both/and! But as human beings we tend to have a bias in one direction or the other and that is what we are trying to discover as look forward to a 'post Covid world'. Where does St James' fit on that spectrum?

The PCC met last week via Zoom and what came through very strongly was just how much people are missing the other members of the Church community. Mostly these are people we would never meet normally but they have become 'family' and life is much poorer now that we don't see them. And second, however good a virtual service is, it can't possibly compare with being alongside each other in St James'. As someone said, screens are for work and for socialising. In an emergency, streamed services help a bit but they can only ever be second best.

But what interested me after that was that no one was suggesting we ought to be doing more together outside the regular 10am Mass on Sundays. Being part of St James' Islington, the PCC seemed to be saying, meant being part of a broad based community who, first and foremost, prays together (in Church). We don't expect to mix much otherwise - though some may be involved in all kinds of other charity work. *Is that true? And do you agree with that view?*



APPEAL FOR TOP QUALITY PRE-OWNED CHILDREN'S CLOTHES AND BOOKS Julia Maile continues to ask for donations of clothes and books for local families. Despite our affluence the rate of poverty in Islington is high.

Anything you can spare will be gratefully passed on to those in need. Further details available on their excellent website: www.merrygoroundUK.org

Calendar and Daily Prayer themes

Sun 14 *TRINITY 1* Carly Cunningham, James, Michael and Francis Russell
 Mon 15 *DEL Wk 11* Cyril Daley; Dennis Davis; Adam Dickson
 Tues 16 *St Richard of Chichester* Richard, Teresa, Mae and Ivy Dennison
 Wed 17 *Feria* Sophie Duffy, James, Reggie, Olive Murphy; Amanda Doyle
 Thurs 18 *Feria* Amy Eldon Richier, Freddie Pemberton, Scott and Callum Kinch
 Fri 19 *Feria* Will Ellsworth-Jones; Weini and Ethan Faloppa; Tomi Solomon
 Sat 20 *Feria* Luigi, Jane, Luca, Francesca, Matteo and Gloria Falcioni
 Sun 21 *TRINITY 1* Page, Bella and Lola Flynn, Lisa and Sonny Follett

Birthdays this coming week

Many Happy Returns today to Sam Seabrook and on Thursday to Sonny Follett who will be 13.

WHAT IS A CHURCH FOR (2)? I then began to think about our other major priority: teaching the Christian faith. In a generation where so many of those coming to St James' haven't had a chance to learn anything about the Bible or what happens in Church, the *Basic Christianity course* leading to adult Baptism and/or First Holy Communion has been a real success with two groups taking up this opportunity during the year. For our children the growth of Sunday School for the 0-10s has been amazing though, as with many churches, there is a real gap for our teenagers. The other work we have been encouraging has been the shared reading of a book (most recently Rowan Williams' *Luminaries*) and the chance to reflect on it together, either by email or via a Zoomed meeting. But what about sermons?

I am very well aware of the huge range of backgrounds of our congregation "from every tribe and nation" - and from every educational background too. While the style of sermons differs week by week, I know that last Sunday's sermon on the Trinity was quite hard and, not surprisingly, it got very mixed reviews! Some said it was too difficult to understand and some said it wasn't upbeat enough (you want to come away from Church feeling good). On the other hand a couple of others said it had been helpful and one said that it was the first time they had ever thought about the Trinity in this way and they had really appreciated the chance to examine what the Creed meant. While 'you can't please all the people...' we really want to make the best of the sermon slot if we can.

So question 2: if being a member of the Church is also about life-long learning, 'how can we continue to explore our faith in ways which are useful, interesting, spiritually nourishing, not over demanding in terms of time - and are within the resources of St James' to deliver?' Please give these two questions some thought and let us know what you think.



Keep safe!

Best wishes as ever,
John



May God bless every £1 we give so that St James' will be here, not just for today and for tomorrow, but for the future he wants to create.

WE DECLARE THE CHURCH 'OPEN'! On Wednesday we heard from Bishop Sarah that churches in the Diocese of London *may* open for private prayer as from next Monday (15th June) and that - socially distanced - funerals may also take place inside our buildings. After all the negative comments we have received we are relieved that we can take these first steps at last. Inside Church there will be two new things to notice. The first is the provision of hand sanitiser. The second is the large 'Book of Remembrance' for people to write down the names of loved ones who have died during the pandemic. But of course the book will also be available for any thoughts, prayers and hopes that people would like to share. In this way we trust we will be part of the healing process that our community needs to go through after such a long lock-down. After all isn't that what churches are for too ... ?

FAVOURITE HYMNS Thanks to Louise Ahmet for this week's reflection: *"I sing this beautiful song to Benjy before he goes to sleep. He joins in the actions and finds some parts very funny. It is a really positive hymn that makes us feel happy and teaches us to be thankful for the simple things God gives us and for making us special and different. I also teach it to the children in my school and their faces light up when they perform it with all the actions."*

*If I were a butterfly,
I'd thank you, Lord, for giving me wings,
and if I were a robin in a tree,
I'd thank you, Lord, that I could sing,
and if I were a fish in the sea,
I'd wiggle my tail and I'd giggle with glee,
but I just thank you, Father, for making me 'me'.
For you gave me a heart,
and you gave me a smile,
you gave me Jesus
and you made me your child,
and I just thank you, Father,
for making me 'me'.*

*If I were an elephant,
I'd thank you, Lord, by raising my trunk,
and if I were a kangaroo,
you know I'd hop right up to you,
and if I were an octopus,
I'd thank you Lord, for my fine looks,
but I just thank you, Father,
for making me 'me'. For you gave me a heart...*

*If I were a wiggly worm,
I'd thank you, Lord, that I could squirm,
and if I were a billy goat,
I'd thank you, Lord, for my strong throat,
and if I were a fuzzy wuzzy bear,
I'd thank you Lord, for my fuzzy, wuzzy hair,
but I just thank you, Father,
for making me 'me'. For you gave me a heart...*