

In July the DCC decided not to resume Sunday Services within the church building at the present time, but to open our church building for private prayer, initially on a trial basis. Do pray for us, that as we enter into the autumn we are led by God in the decisions we make, and have the courage to follow Him as we seek to share Christ's love within our community.

St John's Bellingdon

June and July are usually busy times for St. John's Bellingdon with the Village Fete and a Flower Festival or exhibition at church with a celebration songs of praise style service but, of course, this year was all different! But we did still manage a Flower Festival online – the arrangements were safely delivered to the car park and then taken into church – and for the first time in 16 weeks we filmed the service and the flowers in the Tin Tabernacle! (If you're interested, you'll find the service on the Parish YouTube channel in the service for 05 July). We've celebrated a couple of notable birthdays but also been saddened by the sudden death of Derek Chandler who was a well-liked and respected member of our congregation.

We're now filming much of our weekly service in church but, given the size of the building, we're still a long way off being able to hold our regular Sunday services in the 'Tin Tabernacle'. But we're still making our plans for the Autumn, for harvest, and beyond and, of course, looking forward to welcoming Edward as both Team Rector and Rector of St John's Bellingdon (as well as St, Mary's!)

St. Mary's Church

The first service in the church building for over three months took place on Sunday 5th July at 7pm with a congregation of around 20. We reflected on the flawless words of God from Psalm 12, discussed, prayed, laughed, cried and worshipped together. The 10am services have continued on Youtube and we have had two other 7pm services in the building, which have been streamed, live to Youtube. A dedicated team, headed up by John Spence, have done technological wonders to make this happen. We've resumed funerals and weddings in the church building and have continued to meet over Zoom after Sunday services, at monthly prayer meetings and as amalgamated small groups. There is much to be thankful for - though many people are finding the weary days of lockdown hard. Young families and teenagers seem to have been particularly affected. Please pray that we would receive this as discipline from a Father who loves us. We've enjoyed the Parish-wide holiday club, and look forward to Edward's arrival in September.

Dear Friends across the Parish,

How good to reflect on Jesus praying for us here in Chesham in the last part of his prayer recorded in John 17: *“My prayer is not for them (the first disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* (Jn 17:20-21)

What an amazing privilege, that by hearing the gospel message and believing in Jesus, we are brought into intimate fellowship with our Triune God; and in Him, we are united as one people. Jesus prays for our unity in God, so that others may see it in our loving fellowship, and believe for themselves that Jesus is worth believing in, as the One who came from Heaven.

As we begin to unlock our churches, we are all moving at different speeds for good reasons, wanting to be responsible in following government guidelines, but giving opportunity to gather again where we are able. Seeking to maintain unity within our congregations is difficult as some are keen to move forwards quickly while others are much more cautious; some have already been able to gather together while others have not had that joy. These differences have potential to divide, so let's pray for that ongoing unity in God within our church families.

Let's pray also for that ongoing unity across our 7 churches in the Parish. It is good to share news again, so that we can be informed of what is going on and pray for one another. We have enjoyed a unity in the staff team through these last months and have sought to encourage each other in the not insignificant challenges. It has been wonderful this week to see the collaboration in putting together the online Eureka! Holiday Club. Seeking to reach children across the Parish, it has been great to have lots of different faces from various churches on the screen, as we demonstrate that ongoing unity in God.

We are all very excited about the arrival in Chesham of Edward & Liz Bowes-Smith and their family in the coming weeks, with the induction and welcome services on September 14th, and Edward's first Sunday at St Mary's on the 20th. Let's be praying for them in their move and as they settle into life and ministry in Chesham. As the Team Rector, Edward will be a figure of unity leading us together in mission as a Parish in the coming years; but of course our true unity will be not be found anywhere other than in God himself, just as Jesus prayed.

With love in Christ
John

Christ Church

After 21 weeks without worship in our building we returned for a said celebration of the Eucharist last Sunday. Wardens Chris and Stephen have worked hard to ensure we have supplies and the correct procedures in place to enable us to gather safely. We are grateful for the PCC's support as we have navigated the past months, supported people in need and continued to investigate potential technology for recording services. Our focus has been on keeping our community connected and supporting one another in our journey of faith. Each week people from Christ Church, St George's and St John's have contributed to our recorded weekly worship and Revd Chris Gercke, assisted by Dan Godwin, have woven together a service uploaded to YouTube. Estelle Foster and others have ensured our small church@5 family are in touch with a service via Zoom every fortnight. Earlier in the summer, along with St George's members, we concluded a well-supported Tuesday evening Zoom learning group from the 'Pilgrim' series, focussed on the Lord's Prayer. In the autumn, by popular demand to grow deeper in our faith together, we will launch into another.

Emmanuel Church

It has been a joy for many to have some greater freedom to meet for fellowship in the last few weeks. Home Groups have met in gardens, there have been informal Sunday picnics, and families have been able to meet other families. Of course our life together as a church is still very limited, but we have enjoyed the opportunity to gather on three Sunday evenings for worship. It was strange having to book in, sit socially distanced with faces covered, unable to sing, but it was wonderful to hear other voices saying a Psalm, confessing sins, and praying the Lord's Prayer together. We are thankful for online worship, but continue to lament the great loss of meeting together, especially missing our children and young people. It is difficult to plan for the Autumn with all the uncertainties and changing guidelines, and yet we trust God to lead us forward as a church family, and look forward to the arrival of a new Team Rector.

Hope Church

As a leadership team we have taken a cautious approach to re-opening the building to Sunday services and decided to re-gather from 2 August, offering places to those in our congregation who do not have access to the internet and others who find it difficult to login. We welcomed 16 people on that first Sunday back who were overjoyed at returning despite all wearing face coverings and resisting the urge to sing as they watched our pre-recorded online service.

Recording services has meant we can be more adventurous in song choices and we have included quite a few new worship songs in recent weeks. Like all of us, we face challenges in the coming months. Some faithful key workers are either moving on or stepping down from their ministry, and we are grateful for their service. Among them is our Pastor Jonathan, who has recovered his health and wellbeing, but has concluded that the role of Community Pastor is not the Lord's best for him. Please pray for him, and for the Parish and Hope leaders as we seek the Lord for the next steps in pastoral leadership among us

Your prayers would be appreciated as a couple of volunteers are stepping down from Children's ministry and also one of them uploads our online content to YouTube so their technical expertise will be missed. We extend gratitude to both of them for their commitment.

St George's

Over the last months, the main subject of conversation around the parish, indeed, the world, has been Covid 19. Although some say that things are improving, this has not been reflected in Church life, where Churches remain closed. Wardens continue to receive directives and requirements for risk assessments, along with other actions.

St. George's is up to speed here, with a risk assessment that has changed in order to direct that masks must be worn. We also have the necessary hand sanitisers and other items to open for private prayer. An email has gone out to the congregation asking if folk would attend St George's for private prayer. It would appear that there is little demand for this at this time. On a positive note, the Sunday Service on YouTube, a joint production with St John's, Ashley Green and Christ Church, appears very popular. It may well be that a 'live stream' of an actual service will still be needed after 'normal' services resume. St George's is more than willing to take on such a challenge, along with the other satellite Churches.

St John's Ashley Green

Though we may be exiled from our building, God's people continue to be Church to each other and the wider community as we join in with God in love. Working in collaboration with our brothers and sisters at Christ Church and St George's, our weekly online services have continued to support and encourage our church family. A real blessing of this season has been how we have been able to share this with family and friends around the world, a reminder of Christ's reconciling love. A big thank you to our pastoral care team, who have continued to offer much needed support to many. Sadly, over these past few months several much loved members of our church family and wider community have passed away. Please do continue to pray for those who are grieving, and us as we support them.