



3rd April 2020

Dear friends,

What a whirlwind these last few weeks have been. Like everyone, I have had to respond quickly to the situation. My thanks to everyone on staff and throughout the church for making things happen in order that we can continue effectively as a community, not least on a Sunday.

As much as this time has been exhausting, I have to say it has also been exhilarating. As I was saying on Sunday, the building is closed but the church is very much open. Yes, it is a time of crisis, but it is also a time of real opportunity to try new things, and to put our faith on the line. Talking with ministers on zoom this week (where else?), we all felt the same. This is our time as the body of Christ to be at the vanguard of change in our world. And I say this in the light of Easter of course.

As in my previous letter, let me offer you some headings. You don't have to read them all at once. If you are anything like me, my eyes glaze over. But even if you picked just one or two headings, you will be engaging at a very deep level with what is going on in our church at the moment.

Holy Week and Easter

In a time of crisis, it is so important to maintain proper rhythms, and to observe these wonderful festival seasons, even if we can't meet together. In what some people call Holy Week, we shall be live streaming a series of reflections on Monday-Thursday this coming week, 9-9:30pm, trying to relate different aspects of the chapel to the Passion story.

Then on Good Friday we shall be hosting live stream a (virtual) communion service at 8pm. You might want to have some bread and wine ready beforehand, so we can take communion together as a whole church. On Easter Sunday we will be meeting on live stream at 10am in what will be very much an across the church celebration; and then meeting again on Easter Sunday evening at 6:30pm, during which some of our young people will be leading worship and prayers.

This Palm Sunday we shall be live streaming at 10am and 6:30pm, as usual. For all live-streaming services: <https://guildfordbaptist.streameventlive.com/login>

We are also making CDs for those of you who don't have internet. If you are not already on our list, do contact Alysha at the church office number: 01483 575008.

As I write, we are looking into telephone connections to our live-stream, and to zoom. Watch this space.

For your interest, I will be starting a daily written reflection on Easter Monday morning which will continue all the way to Pentecost. You will be able to find it on the website each morning, along with a prayer for the day.

Pastorates

It so wonderful to see Pastorates taking on a new life at this time - using zoom and WhatsApp, as well as the time-honoured methods of emails and phone calls. Pastorates have always been an important place of fellowship and care, but at this time they are even more necessary as a way for the church body to stay connected. If you are not currently in a pastorate, I would like to encourage you to join one now. Simply contact Elizabeth Hodkinson on 07971 239371 or elizabeth.hodkinson@guildfordbaptist.org, and she will help to link you up with one.

Midday Prayer

A reminder that we are gathering at midday Monday to Friday, to pray together just for 15-20 mins. It has been great to see people on zoom, and I provide the link here so that you can join.

www.guildfordbaptist.org/dailyprayer

Fasting

Several of you have been asking whether we might consider fasting during this time. As always with a church that commits to fasting, some people will simply not be able to do that for health reasons, or simply because it is not practicable. But aside from that, some of us on the leadership team have decided to commit to fasting on a Friday (either the whole day, or part of the day) for a season, and you may want to join us in this. Our purpose is to stay open to the Holy Spirit: His power, His comfort and His direction.

Mercy Ministries at Millmead

- **Lifeboat**

Our Lifeboat Fund has existed for many years to help people in financial difficulties. Given the economic situation we are in, and aware already of people who are facing loss of earnings, we are keen to build this fund up even more, so that we can respond as best we can to the need. If you are able to give, you can do a bank transfer to:

Bank: NatWest

Sort Code: 60-09-21

A/c: 74673114

Name: The Millmead Financial Lifeboat Trust

Reference: Donor name

Alternatively, you can send a cheque to the church office, payable to: The Millmead Financial Lifeboat Trust (gift aid as well if you can).

If you want to apply for help, or know someone else who is in need, please contact one of the pastoral team. Clearly, the more funds we have, the more we will be able to help.

- **Food Bank**

Thank you for the wonderful donations to the North Guildford Food Bank last week! They are really grateful for Millmead's help and were able to give food out to over 200 people. This week they need donations of: sugar, tinned spaghetti, spray clean, flour, oil, long life puddings and toilet rolls. Drop off at Millmead on Tuesday, between 9.30am-11.30am.

If you prefer to give financially then the bank details are:

Bank: Lloyds

Sort code: 30-93-74

A/c: 66556468

Name: North Guildford Food Bank

Reference: Donor name

- **Food supplies for our Church Community**

For those struggling to shop and not connected to a pastorate please contact Ruth Cheah who is currently sourcing food supplies. Ruth's email for this brand-new ministry is millmeadfoodconnection@gmail.com You will be pleased to know that this ministry is also beginning to extend to the wider community.

Church Matters

- **Church Building Project**

Work is still progressing, albeit much more slowly. Meantime, the BU have offered a three-month holiday from loan repayments (including interest payments) so we are in the process of applying for that. Given the priority at the moment of maintaining our staff, our world partners, and the various ministries that we run, we will be deferring our April gift day for the building fund until the summer.

- **Church Meeting**

Given the huge amount of work to get Sunday's set up on live-stream, preparations for Easter, and also the need to work out how we might best live-stream our church meetings to include participation, we have decided to defer our church meeting on Thursday April 16th to Thursday May 7th.

- **Staff on Furlough**

In response to the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, we have agreed with several of our staff that they will now be 'on furlough', as it is called, for the duration of the current restrictions. The staff in this category are Suzi Bragger, Sara Davison, Elaine Grover, Rob Mansell, Sandra Stacey and James Talbot-Hammond. Once on furlough, it is no longer allowable to work in the role that a person was employed for,

but we will still be appreciating Rob in his voluntary contributions to our live streaming on Sundays, and all these staff are able to have the normal contacts enjoyed by all members of our fellowship.

We will be continuing to pay these staff 100% of their salaries, whilst hoping to recoup 80% of those costs from the Government in due course. We're very grateful to Mike Bragger for handling the residual caretaking/cleaning needs at the Millmead Centre; all other staff are continuing to work, but from home, so do please contact them in the normal way by email.

One Day at a Time

So, lots to think about and pray about. We are now beginning to receive, as I am sure you can imagine, many requests from outside organisations who have been impacted by this crisis. So please do pray for us as we seek to discern what things to support, and indeed what things to bring to your attention.

In closing, thank you for your encouragements about my venture into the world of YouTube. Someone thought I was speaking from a sauna! In my talk I mentioned a quote that Rob Mansell sent me. Here it is:

Yesterday is gone,
Tomorrow is uncertain.
Today is here

In other words, one day at a time (Matt 6:34). And remember: His mercies are new every morning!

The Peace of the Lord to you

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