



19th June 2020

Dear friends,

In the interests of keeping you up-to-date, this is my sixth letter since the coronavirus outbreak. It feels like we have been in this place for a good deal longer than three months, and it's not that things are going to suddenly return back to normal, so I intend to write for as long as is needed. I hope you have found them encouraging as well as relevant.

The first thing I do want to say, as we start to come out of this time, is a huge thank you to everyone – Staff, Elders, Deacons, Pastorate Leaders, Pastoral Care Team, Prayer Ministry, Youth Team, Children's Team, and countless other areas of the life of the church – for responding so adeptly to the crisis we are in. The fact that the building project has continued apace throughout this time is simply astonishing. We thank Colin and the Project Team for that – as well as our builders of course. And finally, a special thanks to our tech team, worship leaders, all-age team, and the ever-present Rob Mansell, for allowing us not only to continue on a Sunday, but to develop in all kinds of new ways. I can assure you that none of this experience will be lost. Virtual is not substitute for actual, as I am sure you agree, but that is not to say there is nothing we can't take from this time and build into the future.

Which leads me to say, on behalf of the whole leadership team, that we really do intend for us to be back together again as a church. It may take a while. The challenge of coming out of lockdown, as everyone is discovering, may prove harder than going into lockdown. But I assure you that we are not going to let things just drift. We are already exploring the possibility of some form of Sunday evening worship sometime in July (with live-stream) as a kind of trial; and I am aware also of other developments elsewhere in the life of the church where, bit by bit, we can start meeting together.

Chapel Open for Prayer

Speaking of new developments, you will be pleased to know that our Chapel at Millmead will be open for individual prayer from next Monday (22nd June). We would welcome you to come along if you are able. This is a key time in the life of the church, and we want to be praying for all that will emerge in the coming weeks and months, particularly as the building work reaches its completion. You will have the bonus of seeing the new building for yourself as you come and pray. It is very exciting to see it develop!

We will be following government guidelines to make the building as safe as possible. To that end we would ask you to do the following:

Please bring your own materials (Bible, prayer resources, pens etc. that you will want to hold/touch). There will be prayer materials to look at in the Chapel, but we would encourage you not to touch them.

You can book a 45-minute prayer session via ChurchSuite and come down to the Chapel as an individual or as a household. Households with children can come in the final hour of the day so that we can do a thorough clean of the room afterwards.

Times for prayer:

Weekdays: 9.00am-12.00pm; 1.00-4.00pm.

Saturdays: 9.00am-12.00pm.

We will not be able to provide refreshments although you can use the water cooler. Please bring your own water bottle. And why not take a selfie as you come into the building and send it to Anika for the purpose of a photo montage that celebrates people coming back to Millmead.

Chapel Prayer Space sign-up for slots can be accessed in the following ways:

1. Via MyChurchSuite – just search My Events for ‘Chapel Prayer Space’ and select the date and time to sign up
2. Via the website calendar, following this link and selecting the date from the calendar:
<https://www.guildfordbaptist.org/whats-on/calendar/>

Garden Hospitality – Sunday 19th July

Given the current constraints on gathering indoors, we have not been able to hold one of our normal Hospitality Sundays for a while. I am sure many of you are missing the opportunity to meet up for fellowship over a meal, so we thought – why not have an outdoors Hospitality Sunday? The plan is for as many of us as possible to meet up for tea, either in our gardens or in public parks or the countryside more generally.

If you would like to host a tea, you can invite your own guests, or you can have guests assigned to you, or do a mixture of both. If you would like to be a guest, you simply register your interest, and we will enjoy pairing you up with a host. You will find details in this week’s bulletin.

The tea can be quite simple – the main thing is our fellowship together, which many of us have been missing badly. When we pair hosts with guests, we will make sure we limit the overall group size to fit with whatever the government guidance is in July – as well as hosts’ preferences, of course. At this stage you just need to register to be a host or guest; you will then receive further details.

A note from Elizabeth who has taken this initiative:

‘I’m personally looking forward to this. There is something special about fellowship over a meal, and I am encouraged by the thought of many of us gathering together on 19 July. We are, after all, one family and household – the household of God – and it’s good for us to gather in whatever way we can. That said, I’m very conscious of those whose health means that they will not be able to join us in person. We do pray for God’s particular grace and blessing on you at this time.’

Children and Families' Ministry

I am sure you will all want to send your love, congratulations and best wishes to Lydia Birmingham, our Children and Families' Pastor, who will be going on maternity leave shortly. Lydia is planning for her last day to be Sunday 5th July, so that she can take some well-earned holiday before her baby is due. Thank you so much, Lydia for your excellent, creative leadership of our children's ministry. We will miss you!

However, I'm very pleased to tell you that we have invited Wendy Cook to fill an interim role of Children and Families' Coordinator. Wendy and family (husband Neil and son Will) have been coming to our church for some time now. In her professional life, Wendy spent 7 years up to 2019 as the Manager of the Little Stars Pre-School at Emmanuel Church, and in the last year she has been employed as a Home School Link Worker at Northmead Junior School. Wendy also has many years of experience as a volunteer helper in Sunday schools and has a great passion for sharing the good news of Jesus with children.

Wendy is going to continue in her employment at Northmead and serve the church in a voluntary capacity. She is already involved in Lasers and is getting to know the great team of children's leaders which we are privileged to have in this church. Wendy will begin her role formally on 6th July and can be contacted on wendy.cook@guildfordbaptist.org. Wendy will not be able to give as many hours to her role as Lydia has done, and so we plan to keep this arrangement under review. But we do sense God's hand in this providential availability of Wendy. Do pray for her – it is hard to take on a new role at this time when we can't meet together face-to-face.

Weddings at Millmead

Please do pray for a number of couples who are waiting on the Government to allow for weddings to take place, albeit limited scale. It is not clear to us why this is taking such a long time to decide over. Indeed, you may have already signed a petition asking the authorities to get a move on. But do remember, in particular, Joanna and Tim who were due to marry a couple of weeks ago, and Amy-Jane and Luke, who are due to marry in August. Let's pray that things will become possible very soon.

Covid-19 Fund

Thank you so much for giving so generously to the Covid-19 Relief Fund, which we launched on Easter Sunday. This has enabled us to respond quickly to the needs of many charities who are struggling to keep afloat. Just yesterday, we became aware of yet another youth organisation that is struggling. Hence, we shall be keeping this fund open for the foreseeable future, and would ask you, among the many other calls upon your giving, to consider this as a great way of engaging with the crisis we are passing through.

An Interest Free Loan Fund for the Self-Employed in Guildford

In the same vein, I would like to make you aware of a new initiative that we want to launch, as soon as is practically possible.

A donor from the Millmead membership has given a minimum of £25,000 to 'pump prime' a fund to provide interest free loans to the self-employed in the Guildford and surrounding areas. The intention is to advertise this fund widely, through agencies like CAB.

In this context self-employed includes both those who operate as sole traders and those who operate through a service company. Priority will be given to those who have not benefitted significantly from a Government scheme.

To be clear, these are not business loans. Rather, they are small interest free loans (up to £1,000) to help people with personal finances at a time when things are very challenging. Most importantly, it will be another chance for us as a church to reach out to the wider community and show the love of Christ.

Please pray as we try to put shape to this initiative. Pete Jeffery has kindly offered to assist us in this matter.

Our hope is that others in the Guildford community, as well as in the church of course, would provide donations to support this very specific, Covid-related fund.

Closing Words

I am sorry this is such a long letter. I know these days people like snippets, but each one of these items do merit some proper attention.

I do intend to write again, not least to follow up on the matters I wrote about last week. In many ways we are only at the beginning of the challenges that have presented themselves to us in the last few months. And whatever we feel about these matters, and whatever differences we hold about what this all represents, I am sure you can agree with me on two vital truths: first, that God is sovereign over the affairs of our world; and second, that he asks us to walk in faith and not in fear. As Paul says to Timothy: 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline' (2 Tim 1:7).

So good to see some of you face-to-face in recent weeks. And so good to know that Sam Daniel is now home. Our thanks and praise to God for this remarkable recovery, and to all those at the Royal Surrey who looked after our dear brother so wonderfully.

The Peace of the Lord

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