



Ascension Day  
21<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Dear friends,

What challenging times we are living through. And how much grace we still need as we try to emerge from this period of lockdown. We pray for much wisdom as every aspect of our society tries to navigate a way forward. We pray for our government as they work hard towards solutions for something that we all still trying to get our heads around.

On a personal note, I want to thank you for the very many messages of encouragement. They are a great spur to all of us on the team to keep going, to keep trusting, and to be bold. I am in daily contact now with leaders across the country, and whilst we are all committed to doing what we need to do, we are also keen to be at the vanguard of change. None of us want to return completely back to normal – so much of it was unsustainable; nor do we want to stay in this ‘virtual’ world forever. What we do want is to enter the future with faith and without fear. So, let’s stay prayerful as a church and believe that the best is yet to come.

Regarding meeting again on Sundays, it is most unlikely we will be able to gather as the *whole* church for quite a while. The government are talking of allowing churches to open after July 4<sup>th</sup>, but given the issues around social distancing, I cannot see we will be able to gather as a whole congregation for some time. Realistically, it is going to be a combination of live-stream and a limited size congregation in the first instance (or what one person jokingly called ‘a studio audience’).

Be assured we are doing a lot of thinking about all of this, in relation not only to Sundays but also to youth and children’s work, pastorates and many other aspects of our life together. As the building comes to a wonderful completion, we are thinking about how we might start using these wonderful new spaces.

We are monitoring government guidelines around churches, complying wholeheartedly because of the situation the whole country finds itself in, and questioning, where necessary, if there seems to be a reasonable and common-sense way forward. Personally, I have concerns for the church at large, and my concerns are not about anti-religious sentiment as such (because there isn’t any at present), but more to do with the way churches are being treated as leisure activities. It is no surprise, I guess. The church has been categorised in that way for a good long while now. I just don’t want us to buy into that idea as a Christian community. I am writing this on Ascension Day of course. The day when we celebrate the Lordship of Christ over every sphere of life, not just our private, religious world.

## **Holiday**

On a practical note, a number of us on the staff team really are in need a break after this whirlwind of a time. So, I shall be off this Friday May 22<sup>nd</sup> until next Thursday May 28<sup>th</sup>, returning in time for Pentecost! Anika is off next Tuesday (26<sup>th</sup>) and Wednesday (27<sup>th</sup>); Karen will be off from 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June; Chris Toms is taking Half Term off, 25<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> May. The Church Office will be closed for Bank Holiday Monday (25<sup>th</sup>).

And speaking of time away, Rob will be taking a much-needed break this weekend from live-streaming, pre-recordings, zoom, piano, singing, and anything else that makes Sundays happen. He has been a complete star, and we pray he has a good rest – although not before he helps us lead the Ascension Day service this evening at 8:15pm: <https://guildfordbaptist.streameventlive.com/login>

## **Youth Weekend Away**

A reminder to pray for Chris, Abby, Dan, and the team, as they host another Youth Weekend Away, this Friday. Last weekend was a great success, so please pray for our older youth as they come together on zoom – all 29 of them! Thanks everyone in the Youth Dept and everyone in the Children's Dept for the astonishing way you have responded to the need of this time. We are truly in awe!

## **Covid-19 Relief Fund**

There is always a danger when you publish information about the monies that the church has given out that you violate the principle of 'not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing'. On the other hand, it is quite inspiring to see how many different groups we have had contact with over this past few months, and how quickly we have been able to dispense funds as a result of your generosity.

Please do keep giving to this Covid-19 Relief Fund. In terms of the scale of the crisis, these sums are a 'drop in the ocean', but then again, we serve a Lord who can feed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes!

Giving so far:

BMS Project - providing essential food and hygiene items to vulnerable families in Tunisia (£2000)

Christian Pastor relief in Pakistan - a project identified by our world partners Tariq and Angelina Waris, which is providing food for Full Gospel Assemblies (FGA) pastors who currently have no income (£2000)

Christian Youth Enterprises (CYE) - a Christian activity centre for young people, based in Chichester, which has launched a lifeline appeal (£1000)

Disability Challengers – a local charity providing inclusive play and leisure activities for disabled children and young people (£1000)

Grassroots Trust - a project set up by Hugo and Sharon Anson, to relieve poverty by sponsorship

programmes. Covid-19 relief work involves food parcels and provision of textbooks for home study (£1000)

Helping the homeless on the mountain at Muizenberg, South Africa - a project identified by our world partners John and Shan Barry (£1000)

Kings Rugby Development Academy - a project identified by Kim Tan, helping young people from the Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya, which is currently providing food for needy families (£2000)

Roads of Success - a project set up by Yvette and Jacqueline Isaac to help displaced refugees around the world. Our donation is helping to provide a shipment to Syria (£2000)

Shooting Star Chase Children's Hospice - a Covid-19 appeal (£2000)

Starfish Asia - a charity in Pakistan set up by our world partners Mike and Kirsten Wakely, to support Christian schools, which has launched a Covid-19 Emergency Appeal to provide food for needy families (£1000)

Stoke Community Support - for Stoke/Bellfields emergency hot meal programme (£2000)

St Peter's, Brockley, food bank - the food bank of Daisy Edwards' church (£500)

Venezuelan refugees in Colombia - a need identified by our world partners Ian and Juliana Horne, where Covid-19 has disrupted the refugees' usual sources of support (£2000)

YMCA Guildford - support for work amongst unaccompanied asylum-seeking children whose education has been disrupted by Covid-19 (£2000)

### **Daily Hope**

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has launched a free national phone line as a simple new way to bring worship and prayer into people's homes while church buildings are closed. 'Daily Hope' offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. Phone: 0800 804 8044

### **Speak to your Soul**

Do go onto this part of our website. There is some quite stunning artwork there, and some beautiful video clips. You can also find here a wonderful message from Murray Salisbury on Psalm 23. Click on this link and you will see what I am on about:

<https://www.guildfordbaptist.org/covid-19/speak-to-your-soul/>

So many more things to mention. For some of them you might want to refer to previous letters I have written during this time. And be assured I shall be writing again soon. Meantime, may I wish you a very Happy Ascension Day. In the words of the famous Wesley hymn:

Rejoice, the Lord is King

Ian