



The Deanery of Westminster (St Margaret) during COVID-19

Our deanery, of more than 20 parish churches and a variety of chaplaincies, was due to come together towards the end of June for our annual garden party. This was not possible because of restrictions in place and so we issued an invitation to everyone to say something of their experiences during the pandemic. These experiences are relayed here. They say much about the remarkable Christian communities which exist in central London.

The contributions were written over a four week period and are not therefore a precise snapshot, but they have been collated and curated in this one document to give a flavour of what happened in our part of London.

The Rev'd Philip Chester
Area Dean

David Richards
Lay Chair

August 2020

[Holy Trinity Church, Prince Consort Road \(0301\)](#)

From Chris Cann:

Holy Trinity is currently in an interregnum, following the retirement of the Reverend Liz Russell in February.

When lockdown began on 18 March, the Churchwardens immediately decided to experiment with holding the regular Sunday Service online, using Zoom Video Conferencing. The Parish uses the 1662 Book of Common Prayer for our principal services, alternating between a Eucharist and Morning Prayer. As the services will take place online, the Zoom Sunday services have used the office of Morning Prayer from the BCP, with readings and a short address, but without music, which forms a major part of our usual services, and which has been much missed.

Churchwarden Paul Meitner had found cover for all services to the end of August and most priests have been able to adapt to the online format. Our congregation includes a number of elderly people and prior to the first service, an email was sent out to everyone on the Parish mailing list explaining how Zoom Video Conferencing works and how the service will run online. A number of parishioners were a little wary of the technology, but "Zoom Church", as it has become known has been a huge success, well beyond all expectations and the congregation is now regularly joined by past members who now comprise the "Holy Trinity diaspora", logging on from as far away as Dijon, France, Auckland, New Zealand and Ottawa, Canada. It has also been an invaluable lifeline to the frail and house-bound members of the congregation, and has been a good way to monitor the pastoral needs of the Parish during the current Interregnum. Indeed, the success has led us to look into ways of live-streaming our services once we move back into the church building itself, which we anticipate will happen in early September.



For the last three weeks, we have also experimented with a limited reopening of the church for Private Prayer on Thursday lunchtimes, when adequate stewarding is available from parish volunteers. Our colleague and friend from the adjacent Imperial College Chaplaincy, the Reverend Andrew Willson, has also opened his midweek online led-meditations to parishioners, in the absence of our usual Wednesday lunchtime Eucharist.

In short, the congregation are in good heart and prayerful faith. Particular thanks must go to the Archdeacons, Luke Miller and Adam Atkinson, for taking such good care of the parish and helping with many of our online services.

[St Matthew's, Westminster \(0302\)](#)

From Margaret Robinson, Jane Kennedy, and Fr Jonathan Aitken:

We have faced up to the challenges of Lockdown and the first month afterwards on a wing and a prayer – rather more of the latter but it seems to be working!

On Tuesday March 17, the day the Government issued its Stay at Home order, which also closed all places of worship, we celebrated our final weekday Mass. The Pastoral Assistant on duty sorrowfully observed (he was due to start his Ordination training at an Oxford College in September): *“I guess I have just attended my last ever Mass at St Matthew’s”*.

Happily this gloomy prophesy turned out to be wrong. Our staff team rapidly developed expertise in recording services via Facebook and then created a YouTube channel as a platform for regular worship. A well-received Children’s liturgy was started on Sunday mornings at the beginning of the pandemic. It was followed by an online Mass from the church led by our clergy with recorded readings and contributions from outside members of the congregation. A number of guest of preachers contributed to the online services, including the priest from a parish in Paris. We also held an open air Mass in Church courtyard garden (see photograph below).

We have taken advantage of technology to keep up with each other in other ways. PCC meetings have moved online and we are adjusting to Church of England guidelines in ways of administering and recording decisions made in a new format.



Socially, we now have a weekly online afternoon tea with the congregation and with American friends, whose online coffee morning coincides with afternoon tea in British Summer Time. People who join in also come from several other countries and it provides a wonderful opportunity to meet and share.

Throughout Lockdown we kept in touch with isolated or vulnerable members of our congregation via a telephone roster. So one way or another we feel that we have maintained many of our links as a community even though we have been physically separated.

Also we have maintained St Matthew’s ministry to Christians in the Civil Service while they work from home. Our clergy have led or attended virtual prayer meetings every Monday for the past four months organised by the Christians in Government network of Civil Servants.

St Matthew’s School has partially reopened following extensive preparations and risk assessment thanks to the efforts of the Headteacher and her team.

Opening the church building for services and then for private prayer were also milestones, which allowed recorded services to take place in the familiar environment and to provide somewhere for people to reflect and pray.

As soon as the regulations permitted we joyfully reopened St Matthew's for public worship. The first Sunday Mass after Lockdown was attended by a congregation of 30 including several newcomers. The service started with the blessing of the church doors followed by a procession – all observing the recommended social distancing measures.

We now have beautiful church music on Sundays provided by our Musical Director and Organist Nigel Groome and our Soloist Cantor Rowena Ashby.

We also celebrate a weekly said Mass for the local community every Wednesday at 12 noon.

Beyond the walls of St Matthew's our clergy make pastoral visits and support other churches. Recently our clergy have officiated at two weddings and two funerals. They have also preached during Lockdown via Zoom to six virtual congregations in other parts of the United Kingdom.

So St Matthew's is alive and active! We do not minimise the challenges that lie ahead of us. But we have seen that the changes we have had to make are opening up new opportunities for thinking laterally about the way we offer our services, support our community and reach out to our people.

We are deeply grateful to all those who have contributed to the life of St Matthew's during the Lockdown period. We look forward to the future with trust and prayerful hope.



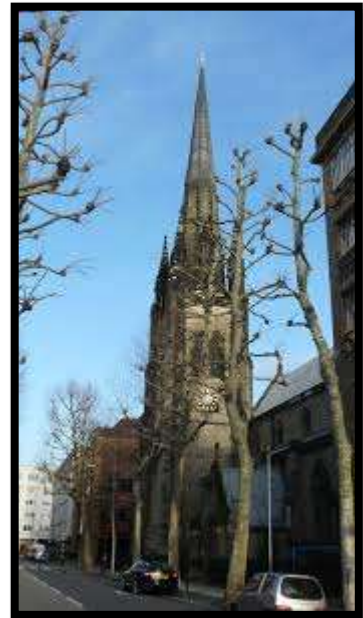
St Stephen's, Rochester Row (0303)

From Steve Waldron and the Rev'd Graham M Buckle:

We have kept morning and evening prayer going from the first day of lockdown via zoom with our friends from St Barnabas together with friends and associates from India, South Africa and our link church in NYC - all joining us, with sometimes as many as 20+ people...we have continued with all the other services live via zoom. We have engaged in a couple of joint projects with Westminster school: writing and delivering letters and plants to people. We have also run a volunteer scheme to ensure our vulnerable and isolated people are visited and contacted regularly. One of the most important means of communication was through our daily devotion on our website - <http://www.sswsj.org/daily-devotions.html> which was updated every day from day one of the lockdown. It had something topical and devotional every single day since lockdown: this gives a real insight into what we were doing and what was going on both in our church, parish and world...

Highlights include:-

- a) We have been observing Morning and Evening prayer throughout the lockdown and since, available on Zoom and open for visitors now as well now in Church. Also 12.30pm weekdays.
- b) Sunday Service plus evensong has been observed on Zoom throughout with Services well attended by 45-60 logging on with children and adults numbering up 100 participating. We had Bishop Sarah join us for part of Easter Sunday and have participants now from India, Nigeria South Africa and other countries abroad. Children have had a group meeting after Sunday Service for keeping in touch.
- c) There has been a daily devotional on the website throughout including contributions from our link Church in New York and our new Lay Minister (Deacon to be).
- d) There have been occasional Zoom house groups and debates during the week.
- e) Our website has added Service materials, notices and updates every week.
- f) We are now open for private prayer two days a week on a rota including other local churches.



St Martin in the Fields (0304)

From Jim Sikorski:

St Martin in the Fields has developed a wide range of activities during the first months of the pandemic. Morning Prayer and compline as well as Sunday and midweek Eucharists have been streamed live to members of the public while other services have been open to the congregation only. An average of 250 people join the Sunday Eucharist online.

More recently the church yard has been open for prayer 4 afternoons per week and on Sunday July 5th the church building reopened for Sunday Eucharist.

A new structure of Faith Companion groups keeping regular contact between 4-5 members of the community has been set up.

The Nazareth Community have been meeting virtually and there have been Saturday morning contemplative prayers on a regular basis.

Theological study has been continuing and expanding, sometimes in conjunction with Heart Edge but at other times enabling parish Theology group meetings (attendance 40-50) and Theology Reading group meetings to take place.



Heart Edge activities have expanded significantly with virtual meetings coinciding with a large increase in the number of member organisations and the development of a very international attendance.

Musical activities have adapted with Choral music recorded by the Scholars in their homes enriching the weekly worship of 4000 Church of England parishes.

A new digital platform – St Martin's Digital – has been launched to make available many of these activities to the public.

Some activities, especially work with homeless people, has continued, but in a different form: in particular the Connection has been able to get a large number of its clients into hotels and kept them fed and supported throughout the lockdown period.

An Emergency Appeal to allow activities at St Martin's to continue despite the huge reduction in income which the church faces, has successfully reached its target with over 3000 donors responding.

St Mary le Strand (0305)

From Mthr Sarah Lenton:

Like all London churches, St Mary's church shut its doors at the beginning of Lockdown and that, we thought, was that. But no, there was a new priest in charge to appoint, so the church wardens, Sam Holmes and Margaret Stonborough, found themselves having to learn Zoom technology in the very first week, and Fr Peter Babington was duly approved via the new technology. After that the church remained undisturbed until the clergy were allowed back into their buildings again.

The moment we could we livestreamed a mass from St Mary's, with the help of the St Matthews team – who'd been living in a joint household throughout, and had

made it possible for us to produce an inventive DIY Holy Week for both congregations.

But the great joy was getting back into church properly last month, saying mass with a congregation, and being bathed in the light from our famous East window...

It filled an empty ciborium with beauty and gave the celebrant a blue rinse and alerted the Strand that the church was open again.



Our congregation has begun to trickle back, joined by some

newcomers – one of whom had a go at opening the Tabernacle for us (suitably masked)



And last week the Tuesday mass got back to double figures....



...social distancing presenting no problem to the average Anglican.

Our pastoral assistants, Will and Duncan, have been taking it in turns to lead recordings of Evensong and Compline, with music director Nigel acting as cantor from the body of the church.



The London Romanian church are back as well, saying several masses to accommodate their numbers, and enriching St Mary's with their portable icons. So we're up and running, and will be celebrating the Feast of the Assumption with an Evensong and Benediction at 6pm on August 16th – with Nigel on the organ and Sam singing solo. And of course we are looking forward to welcoming Fr Peter Babington. His licensing is on Sep 7th which, by a happy chance, is the vigil of our Patronal Festival, the Nativity of Our Lady.



[St Giles-in-the-Fields \(0306\)](#)

From Zi Ken Toh:

2020 has certainly been out of the ordinary for St Giles-in-the-Fields. Starting the year in an interregnum, following the retirement of our rector last Christmas, we had already expected a challenging year ahead for parish, but who would have guessed that the year would take such an expected turn!

Following the suspension of services and then the closure of churches in March, St Giles was not able to switch to streaming services right away, and the parish office compiled a weekly order of service for morning and evening prayer for our parishioners to follow at home, complete with links to musical settings.



Eventually thanks to the efforts of our churchwardens, administrator and the wider network of clergy, we were able to come together virtually each Sunday during the lockdown for an online service of said Matins on Zoom. While we all missed being able to physically gather in the church, it was great being to connect with our parishioners all around the country, as well as around the world who tuned in from wherever they were for a shared time of prayer. In addition to our parishioners in London, we were joined by our St Giles community from across the country and around the world with parishioners tuning in from Asia to the Americas, who took the online opportunity to rejoin the St Giles community in worship.

It was good to finally hear our bell ringing out again last Sunday, and as we transition back towards our regular service schedule, we continue to livestream our services for those unable to attend physically. Although we still miss certain aspects of our usual pattern of worship,

most notably singing, we are glad to be able to return to the church building, although we remain mindful and cautious, taking every precaution to protect each other from the virus.

*Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved:
and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea;
Though the waters thereof rage and swell:
and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same.
The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God:
the holy place of the tabernacle of the most Highest.
God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed:
God shall help her and that right early.*

Psalm 46:2-6



[St Paul's Covent Garden \(0308\)](#)

From the Rev'd Simon Grigg:

As you all know, as well as being the Parish Church of Covent Garden, St. Paul's is also known throughout the world as the Actors' Church and we have always had an especial ministry to the theatre industry. Theatre in the UK was shut down (*extremely clumsily*) by the Government on 17 March, so we were left reeling a bit sooner than other churches, though, of course, like everyone else we ceased public worship the following week.

I was immediately asked to join a brilliant initiative by SOLT (The Society of London Theatre) which brought all the theatrical charities together to raise money for all the beleaguered members of the industry. Because most theatre professionals are freelancers, they were initially excluded from the various government schemes and the first few weeks were truly grim. Things have stabilised somewhat since then, but the outlook for theatre across the UK still looks extremely fragile. It has been impossible to make the government understand how theatre works, its timescales and its business models. They also seem unable to understand the importance of theatre to the UK economy. For example, 14.5 million people went to a Premiership football match last year (*about which the government has appeared fixated*) **whilst 34 million people went to the theatre**. The theatre industry is also vital to London's tourist industry, which is a major earner for the UK.

Our own professional theatre company (www.iris theatre.com) was also forced to cancel our summer season in our gardens. Thankfully, a VERY generous individual donation will allow the company to survive but, do, please, keep theatre in your thoughts and prayers as we struggle to survive. Now that we can open again, I'm thinking of providing a socially distanced coffee time for theatre professionals on a Thursday afternoon (when many matinees would normally be playing) as a cheer up space for the industry. We will see.

We are also planning to offer our garden (which is not in use for Iris Theatre this summer) to a local family run restaurant, so that they can get back to an economic number of covers when they are allowed to re-open.



Like most churches, we got up and running with 'zoom' services from my dining room pretty promptly, missing only the first week. These have been a great success and we have had people joining us from North and South America, Berlin, Brussels and even Manchester.



We have now installed the tech. kit to stream from church, which starts on Sunday 25 June and will continue to stream the services, even after partial re-opening on July 5. We have

been open for private prayer since that was allowed and, although numbers are few (*Covent Garden still being very much a ghost town*) it has been appreciated by those who have come to pray. One lady was in floods of tears at being able to be in a church again. It's not all about numbers!

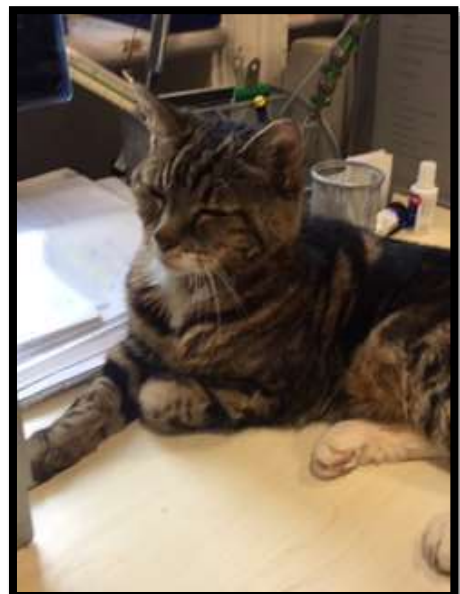
I have also become quite adept at recording assemblies that are sent out as a weekly blog to the pupils of St. Clement Danes School and I have (together with the Deputy Head) got quite good at some fun camera tricks, like appearing and disappearing and conjuring pictures out of thin air.

On top of all the sadness of the pandemic, our beautiful horse chestnut tree had to be felled after a huge chunk of it fell down one night and, very sadly, our wonderful church cat, Jonesy, died of old age during Easter week.

It was a great initiative of Fr. Philip to bring us all together for zoom chapter meetings.

Like all of you, our finances have been decimated. We have probably lost in the region of £100,000 so far. It was depressingly familiar to receive a note that said that no cut-backs were planned at a central level. I don't think the hierarchy have any idea that paying anything like the current Common Fund is not going to be an option for many of us.

We have planted a rose called 'In loving Memory' for all those who have died during the Pandemic and we will dedicate it during our first Sunday back on July 5. In the longer term we plan a memorial plaque to sit alongside it to remember the ghastly events of 2020 and our school is planning a time capsule for all the children to write their reflections on this extraordinary historic event. I have also created a photo montage of the boarded up theatre, pubs and businesses of the West End, which we scroll through with an organ accompaniment before each Sunday 'zoom' services. History in the making.



[St James's, Piccadilly \(0309\)](#)

From Pearl Willis:

The church is open again and having public services. Each Sunday, we are delighted to be welcoming a limited number of socially-distanced congregation back into the church building. We try to encourage the fullest sense of gathering together between people in the building and those watching online. There are 3 ways of participating in the Sunday service – YouTube, Zoom and in-person.

St James's Church, Piccadilly wants to be a beacon of creative, inclusive, kind, faithful and humane Christian community in the centre of London and online. We want to be as strong a voice as possible for this kind of community-building, as our society and city emerge from this incredibly stressful and demanding time.

EVENTS

During the lockdown we had a daily Zoom compline service at 9pm.

During Lent, we had begun a weekday Evening Eucharist. We were using a simple liturgy drawing on prayers, some from the Iona Community and others more home-grown. We were using music from Taizé and sharing stories. This moved to a Zoom simple evening Eucharist every Wednesday evening.

Each month on a Sunday we had an eco-contemplative liturgy on Zoom at 9.45am. Participants were invited to speak about their garden or view or object or experience of the natural world during lockdown.

Midday prayers continued each day during lockdown, from a variety of locations, via Zoom and YouTube.

The Sunday Eucharist at 11 is live on YouTube, the most public platform. St James's Piccadilly is a church that always welcomes a number of visitors week by week, often for the first time, and this platform enables visitors to join easily online without needing an invitation. The livechat function is being well used by some of our congregation and visitors. The readings and intercessions are recorded



and sent in by congregation members, keeping the normal rotas going as much as possible. After the service there is a Zoom 'coffee' for people to see each other and chat.

John Russell, our new Associate Rector, was licensed by Bishop Sarah on 7th May as guests looked on through Zoom.

During lockdown, we began running a regular programme of online Death Cafes, which provide a safe place for people to discuss any aspect of death, grief and loss. To date, over 50 people have participated.

The Four Seasons – Sat 27th June 7:30pm

The Piccadilly Sinfonietta was joined by pianist Warren Mailley-Smith in our first live-streamed concert from St James's since lockdown began. In this special socially-distanced concert there was no audience in the church, and musicians were all positioned 3 metres away from each other.

The programme:

Mozart - Piano Concerto in A major, K414

Vivaldi - The Four Seasons

There were over 60,000 views on YouTube.

God in Lockdown

The Revd Lucy Winkett led three different sessions of spiritual reflection, prayer and discussion on what this lockdown experience has meant for our souls, including writing or drawing our own psalm and writing a letter to ourselves during lockdown, to be opened in a year's time.

What have I learned?

What have I missed?

What have I gained?

Where is God?

The Gospels Aloud

Our ambitious plan to read the Gospels online continues. We are reading the Gospels aloud together online, in half-hour sessions four times a week. We read three chapters each day, with time for silent prayer in-between.

Pentecost Film Project 3.0: The trilogy.

People were invited to submit a 2-minute video of our stories of lockdown, where they were uploaded to our YouTube channel.

★ ★ **The Revd Lucy Winkett's 25th Anniversary** ★ ★

Thursday 2nd July was the 25th anniversary of Lucy's ordination. On the eve of that day, she celebrated the Wednesday Zoom Eucharist and told us a story from her life.



CONTACT GROUPS

We have remained connected as a Church.

Different groups are doing different things; some are on WhatsApp, some are emailing regularly, some are having zoom meetings and some are having phone calls.

Many new cluster groups, as well as existing groups such as the LGBTQ+ group, Circus Spirit, Camino Companions, are meeting online and keeping in touch by a huge variety of means.

In Camino Companions it was suggested that we pray each day, to set aside some time, and to keep a journal/ a note of how this goes. Like a spiritual diary. It was suggested that we include the Lord's Prayer in this, and/or an 'alternative Lord's Prayer' which was given to us. We were emailed a collection of resources to help and accompany us, along with some Scripture, poetry, wisdom and thoughts. The advice we received was to 'Pray as you can, not as you can't'. There is no 'right way' to pray. Just explore the way that is yours.

DAILY BREAD

Samples of seed were distributed to many members of the community on 15th March, when the wheat was sown. We know many of these are now thriving across London and beyond.

Our wheat is growing apace in the church's courtyard, and you can see our ongoing blog featuring poetry, science and photos here <https://www.sjp.org.uk/daily-bread.html>

This pandemic has helped us to appreciate that we are surrounded by astonishing gifts from God.

May God bless all of us in this time.



St Anne's, Soho (0310)

From the Rev'd Simon Buckley:

Silence in Soho: The streets of Soho normally only fall silent on Christmas Day. This year all my Christmases came at once, except this wasn't what I'd asked Santa for at all. After a couple of weeks of lockdown the reality of the situation really set in, and the only noise in Soho came from the Rectory. It was the sound of my dog shredding the Mission Action Plan. A sound, no doubt, echoed across the Deanery.

There have been positives in this experience, though. Long phone conversations with people with whom I normally only have a few minutes at the end of a service, seeing into the homes of far flung parishioners as they joined the zoom coffee hours and new weekly Bible study and time to finally produce a Soho Daily Prayer Diary for all members of the congregation. I got into the flow of recording assemblies for the school's YouTube channel when not intervening with social services, delivering for the local pharmacy (with others) or shopping for someone shielding home alone. We didn't live stream services. Worship at St Anne's is so much about the experience of being together that we didn't know how to create that virtually. Instead, each week we mailed out a Service of the Word for people to say at home on Sundays at 11, just as I would be saying it at St Anne's. United in Christ and united in prayer, wherever we were.

As a Church whose whole character is defined by bringing people together it has been painful to be kept apart and for our doors to be closed- though it helped that the streets were deserted so it never felt like anyone was shut out. Now we can come back together with a mixture of excitement and apprehension, we work with a lot of people who don't understand boundaries at the best of times. As for the virus itself - it struck two from our church family. One recovered after three weeks in intensive care and one I buried. I pray we've seen the worst of it.



[St George's, Hanover Square \(0311\)](#)

From the Rev'd Roderick Leece:

The vestry team (Dee Prior Administrator, and Richard Buck Verger) swung into action in early March along with Fr Alan McCormack and were able to deal with health and safety issues, and worship, the fortnight before lockdown and the fortnight afterwards when I was unwell with severe and protracted Covid19. Sadly in mid-March we lost our head server, and former Churchwarden Alan Fairbrass to Covid19. Initially over Holy Week and the Easter period we pre-recorded a Zoom service from the Rectory which Dee's husband Andrew, and brother George edited to include music on the organ and readings from congregation members. These videos were uploaded onto a brand new YouTube channel for SGHS. This grew when we returned to church during lockdown into very well-crafted videos of Sunday worship pre-recorded on excellent cameras, directed and edited by Andrew. Involving readers sending in recordings and pictures etc. and the choir being edited from their solo offerings recorded from their homes into 4 part anthems. Tragically Dee died suddenly in early June since when we have reverted to simple live Zoom services on Sundays. Having been advised that churches would not reopen until August we went ahead at short notice with the complete repair and restoration of our parquet and marble flooring. This is due to finish in a fortnight and we return to church on 16th August.

In addition our Verger has been a faithful volunteer regularly providing food for homeless people in Trafalgar Square - a local Roman Catholic initiative which we've been glad to be able to support.



[The Grosvenor Chapel, Mayfair \(0311A\)](#)

We have had services six days a week online during lockdown led by the clergy and with contributions from lay people. In addition we have had four weekly video-conferencing groups: "Coffee Time" post Sunday liturgy; Fellowship Group, Sunday at 5pm; Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life on Wednesdays; and either Sunday Club or Sunday Club social on Sundays at 3.30pm for the children. Pastoral Care was delivered by a clergy-lay team. Thank you.



St Barnabas, Pimlico (0312)

From Linda Ulrich:

Though we were closed, all services continued – partly in joint-zoom with St Stephen's for morning and evening prayer and the masses of Holy Week, and with our own mid-day mass on Wednesdays. Compline was celebrated on Thursdays as usual; for the first 5 weeks we had a break in the middle so we could all go and clap for carers.

We have introduced a virtual tea @ 3, without the cake, but with hats on:



For our Sunday celebrations, we have been joined by regular, returned, and new worshippers at our zoomed Sunday celebrations from Fr John's 'upper room':

Parishioners unable to access the Sunday service have had the pew sheet (socially distanced) delivered by hand. The notices, in the form of a weekly newsletter, are also emailed or delivered. Our Easter Day service was enlivened by a 'zoom-bombing' Bishop of London.



The St Barnabas Patronal festival took place 12 weeks into lockdown: by that time, we were well into our zooming routine, with the organist playing from his front room and a cantor singing the psalm from home. For the Patronal, our guest preacher was Rev Roderick Leece, and we were able to welcome worshippers from as far afield as Oklahoma and Dorking.

Remembrance of the Grenfell disaster was heard in the parish on June 14th as a lone bell-ringer in St Barnabas tower tolled 72 times for those killed in the fire.

During Corona time, we started a Crowd-Funding appeal to 'green' our courtyard with plants, planters and benches. The required sum has already been more than reached, and the courtyard has been prepared for its beautification in the autumn.

There was a worry that without a collection, the lack of plate-giving would deplete our budgeted finances. In fact, the congregation rallied round and our stewardship increased during lockdown.

St Gabriel's, Pimlico (0314)

From Stephen Sklaroff:

Lockdown at St Gabriel's catalysed a huge range of new and enhanced activity aimed at maintaining spiritual and material contact with our congregation (especially those who were on their own). A plan was drawn up at the start, assigning clear responsibility for different actions. We quickly created a parish WhatsApp group, which allowed the exchange of information and light-hearted commentary. An e-mail list of members of the congregation was used for daily communication about service times and other matters. A contact programme was set up for those members of the congregation not on e-mail. Written materials on how to make a spiritual communion were widely distributed and used.

Mass was live-streamed every day except Monday (at first from the church, then from the Vicar's study, then from the church again), as were Evening Prayer, Benediction and other devotions every Sunday evening. The



numbers following services this way were very encouraging. All the solemnities of Holy Week and Easter were observed. Full-scale service sheets were provided for Sunday services, alongside other prayer material (including, for example, resources for a Novena in the run-up to Pentecost). We held weekly after-Mass coffee meetings via Zoom.

Later, a stewards' rota was created and implemented, allowing the church to be opened for private prayer every weekday, attracting a pleasing number of people each day. A new risk assessment was drawn up for the full re-opening for services from 4 July, and guidance circulated to members of the congregation on the new epidemic-related rules. Mass is now being celebrated with the congregation on Sundays at 8 am, 10.30 am and 7.30 pm, and Evensong and Benediction at 6 pm. Mass is celebrated from Tuesday to Saturday at 9.30 am. We are continuing to stream all these services, and the numbers attending and watching are encouraging.

Our Mission on the Churchill Gardens Estate, *Heaven's Gate*, was also active throughout the lockdown. *Heaven's Gate* maintained regular Morning Prayer, virtual meetings for the mission team (including front-line nursing and mental health workers), and a weekly Home Group via Zoom. The Mission team also created a series of youth outreach videos on YouTube called *Thrive*, as well as video material for use as part of the forthcoming

SouthWestFest. The Mission received a Diocesan grant during the lock-down and is now gearing up to hold its first public Mass on 12 July.

During lockdown, we also completed plans for the next stage of the repair and renewal of the fabric of our beautiful Grade 2* listed church building, involving a major overhaul of our gutters and ground-level drainage, the installation of new lavatories including a fully accessible WC, a new access ramp, and the restoration of our perimeter walls and railings. Taken together, this will provide enhanced provision for all users of our building and ensure we are better equipped for the many concerts and other events we host. Work starts on 20th July.

All in all, the challenges of lockdown have been accompanied by many blessings, not least the opportunity for the parish to pull together for each other and for the Glory of God.

[St Michael's, Chester Square \(0315\)](#)

From Kate Homan:

At St Michael's, we have much to give thanks for as we reach the summer. We are grateful for God's provision over the last four months, which have seen many changes to our plans. We have really missed our usual 'in person' meetings in Sunday services, mid-week small groups, and social gatherings.

However, we're glad to say that we have benefited greatly from our online Sunday services which are followed by virtual coffee on Zoom, where we can catch up and pray for one another in breakout groups. Having moved from two separate services to one for this season, we have appreciated the strengthening of relationships across different services that has resulted. We have also enjoyed the opportunity to have guest preachers join us online from outside London, including a previous curate now based in Washington DC!

Thanks to the creativity and hard work of our staff and volunteers, our children's church has also flourished. The younger children have had short videos to watch including a Bible story, songs, crafts and exercises related to that day's theme! Our older children and youth have met online, as have all our midweek groups. An unexpected encouragement to us during this time has been the increased number of people engaging with the services and children's church online. We are seeing more engagement than we did pre-lockdown, including from friends and family members who are getting involved for the first time. We have been able to start a new home group and two book groups, all of which are working well online.

During this season we have also had an extension to our interregnum, since our new vicar, Revd Rupert Charkham, who was due to start with us in May 2020, was very unwell with the virus and his move has been delayed until September 2020 to facilitate his full recovery. We are immensely grateful to our curate, Revd Guy Axelson, for agreeing to extend his time with us for a further year. We should be grateful for your prayers for Rupert's ongoing recovery, and for Guy and our Churchwardens along with the Lay Vice-Chair of our PCC as they continue to lead us through the extended interregnum.



[St Paul's, Knightsbridge \(0316\)](#)

From Gardenia Griffiths:

What strange times we have lived through and are still living through. At St Paul's, Knightsbridge we have been blessed. Fr Alan Gyle along with Phil Davies were somehow ahead in thinking of what needed to be done to nurture and sustain us, the Parishioners at St Paul's, through this appalling pandemic. Both Fr Alan and Phil were involved personally, showing respect, friendship and strength and leading by example.

A team was set up immediately, no one on the electoral roll was left out of the loop of telephone calls, checking that they were ok, if groceries, medication or just a phone call was needed, the parish phone line was always open.

But the sustaining pattern of daily 5 o'clock prayer with psalms and readings, Sunday worship, with hymns, choir and sermon, coffee, tea and drinks parties, by Zoom, of course, meant that as a congregation we never had to feel alone. Our choir was magnificent, our director of music and our organ and cello scholars all worked so hard together from their homes, giving us superb music, too. This was achieved with the use of new technical skills for many of us!

We were also fortunate that Fr Luigi Gioia was licensed by the Bishop of London and has joined us at St Paul's as our curate, a special addition to the team. It has been a welcome decision to allow churches to open for personal prayer, we look forward to gathering together for worship again in our beautiful church and cannot thank Fr Alan enough.



[St Mary's, Bourne Street \(317\)](#)

From Shane Fletcher:

It is one of the many strange ironies of lockdown that we have all been able to see more of what other churches in the deanery have been doing, thanks to the internet. In this way our lives have been enriched by music, talks and, above all, liturgies from across the area – for which many thanks. Where St Mary's is concerned, there has been a combination of ministry outside the church as well as the continuation of our liturgical life.

In the past months, St Mary's has been helping provide meals to the homeless and vulnerable of

central London, a project instigated by the Presbytery housekeeper, Gloria Gardner, but over time involving as well sandwich makers based in Chelsea and cake makers from our own geographic parish here in Belgravia. At the height of the production line, no fewer than 250 meals were being provided each day and taken out to four drop off points around Victoria, Embankment, Waterloo and Kings Cross.



For those on the Electoral Roll, locked down at home, there were regular mailings ranging from special cards, old parish magazines, suggestions for daily prayer and even at the last a packet of Marigold seeds to sow. A demanding jigsaw of an old map of the parish was also made available to keep minds occupied, and a daily online image of one of the church's splendid collection of vestments, ranging from the delicately embroidered to the outlandish, was also a feature.

Following episcopal direction, the Presbytery dining room served as an oratory for a period where daily mass continued and indeed the Triduum was celebrated. Luckily, the church is

reachable under the same roof so, whenever permitted, the daily mass took place in its true home. God's good grace also provided us with a key member of the musical staff living in the Presbytery and an assistant priest with great technical knowhow; so not only has the daily mass been maintained throughout, but on Sundays and feast days we have had a sung plainsong mass with rousing voluntaries to send us from mass in good heart. Each day mass has been live streamed via our website and Facebook

So, while the provision of meals was one kind of outreach, we had a different kind through the broadcasting of mass worldwide; and we have had keen followers from as far afield as Hawaii, New Zealand, the United States and the Dominican Republic. All this was facilitated by very generous financial help from the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust and the parish has been honoured for its work in time of lockdown by a very kind letter of recognition from the Lord Lieutenant, Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE.



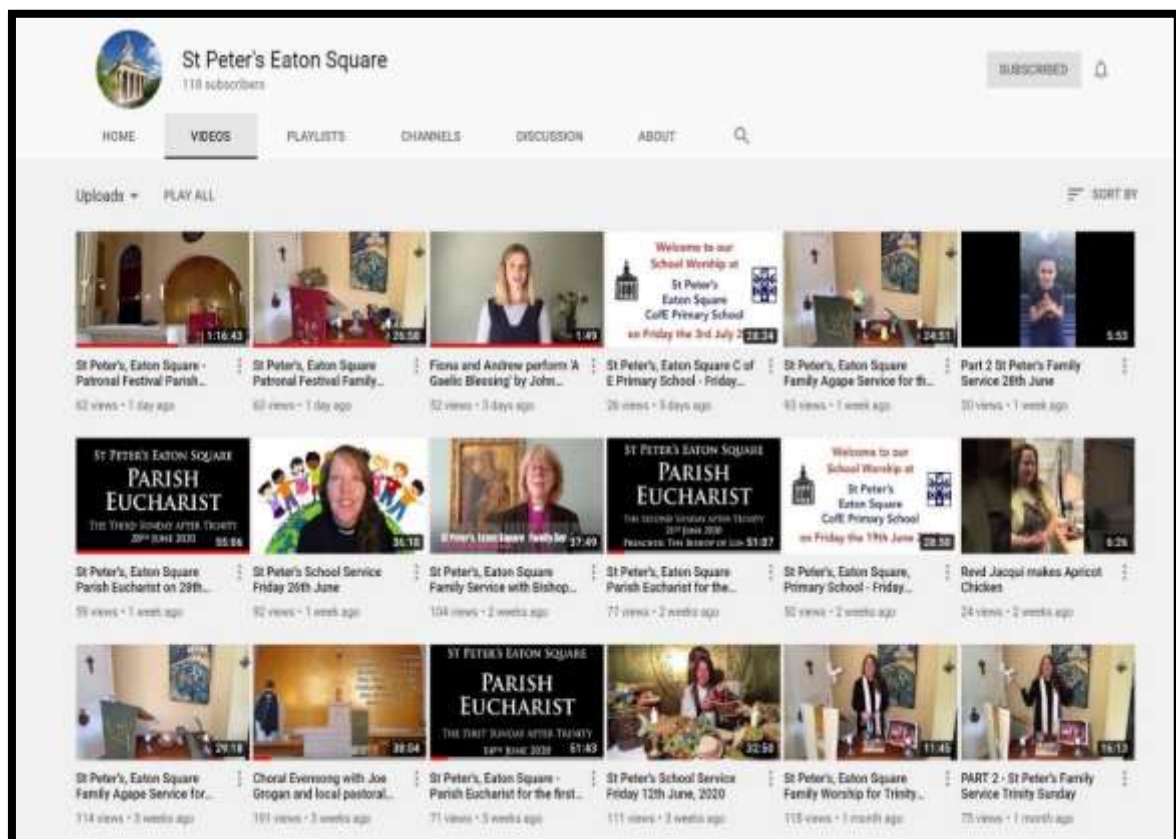
[St Peter's, Eaton Square \(0318\)](#)

From the Rev'd Julie Khovacs and colleagues:

The past few months have seen a wonderful flowering of creativity across the parish to counter the physical restrictions caused by the coronavirus – in fact, St Peter's has been buzzing with activity! Following the moving experience of participating in Holy Week services remotely under strict lockdown, we have continued to share online Eucharists via the St Peter's YouTube channel each Sunday, including a dedicated Family Worship with Agape Supper. Sermons, readings and intercessions have been recorded in people's homes and spliced into the Eucharist, and we were particularly pleased to welcome Bishop Sarah to preach at both St Peter's services on 21 June. Music has been introduced to our online worship with ever greater levels of sophistication, and individual members of the congregation have treated us to private concerts, story readings and cookery lessons in between Sundays. We have enjoyed working with St Peter's school and, with participation from the teachers and pupils, we have created a weekly online school service. Fr Ralph and Rev'd Julie have also 'zoomed' each week with the various classroom bubbles.

Despite all these innovations, it was still a joy to return to church for our first Parish Eucharist together in person on 5 July, when we celebrated our patronal festival in St Peter's itself. We look forward to rebuilding our common worship together as more and more members of the congregation feel confident to resume travelling to church.

Lots else has been going on in addition to our Sunday worship. We have been zooming Morning Prayer on Wednesdays and Evening Prayer on Tuesdays, alongside audio recordings of Evening Prayer on weekdays and Compline on Saturdays. Our monthly Faith



Group has met virtually and discussed the Resurrection and the gift of Creativity, both very

apposite in these times. There have been several Pilgrim courses continuing on Zoom as well as baptism preparation 'visits.' The Book Group has continued its lively meetings, discussing works as varied as *The Little World of Don Camillo* and *Work and Love* (a biography of Tove Jansson) – also virtually, but with the accompaniment of the drink of one's choice. And our regularly weekly email newsletter and the online spiritual reflections have been especially valued as the main means of communicating what previously could be notified in different ways.

We have also enjoyed a variety of zoom groups with young families connecting with those who would normally attend our family service and toddlers group. We have had a fun and lively weekly Zoom storytelling with Rev'd Julie and also a Zoom craft group with Carole, Fiona and Julie. There has been an overwhelming sense of support and participation from our congregation, including many children and families.

Perhaps one of the most surprising elements of the lockdown has been the opportunity for outreach. Just before lockdown we distributed leaflets to all those living in the parish to offer assistance and prayer and we have had a number of responses to people living in the parish that were not regular service attendees. We have also remained connected with the refugees and asylum seekers we know through our Welcome Box ministry. And finally, as I know is the case with many churches, people beyond our church community have watched our services. All of this is a confirmation of the presence and love of God in the midst of and through the pandemic. And we are immensely grateful.

For those wanting to feel the spiritual healing of God's presence as lockdown eased, we set up an open air seating area on the portico at St Peter's with a banner reproduction of the view to the high altar, as shown below.



[St Saviour's, Pimlico \(0319\)](#)

From Michael Gliddon and colleagues:

Shepherds: We have a large, diverse congregation, yet many do not seem to read our emails or visit our website. To help us stay in contact in March we launched a scheme in recruiting 10 'shepherds'. The electoral roll was divided up and each shepherd was allocated about 10 'sheep'. Shepherds were encouraged to keep in contact with regular phone calls, providing pastoral support and prayer. A twice-weekly fellowship group meeting via *Zoom* was launched in May.

Music: Our Director of Music, Richard Gowers, recorded *YouTube* videos speaking about the music we would have had in church on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. The recordings were then weekly from Easter Day. Our *Sing After School* children's music club has continued weekly on *Zoom* and Richard has joined our children's ministry group, *Diddy Disciples* on *Zoom* on Sunday mornings.

Worship: shepherds have been encouraged to pray with their sheep. We introduced *Zoom* Morning and Evening Prayer on Sundays and at various points throughout the week. Mass is still said on Sundays for everyone each week at the Vicarage. Our Vicar, Fr Matthew has recorded a weekly video on *YouTube* including the Sunday Gospel and Collect and with a brief reflection. We held special services online for Ascension Day and Corpus Christi. We had a glorious celebration of VE Day, with singer Claire Sweeney, a member of our congregation singing 'We'll meet again'.

Study courses: Have taken place on *Zoom* focussing on the Book of Jonah and a refresher course on the Christian faith. A discussion is now opening up about what form a midweek fellowship group might look like from the autumn.

Building: This is currently open for private prayer on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Lettings are unable to take place and this has greatly impacted of our finances. A large lump of masonry has recently fallen from the clock face of our church tower, leading to costly repairs.



St James the Less, Pimlico (0320)

From the Rev'd Lis Goddard:

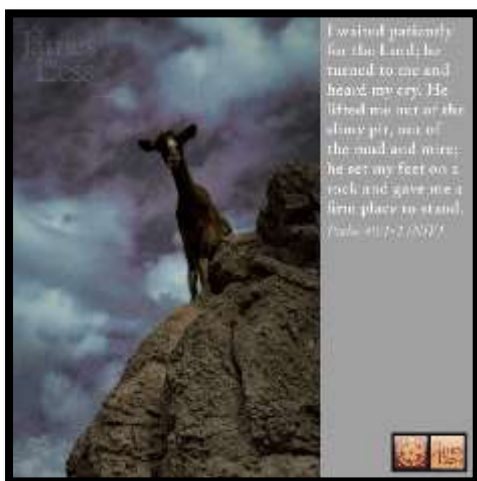
It has been sad to see the church locked but despite this the church and its work of showing the light of Christ in the darkness carried on. There have been a wonderful team who have kept up with the isolated, sick and vulnerable by telephone, ensuring that no-one has felt forgotten.



Like many churches in the deanery we quickly managed to transfer our worshipping life to Zoom and Facebook Live, establishing a ten o'clock service each Sunday and Compline Sunday to Friday evening at 9pm. Throughout the lockdown we have held 2 Chronicles 20:12 as our key verse: "We do not know what to do but our eyes are fixed on you". We have started every Sunday service with these words, reminding ourselves that in the passage Jehoshaphat is enjoined not to be afraid or discouraged "because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's." Zoom inevitably has become vital to our interactions with twice weekly Coffee and Prayer, plus a weekly Bible Study and Prayer time. We were aware that many of our members didn't have the capacity to join us on Zoom either because they didn't have the hardware or the knowledge, so we bought several people WiFi hubs and basic tablets and set them up with the links they needed so that they could easily access the services and other events. We would regularly find that there would be phone calls with more vulnerable members just before a service needing help with Zoom.



Alongside our regular services we also found ways to continue to with Messy Church – Virtual Messy Church became a feature of Lockdown with crafts and games on line once more via Zoom – we made bridges, glasses, bread, biscuits, dancing and singing with great energy, whilst learning the Jesus is the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth, and life.



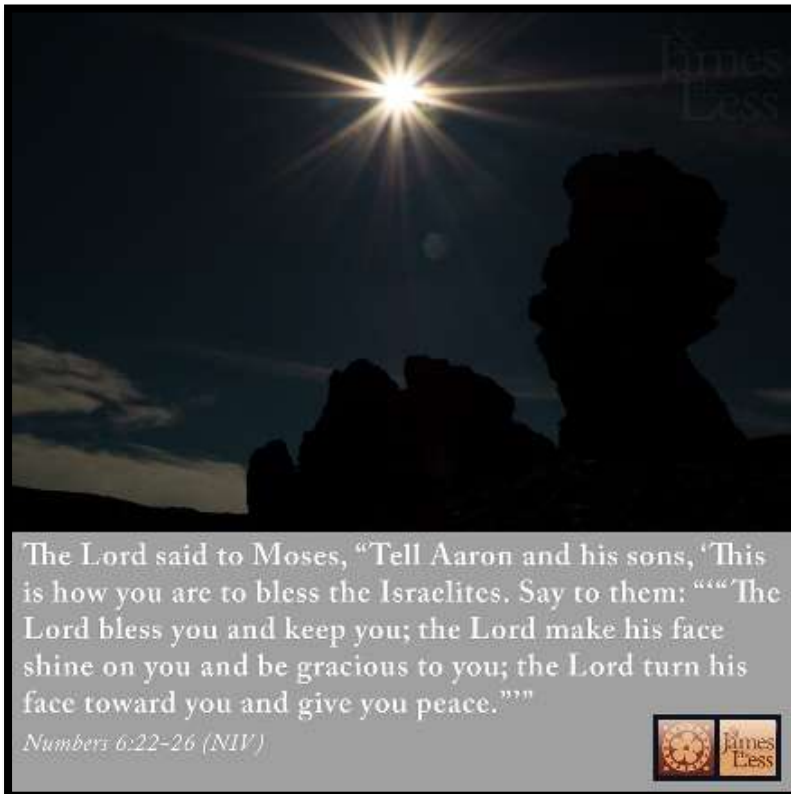
Another key part of the ministry of Lockdown for us have been the #100days of words and pictures which were put together by Ben and Amabel Ealovega from our congregation. These were a series of stunning photographs by Ben, a professional photographer, coupled with a bible verse or passage by Amabel, one for each day from the beginning of lockdown until we came out. They were posted each day on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, coupled with a short reflection from Lis Goddard. The cards, without the reflection can all be found on our website.

Throughout the Lockdown and beyond St James the Less has partnered with Ebury Food Surplus to help them as they have helped to provide food and other necessities to those on the Pimlico estates struggling financially. Several people from St James the Less have volunteered there; we have provided food and have ensured that those in need of food have been referred to them. Latterly we have helped them to procure a van to manage the growing number of their deliveries.

Of course caring for each other hasn't just happened via the foodbank, there have also been examples of members of the congregation dropping round food to one another, doing their neighbour's shopping, much as so many have done right across our community.



We will be glad to slowly move back into the church building, but we feel that God has blessed us through this strange time as we have prayed God's blessing on our community and on our neighbours every night. Like every church we will come out of this changed, but for the better in many ways, trusting that we will continue to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.



[Christ Church, Mayfair \(0321\)](#)

From the Rev'd Matt Fuller:

Some things which I can give thanks for:

- We are blessed with a few talented tech people at church and so were able to get broadcasts up and running from home quite quickly.
- Initially people were committed to their midweek small groups on zoom and attendance was incredibly high.
- we have had over 300 at some of our prayer meetings: that's truly wonderful.
- lots of people in freelance industries have lost all their work but have been supported by their small groups.

And yet:

- plenty of relationships have been greatly strained. A number of marriages are in a dire state.
- taking funerals with tiny numbers of people there mourning is horrible.
- our church finances are dire. Despite furloughing staff we have had to shrink staff numbers for next year
- I and the rest of the staff are absolutely exhausted and next term looks harder with fewer staff
- we are now running services in the building twice on Sunday and once midweek but, to my surprise, people are far slower to want to return.
- we are expecting it to take a minimum of three years to recover to where we were in January but that may be too optimistic.

Yet despite this, the LORD knows what he is doing and so we carry on. For much of lockdown, my favourite Bible verse has been 2 Chron 20:12
"Lord, we know not what to do but our eyes are on you".



[Westminster School \(0379\)](#)

From the Rev'd Gavin Williamson:

On the 17th March 2020, Westminster School was physical. On 18th March, as if by magic (a.k.a Microsoft), the school was functioning entirely online. Some staff and pupils found the transition to Teams and later to Zoom easy to deal with, others initially did not. Many staff have been delighted to find that Zoom allows one to mute an entire class of twenty fourteen year old boys when they struggle with 'mike discipline'.

From the Chaplain's perspective, the weekly pattern of assemblies on Mondays and Fridays has continued as normal, the difference being that they are pre-recorded not live. Was this a woeful lack of imagination or a desire to provide some continuity? It was partly doing what comes naturally and partly a function of the school's technical resources. Morning Prayer has been said live in Latin on Wednesdays. Compline, hosted by a Queen's Scholar in Edinburgh, and sung live by a cantor in Suffolk, has been surprisingly well attended.

Dealing with pastoral issues during lockdown, whether to do with bereavement or BLM, has not been straightforward. The death of George Floyd caused the school to take a long, hard look at itself. A 'Challenging Racism Committee' has been established to try to make sure that the response of the school will be long term and transformative.

The Dean permitted the filming of a small procession in the Abbey for use in the Leavers' Service on Tuesday 30 June. It was very good to be back in the school's 'spiritual home' after a break of three months, even though we are having to say goodbye to one hundred and eighty pupils and many staff, including Patrick Derham, the Head Master, without being anywhere near them. Those of us planning to return in September are praying that much of the school's life can be real, albeit physically distanced.



[The Grey Coat Hospital \(0380\)](#)

From Fr Myles Owen:

Supporting the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of school students has been difficult during lockdown. This is an additional challenge, beyond that of teaching remotely, that we at the Grey Coat Hospital sought to address in various ways.

A daily bulletin email was sent to all students and staff. This bulletin contained a recorded message for the day from the Chaplain, a short Bible verse, and an exercise video. In addition to these daily features, there were maths puzzles, history features, science experiments, music, craft and cooking activities. Plus, students were encouraged to submit their own material on given topics, including footage of a virtual sports day. This helped to maintain the community of the school as well as to encourage physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Furthermore, after a brief hiatus, the upper and lower school Christian Unions continued to meet online (co-ordinated by sixth-form students, supported by the Chaplain), and there was a parents' prayer meeting each month (co-ordinated by a parent). Plus, each Key Stage 3 form attended an end of academic year Collective Worship led by the Chaplain.

It has been especially difficult to support those students who have suffered bereavements during lockdown. The Chaplain made use of the Church Army's *Grief, Death & Hope* resources, and the pastoral team at the Grey Coat Hospital (Head of Year and form-tutors included) cannot be praised enough for their efforts.

The staff of the Grey Coat Hospital worked spectacularly hard during lockdown to ensure that the students received the support they needed. No doubt the same is true of school across the country. As Chaplain, I am pleased the spiritual dimension was not overlooked.



[Royal Military Chapel Wellington Barracks \(0392\)](#)

From the Rev'd John Vincent CF:

Following the outbreak and lockdown, the Chapel closed immediately. The role of The Household Division and London District changed to support to the London Covid effort (OP RESCRIPT). Most civil servants were sent home and an uplift of soldiers moved in to London. My pastoral ministry shifted to support those service personnel who were working very long operational hours and housed in hotels across London.

The Guards' Chapel has maintained a 'virtual' presence throughout: our choir came in just before lockdown to record hymns and anthems, giving us enough material, along with music supplied by our bands, to produce a weekly podcast. This reaches hundreds of people every week and is listened to across the globe. These have and will continue post lockdown.

Because we have both the space and the resources, the chapel was reopen for public prayer on the very first day it was allowed. Attached is a photo of General Chris Ghika with his leadership team formally opening the chapel. There has been a constant stream of visitors since we reopened.

Once we had the all clear to open for services, we resumed with a wedding on 04 July and Communion on 05 July. A soloist sings each Sunday, providing a musical reflection, and our choir and bands are champing at the bit to get back in and support the chapel.

Our numbers are down on Sundays – a combination of an elderly congregation not wanting to travel in, and the addition of the punitive congestion charge on Sundays which has put many off travelling in.



[St Clement Danes – Central Church of the Royal Air Force \(0392A\)](#)

From the Rev'd David Osborn:

We have opened for private prayer and occasional offices and will be resuming public worship on Sunday 9th August. Then gradually opening on more days and adding mid-week worship over the summer.



[Imperial College Chaplaincy Multi-Faith Centre \(0397A\)](#)

From the Rev'd Andrew Willson:

Imperial 'went remote' a week before the lock-down. Staff and students have contributed to medical and research responses to COVID 19. Medical students did final exams online and went to work in hospitals five months earlier than usual. PhD students seconded to COVID research have been doing long hours of behind the scenes maths and coding. Chemical Engineers sent out a 'chemicals shopping list' for items from College storerooms to help brew hand sanitiser in their laboratory. Production was then scaled up at an actual brewery and shipped to local hospitals.

As a chaplaincy team we were, thankfully, already using Zoom. We offered pastoral support and our six weekly meditation sessions online - Christian, Buddhist and Mindfulness. We developed bereavement resources for students and staff. Since Easter we have been offering a fifteen minute weekly [Time to Remember](#) based on our work place memorials. There have been no deaths among our students from COVID 19. But some staff have died and a member of our College Evensong congregation. We know students have lost parents and grandparents.

Unable to hold College Evensongs in Holy Trinity, Prince Consort Road, Imperial's student Chamber Choir have made some fantastic lock-down recordings and put their best recordings [online](#). We have added a second weekly session for our Christian meditation network - offering Lectio Divina and Centering Prayer. I am pleased to be able to open these to members of Holy Trinity congregation. We have capacity here so if members of Deanery congregations are interested in silent prayer they are welcome to email me at a.willson@imperial.ac.uk for Zoom invitations

The desolations of these times are obvious – the loss, separation, grieving at a distance. There have been some wonderful moments and consolations like the online end of year celebration for the 'Medical Humanities' students. The Black Lives Matter protests have given great focus to ongoing work on Race Equality within Imperial. There have been more conversations about poetry - in relation to grief, meditation and racial justice - which has been good after Malcolm Guite's sessions at the Two Cities Conference in November. Starting a new academic year in October online and socially distanced is a move into yet another unknown area.

Deanery Sunrise – Kensington Gardens



[Lincoln's Inn Chapel \(0399A\)](#)

From the Venerable Sheila Watson:

We have been making a weekly video whilst the Inn and Chapel have been closed from lockdown to this week, our last Sunday of Chapel term. Below is the link to our Family Day video - the only Sunday in the year we have a Family Service and fun and games and BBQ! I am relieved that we have kept our musicians being paid their fees for the weekly video work down their iPhone with our Director of Music mixing - and the Chapel Clerk and I editing videos etc. All professional musicians are having a hard time.

Link to Lincoln's Inn Family Day Video: <https://youtu.be/itGGwiwIY98>

