

CENTRAL NEWS: AUTUMN 2020



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Welcome to the Autumn 2020 edition of CENTRAL NEWS which inevitably has a covid-19 flavour to it. I asked a number of ministers and leaders to reflect upon their experience of this strange time and here is the result. You will find some repeated themes, but each story represents how an individual and/or their faith community has responded in a time of sudden change. I have mentioned before how proud we should be of the resilience and imagination shown by many churches, leaders and ministers as they have sought to navigate some really choppy waters.

If only such times were over, but I sense that returning to 'normal' is still some way off. At a point where weariness may be taking its toll, my hope is that these stories will be an encouragement in some way. Not least as we recognise that we are not alone in our plight, and that as part of a larger family of churches, we can gain strength and hope from one another.

Please use this leaflet as an aid to prayer as well as information, and please, please, share the stories among your congregations. A PDF copy can be found on the web site at www.centralba.org.uk/news/central-new-editions/

Many blessings upon you all

Colin Pye



BACK TO CHURCH : AMERSHAM FREE

One of the biggest challenges I think our church has faced over these last six months is that of 'Inclusivity'. Everyone walks at a different pace and has coped with the Pandemic differently.

In the early days it felt relatively straightforward. So, for the first four months we produced an audio service and radically changed our website so something new appeared daily. Even though 'apart', our 'togetherness' felt tangible.

No, the real challenge came as Lockdown eased. We've restarted 'in person' worship and it's had a good take up. Yet not everyone feels able to return, and nor should we, in any sense, pressurise them to do so. It's at this point that it became obvious to us that it was vital we retain the audio service alongside the reinstated 10.30am worship (which is now also videoed). The response has been good, and people have been deeply appreciative.

Everyone is going at their own pace through this crisis. Our challenge as a church is to walk together 'at the speed of love'.

Revd Ian Green



Ampt Hill

Baptist Church

The experience of lockdown and the impact on our community, schools, church, jobs and families has changed Ampt Hill Baptist Church. As with many churches, it forced a change of approach, new pastoral support networks, adapting our communications, learning technology – ‘inward’ changes to enable our mutual support and discipleship and our ‘outward’ mission and service. Many of these are here to stay, even when we gather again and groups restart. It was also a time which generated brand new ideas, started conversations and in which we reached new people.

Outwardly we found we were a

welcome partner amongst others in offering community support, delivering food or supplies, and it opened up good conversations with neighbours and other community groups. We also rapidly joined the wonders of livestream for Sunday services and midweek ‘Songs and stories’ for families with young children. This then grew to include Alpha online, prayer times, a new discipleship course (Explore Mark’s Gospel), youth Bible studies, children’s game nights, church quiz nights, small groups and more. This isn’t to show how busy we were but to highlight the scope of online

ministry and mission, most of which we had not considered much less tried.

And yet it has shown a reach (of distance and audience), an accessibility (from anywhere, for the housebound or unwell, for those unsure of re-entering a church building), a lower ‘risk’ (for those unused to church or Christianity) and creative potential in new ways.





The "Assembly Line" – summer activities, craft, Bible stories, sweets and fun in a bag for our church families with young children.

It has enabled us to include different content and more people in so many ways. We miss the proximity and presence of gathered church, which remains essential, but there is still a form of both proximity and presence in our online connections.

During lockdown we preached through 1 Thessalonians which

proved hugely encouraging and stunningly relevant – Paul's longing to be 'face to face' with his friends. You can't lock down God's word. It reminded us that a church stripped down to less activity becomes clearer in what it relies on – the Word of God to do the work of God, the power of prayer, the

precious value of human contact. It renewed our capacity for 'whole church' mutual care. We also have a world in need of hope, of Christ, and lockdown prompted that outward concern in practical ways.

When the gathering and groups are removed it reveals how we value these but also how deep the roots

of discipleship go, how strong the connections really are to Christ and his church. For many this has sustained them and we've cherished what connections we do have, with phone contact, regular post, chats in gardens, doorstep visits, kids activity packs, Zoom discipleship, etc. For others it has been harder, or the roots need attention. Amidst much change, anxiety and loss as a nation, with these reflected locally too, our confidence remains even more not in what we do but the promise that Christ alone builds his church, his promises don't fail, and he is with us.



Revd Andrew Goldsmith

Remco & Ellie

Wendover Free Church



Since COVID-19 we have been working hard to stay connected with one another through phone calls, zoom meetings, Facebook and weekly Home Worship Sheets. It has been both challenging and rewarding. Challenging because it is all new and different and not everyone does technology that well. And rewarding because relationships have deepened and skills are learned and practiced. We've been involved with the Good Neighbour Scheme that our Parish Council coordinated for the Lockdown duration.

We're now working out how the church, together with other organisations within Wendover, can continue to support and empower all members of our community. It's time to work out what we can do to show the love we've freely received.

Revd Remco Van Den Heuvel

Ollie & Ellie

Well Street United Church, Buckingham

One of the strengths of the church over many years, has been our encouragement of young people in their journey of faith. We had the joy of baptising two of the young people last autumn, and two others are about to begin gap years in church settings. Oli is heading off to a Colchester church to serve through the New Wine network. Ellie will be serving our church for a year whilst receiving training through DNA. She has been accepted by Cliff College for September 2021 to train as a children's worker. Meanwhile, Dom, who also grew up in the church, is in the final year of a Worship and Theology degree at LST.

Please pray for them, not least as their year (as for all of us) will look very different to what was expected! **Revd Tim Edworthy**



Garry Steel

Desborough Baptist Church



Lockdown has been a time of learning. We have tried different ways of sharing the good news and fostering discipleship, but perhaps our most successful step has been to bring people together each week on Zoom to share life, pray & explore God's word together in 'breakout rooms'.

Through these gatherings, new friendships have been grown and we have, perhaps accidentally, created a space which has been easier for many to access -including parents with young children, those who suffer with social anxiety and friends who are further afield. In the midst of the challenges we all face, we give thanks to God that He is always bringing new life and doing something new!

Revd Garry Steel

Fuller, Kettering Holiday Club



Fuller Baptist Church, Kettering, moved their ministry to younger children online this August.

Holiday Bible Club has been run at the church for over fifty years but this was a first for the volunteers, a number of whom book the week off work to be involved. The team created and delivered dozens of craft packs to local families, along with a 'Flight Magazine' to



accompany daily YouTube broadcasts, themed to a Round-the-World Tour. We taught that God's love is with us everywhere we go; heaps of love went into the preparations, setting up a recording studio in the church and the leadership being soaked with water pistols! They rounded off with a online service, celebrating and showcasing the children's work.

Revds Roland & Vicki Sokolowski



Markyate

"We've used Zoom for our Life Groups, prayer and Leadership Team meetings. Sunday services, we have been through 4 phases:

1. **March** we went online via YouTube
2. **June** we **Rebranded our church garden as a "Garden of Hope"** which was well received by the community who now had a place to visit. We also used this for informal gatherings on a Sunday.
3. **August**— A more structured Sunday meeting in the church garden
4. **September 6th**—Transitioning back to using our building. After 30 minutes meeting in the church garden, those who wished to do so had the opportunity to meet in the church hall for a 20 -minute service under COVID secure conditions. This was such a special occasion.

By **October** we hope to have a regular service back in our building."

Revd Phillip Coffin



Introducing Revd JANE DAY

The past 12 months has seen much change for Jane as she relocated from Germiston, a small city east of Johannesburg to Croydon, in May 2019. Jane is no stranger to Baptist Life though and has served in pastorates in Didcot, Gildersome and Regional Minister for Mission for the Yorkshire Baptist Association. In South Africa she served alongside her husband co-pastoring a large multicultural church of approx 350. Sundays were never boring in South Africa and included three worshipping communities and four languages! Jane also designed and delivered a leadership training programme for women across Southern Africa.

In September 2019 Jane began a brand new role with Baptists Together. The role was introduced on the back of celebrating 100 years of ordaining women into Baptist Ministry. Whilst we have made huge progress in seeing an increase of women in leadership and ministry, there is still a long

way to go, particularly with regard to our structures and systems. A new piece of work has begun with some women ministers in the CBA who are intentionally encouraging a generation of women to serve our churches.

Jane is also supporting other Associations as they also seek to be more intentional in encouraging women and particularly coaching individuals and groups.

In July 2020 Jane began a further new role with Regent' Park College as Tutor in Community Learning. Jane will oversee the direction of Footsteps and in time will work alongside the Regional Team in identifying needs and offering training which is relevant and appropriate to our context.

Jane is married to Steve, a Methodist Minister and loves good coffee and books!





Walsworth Road Hitchin

Much of what we have done has been mirrored by churches elsewhere, such as moving worship, prayer, learning and pastoral care online, or ensuring practical support to the more vulnerable through provision of food and delivery of medication. One of the distinguishing features of our Zoom services every Sunday from the outset of lockdown has been the consideration of an object or other feature of the church premises. Yes, we know that the church is not the building, but let's be honest that we do have a deep connection to the premises in which we gather for worship, for community life, and indeed for outreach and witness. Perhaps this was especially so for us, given the busy year in 2019 on and off the premises during our 150th celebrations.

Some of the objects have been fixed features or pieces not readily moved (eg the Communion table, dedicated in the 1950s to a couple who worshipped faithfully among us), and it was very moving to show video footage from one of our teenager's baptismal service one year after the service. Some of the objects have less obvious or even

visible, such as the Victorian grappitho with its beautiful chalk handwriting (evident in a loft space and "left" by the builders during the original construction), or the garden bench outside at the front of church (arguably one of our key informal mission resources, even during lockdown!).

Our newest object from our life together hasn't actually made it into the building as yet, and is a large Lego model of the Saturn V rocket (its 1969 pieces altogether reflecting the date of the first moon landing in 1969!), which was donated by one of our families to enable 12 households to assemble a portion each during the early weeks of lockdown, with the completed model revealed during one of our services together with a short slideshow of photos documenting the assembly in various homes.

And so we were connecting even when we were not able to meet, and with God's help, we will be putting the pieces together again for many in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Revd Andrew Henton Pusey



Roy Farrant

New Association Treasurer

I approached the Association earlier this year, having semi-retired, with a view to helping in some small way. It wasn't my plan but I've ended up as the Treasurer.

I qualified as a chartered accountant many years ago with the firm that became KPMG and have worked in industry and in practice, helping and advising a whole variety of different clients.

I'm also secretary at the local **Christ Church Baptist, Kings Langley**.

Mine is an honorary position and I'm looking forward to doing my bit in helping people to understand the numbers and to use our finances in the best way that we can. Do ask if you feel I may be able to help. **Roy Farrant**
roy.farrant@centralba.org.uk

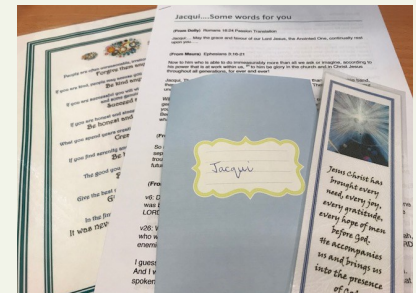


Northall

We are a small Church

with an elderly congregation. Covid-19 came and the challenge was to keep us all together. We quickly started services on Zoom and it seems that 'you can teach an old dog new tricks'! We have even been able to increase our normal attendance by support from other Baptist Churches and some individuals from further away.

Next weekend we have a 'Harvest on Wheels' when food prepared by two of us will be delivered to our doorsteps – Soup and a roll (2 choices of soup) and apple crumble and custard. Then the evening is planned to include some fun. We are supporting BMS and have a BMS speaker for our Sunday Zoom service. God's blessing has been felt among us.
Ruth Cox



Stony Stratford

Love your leaders!

We have all felt the emotional and spiritual impact of the pandemic. Facing new challenges - working from home, home-schooling children, separation from loved ones, losing a job, even developing Covid 19 etc- have taken their toll. We generally expect our ministers to provide leadership and pastoral care in times of crisis. As a minister myself I can say that we have been doing our best to do so. However, have you thought that ministers are not immune from the impact of Covid 19; they are human too? It was therefore a joy for my colleague and I to receive an envelope from our prayer team this week. It contained words of encouragement and prophecy for us. We felt loved and supported. How can you bring encouragement to your minister or leader this week? **Revd Jacquie Green**

Covid-19, mental well-being and the church's response

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a time of shaking for us all. Many of our church family have suffered loss. This includes loss of jobs, loss of companionship, cancellation of plans, loss of opportunity (particularly for our young people) and loss of freedom. The bereaved have had very limited ability to say goodbye to loved ones and less support in their mourning. Those who live alone can feel isolated, starved of physical touch.

For many people, their sense of safety has been threatened with the world seeming a frightening place. The invisible nature of the virus makes it a scary enemy generating debilitating anxiety for some. Added to this is the uncertainty of when life will return to its usual pattern and phrases like "new normal" can seem chilling.

Given the enormity of the problem, how can the church respond?

As a church we have responded in a number of ways:.

Sermon series have focussed on learning to lament using the Psalms and Lamentations and apocalyptic writings like Revelation have helped us look beyond our present trials.

In addition to small groups we have encouraged socially distanced walks, phone calls or shared meal outdoors.

We have allocated the fellowship to pastoral friends for encouragement. We



have drafted mental health leaflets offering practical help and Biblical wisdom on themes like Anxiety, Depression and Bereavement. www.unionbaptist.org.uk/help-in-isolation/mental-health-awareness/

Using a resource from Sanctuary Health Ministries: Faith, grief and Covid-19, we are running small on-line groups to support those most in need. www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org/covid19/

We believe that despite its challenges, this is a time of great opportunity for us as we allow God to minister into our deep areas of pain, discovering and sharing the hope we have in Him.

Dawn and Revd Malcolm Hazell,
Union Baptist Church, High Wycombe



Broadmead, Northampton

One church leader suggested that the pandemic amplifies your church's ecclesiology. In other words, it heightens that which is most important to you as a church. I have certainly noticed some patterns and I think there are five ways we might ensure our focus is on as a church going forward.

- Truly seek God first in all things
- Connections Matter – strengthen them
- Reach beyond yourself
- We all have a part to play
- We need to express genuine love for each other

Colossians 3:17 remind us that we need toLet every activity of your lives and every word that comes from your lips be drenched with the beauty of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One. And bring your constant praise to God the Father because of what Christ has done for you!

Revd Adam Eakins



Kingshill, Bucks

The little chapel of Kingshill Baptist Church often feels like a safe, sacred space. In April, we wondered how we could continue to provide such a place during lockdown.

Our solution was to mow a labyrinth on our church grounds, and invite others to come and make use of it for prayer, meditation, or simply to be somewhere different. One household at a time.

Labyrinths have a long history as prayer aids and pilgrimages in miniature. Evidence of their use goes back many centuries, with many medieval churches and cathedrals having examples.

Since it's installation, I have heard from people who have found the labyrinth surprising and affecting. Its a good place to meet with God.

Revd Martin Hatfield



Rockingham Road, Kettering

Still zigzagging forward with much laughter

Through the lockdown we have learnt -

- the benefit of strengthening fellowship through phoning and keeping in touch
- more technology - experienced the joy of seeing/hearing each other on Zoom Bible Studies and increased our web presence
- that when half in the fellowship have no internet sending a weekly pastoral letter has brought encouragement, particularly to those with learning difficulties
- that risk assessments are worth doing to give the happiness of opening the building for services
- of God's continued provision – funds for a new disabled toilet enabling outside agencies to use our buildings.

Revd Laura Staves

Our fundraising support resources for your church during COVID-19

While everyday life is disrupted with churches not running as usual, fundraising is becoming ever more important. We want to offer practical support and guidance to help you during this uniquely challenging time. To help you manage your fundraising during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, we have developed some support resources in collaboration with fundraising specialists, Philanthropy Company.

⇒ **Top tips for fundraising by churches during COVID-19**



⇒ **List of emergency grant funders**



COVID-19 RESPONSE FUNDS

⇒ **Researching possible donors and**



COVID-19 RESPONSE FUNDS

funders

⇒ **Checklist for grant applications**



⇒ **Outputs and outcomes guidance**



See www.baptist-insurance.co.uk/church-fundraising for more details

Contact us

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Learning to Live in Lockdown

- a personal response

As lockdown loomed, in apocalyptic apprehension I bought a webcam, later adding recording equipment. Holding the church together with short daily Bible podcasts, Facebook messenger and phone chats, was the aim. This developed into an exploration of Matthew's gospel that is currently a 130-page first draft manuscript on the first 15 chapters and growing. This daily reading of commentaries, historical sources, and an exercise in economic writing has become the mainstay of my life. I have found that I am growing theologically and discovering new things in a gospel I've spent 30 years studying. If anyone is blessed, that's now a bonus. You can see these podcasts on the Burton Latimer Baptist Church website, and my Facebook feed. As a spin-off, Sunday sermons are now down to ten minutes.



The other part of my life playing, and teaching Trombone went online as filming short karaoke clips gave an incentive to keep working

on technique and helped me find structure and keep playing so I'm ready for high register work when we can get back to performing.

Getting fatter induced a daily bike ride, I still look like Father Christmas after eating all the (mince) pies, but ho, ho, ho have I put the wind up some motorists!

Having time to do theological thinking properly has been a fantastic blessing, I've resolved an outstanding issue that was undermining the logical consistency of my thought, and in

the process I've found assurance as a progressive, inclusive, kingdom centred, Christian. If you want a couple of short but world-class reads, I recommend, "Crazy Christians." by Michael B Curry, brilliant sermons well worth analysing. Also "The Dream of God." by Verna Dozier, it's compact, profound and defines faith as a brave journey of trust in which we stake our lives on God's existence and goodness.

Revd Mark Welch : Burton Latimer BC



Ringstead

Prayer Space Weekend

Last year grants from various sources, including CBA, enabled us to have a brand new path and entrance, an ideal prayer space and we started to plan.

Then the pandemic arrived. We have been locked down. We have to keep our distance. Many people are worried about coronavirus, about jobs, about children returning to school, about what the future holds.



We remembered the statement in John (chapter 3, verse 16): "God so loved the world that he sent his son, so whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life" and the theme for our Prayer Space weekend of "Love, Hope, Peace" was born.



Visitors were invited to think and pray about:

LOVE. God so loved the world that he sent his son, Jesus. And Jesus gave a new commandment "Love one another as I have loved you".

HOPE. The sign of the rainbow, God's promise for the future. "All my hope in God is founded"

PEACE. The peace of God which passes all understanding. Through knowing the love of God and placing our hope for the future in him we can know that peace.

We hung up text cards for people to take away.

Although not quite the weekend we had originally envisaged we pray that people have been blessed through it.

Angela Davis



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Thank you for your continued support



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