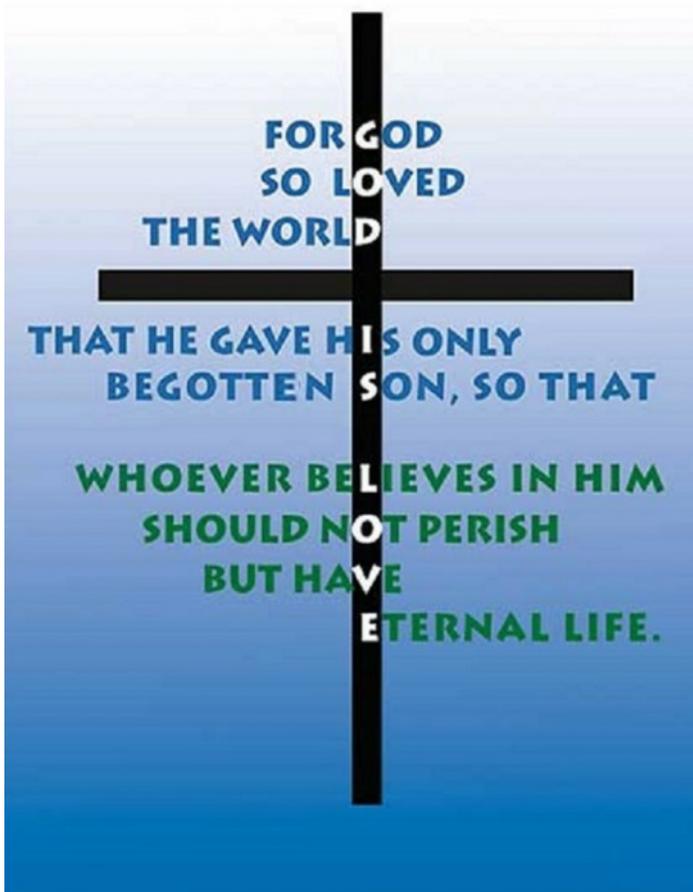




April 2020

Together in Wotton

*Christians worshipping, working and social distancing together in
Wotton under Edge*



Keep Safe - Keep Caring - Keep Praying

Everything is very different this month ...

No Walk of Witness. No Sunrise Service. Or Easter films. Or Stations of the Cross. Usually 'together in Wotton' would be full of Holy Week and Easter Services and events - not in 2020.

As a nation, as a people, we have to distance ourselves from those we would usually greet with a hug, forget about booking new or going on already-booked holidays; buy only essentials.

The churches are all closed ... no, only the church *buildings* are closed. The Churches, God's people, are continuing to work and worship and to aim to do his will, to love their neighbours - and their enemies - and to be able to proclaim on Easter Sunday:

He is Risen!

Keep Caring



Christian Aid Week 10 - 16 May 2020

As you can imagine, Christian Aid Week will be badly affected by the current situation. If any of you have any ideas for fundraising in these difficult times, please let us know. There has already been a suggestion about a way we can carry on the plant sales, so keep watering those seedlings!

Advice from Christian Aid: We are working on alternative plans that will allow people to take part in Christian Aid Week in different, creative ways – by post, by text and online that strengthen our communities during this challenging time. In addition, we will be providing advice on managing risks with smaller sponsored activities, street collections and delivery-only envelopes. Christian Aid Week is our single-most important fundraiser, so we would welcome your ideas on how we can creatively show love for our neighbours at home and abroad, as a community.

Stay safe one and all.

Alison Sutton

Brother Richard Hendrick, a Capuchin Franciscan living in Ireland, has penned a touching poem about coronavirus.

Lockdown

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighbourhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples

are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are.

To how little control we really have.

To what really matters.

To Love.

So we pray and we remember that

Yes there is fear.

But there does not have to be hate.

Yes there is isolation.

But there does not have to be loneliness.

Yes there is panic buying.

But there does not have to be meanness.

Keep Caring

Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

Keep Praying:

Taizé are streaming evening prayer with just six brothers live on their Facebook page each evening at 7.30 pm our time. It lasts about 40 minutes with quite a long time of silent prayer part way through.

If you are interested go to their page at about 7.30, or any time between then and 8 pm. The video from the previous day may be at the top if they have not started, but when they do, today's video will come up. Click on it and you can see loads of comments from people who are watching from all over the world.



Keep Praying

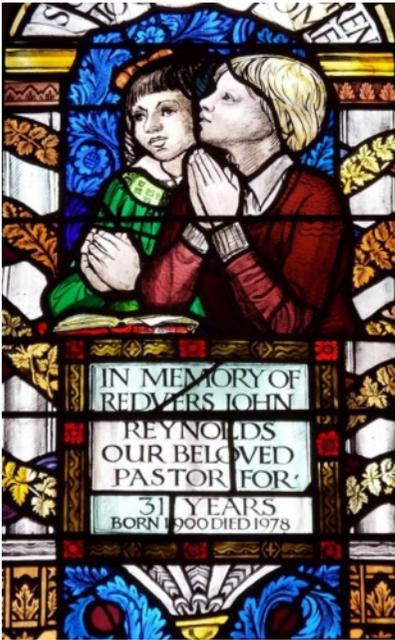
Sadly Wotton Quakers have taken the decision to cancel Sunday Meeting for Worship until circumstances allow us to continue with less risk. We remember that there have been occasions in the past when for one reason or another Meetings have been restricted but Friends have had 'remote' meetings, falling into silent worship in their own homes, at the usual hour.



We intend to do so again with the advantages that modern technology allows for example, sharing by email our own reflections or the writings of others that comfort, challenge or inspire us. We are advised to 'Try to find a spiritual wholeness which encompasses suffering as well as thankfulness and joy.' (Advices and Queries 10). Meanwhile we are encouraged by all the many acts of kindness shown in our community and elsewhere.

Keep praying

News from The Oliver Memorial Chapel



The Chapel has been re-decorated throughout and it now looks bigger and fresh ready for spring as it arrives.

Sadly we too have had to take the difficult decision to cancel all services for the foreseeable future as we all find ourselves in a situation which is affecting us in ways few of us have ever experienced.

Asked for something positive to contribute to 'together in Wotton' and for no apparent reason I found myself turning to Luke chapter 17 and verses 11-19 when ten men with leprosy were in a similar but even harder situation than we have. Leprosy is a

dreadfully painful disease with terrible deformity which changed lives back then usually forever. Turned out of home and village they had nowhere to go; nowhere to find help. Living in absolute isolation with no hope of a cure. Maybe people left food out for them and perhaps some clothing or a blanket. They had to find shelter where they could, in caves, a cemetery or under rocks. They could not go near or touch anyone. In fact it was much more desperate than our situation. Then one wonderful day they met Jesus. They called to him for help. Without even touching them he answered their call, telling them to go and present themselves to the priests. They took him at his word and as they walked in faith they were completely healed. This was just one instance during his ministry: Jesus healed many more. Today he knows all about the way our lives are changing almost daily, bringing problems, confusion and some fear. We too are now having to live in isolation but only for a time. It is so comforting to know that he not only understands he has been there and is ready and able to help us. We only have to ask in prayer and trust in him as the lepers did.

Each day we can experience him helping us even with the little things. If we do this at the end of each day we can look back and realise he has been with us all the time. We can turn this into a special time in our lives which will draw us ever closer to him. With what joy we shall then return to normal living just like the ten lepers, and remembering - only one returned to thank him!

Take care everyone.

Lois Etherington.

During Lent, some people have been receiving daily reflections From
TEARfund by email. This is just one:

Coronavirus has changed the world, and it will continue to change it. But love has not changed. Our God has not changed. The hope we have in him has not changed.

These are uncertain times, yet surely as Christians we ought to be a people of certainty? A people who know that we are held in the arms of God? A people who can shine brightly as the shadow of fear descends?

If our faith cannot be relevant in a time such as this, then it cannot be relevant. The world needs the love of Christ right now. You are his hands and feet. You are the vessel through which divine compassion enters the world

We're built for relationship. We're made for community. We need each other. What that looks like in a world of self-isolation is something that we're going to have to figure out. But I do believe that it's possible. And I've already seen examples of it happening – people reaching out to neighbours who previously they'd never interacted with. Postcards popped through letter boxes offering help to people who are unable to go out.

When I was going through the most difficult periods of my life, there's no way I could have done it without the support of friends, family and church. If we truly want to care for ourselves, then the first thing we must do is reach out to others. That's going to be even more of a challenge now, but it's a challenge that we can rise to. Once you've finished reading this, take a few moments to think about how you might be able to reach out in love in this new world we find ourselves in.

The spirit of fear wants us to think that this virus will drive us apart. But there is a different spirit, the Holy Spirit, that even in the darkest times can bring us closer together.

Stay safe. Stay hopeful. Take care of each other. And remember that love always wins.

Lord,

Thank you for the gift of relationship and community. We pray that, despite the evidence to the contrary, this crisis will bring people together, not drive them apart. For those of us who are anxious, bring peace. For those of us who are sick, bring healing. For those of us who are caring for others, bring strength. For those of us who are lonely, bring comfort. For those of us who are not lonely, help us to see those who are, and help us to reach out to them in whatever ways we can.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

Gideon Heugh



Wotton Area Mutual Aid

Connecting helpers to those who need help

During these uncertain times, the Wotton Area Mutual Aid group is matching up people in Wotton and the surrounding villages who need some help with neighbours who are willing to give it.

Our volunteers are able to collect shopping, help with urgent supplies, or just phone you for a friendly chat. We aren't healthcare professionals so won't be able to give health advice, and unfortunately can't come into your home at this time.

Need support?

The easiest way to request help is to fill out an online form by clicking this link or typing it into your computer or use the QR code (right): <https://buff.ly/394Hzl8>

If you don't have internet access, please call the number below and leave a message giving your name, phone number and help that you need: **07545 042794**

Scan here to get support



Use your phone camera to scan this and it will take you straight to the website

When you request help, someone will get back to you as soon as possible, but we are relying on the good will of our volunteers. We will keep the sharing of any personal data to a minimum and have asked our volunteers to do the same. When this is over, all information held will be destroyed.

Scan here to volunteer!



Use your phone camera to scan this and it will take you straight to the website

Want to volunteer?

If you would like to become a local volunteer, please complete the online form at the address below or use the QR code (left): <https://buff.ly/2WBZPA7>

Thanks to all who have made this possible - so quickly!

f @WottonAreaMutualAid

Thank you from the Benefice Office Chair

I am now 3 months post op, and feeling rather good! All consultants are happy with my progress and apart from having to take a tablet a day for the next 5 years, no further (major) things need to be done.

My recovery would not have been plain sailing without the amazing Teresa Pottinger and Lynda Durrant manning the office so efficiently. I cannot thank them enough for stepping in and sitting in the office chair. It has been a steep (re)learning curve for them and they have done brilliantly. A thank you too, to everyone who has taken on more whilst I have been away, it has been much appreciated.

I have been truly humbled by all the love and prayers, cards and food parcels given to me and my family. I am sure it has helped in my positive recovery. Thank you so much.

I had hoped that the Benefice office opening hours would be back to normal after the Easter holidays: this now seems unlikely, but I can be contacted by email on wotvicsec@btconnect.com or telephone 07483 146531

Kate Cropper

Keep Safe - Keep Caring - Keep Praying

Praying for the Churches

April and the 'turn' of St Mary's. Kate Cropper writes:

We realise that any prayers shouldn't be primarily for St. Mary's in the month of April, but should be for all. As the Church of England has said - "stay at home but continue to pray, to love, to care for the vulnerable."

At St. Mary's there is some news! There is now a new vicarage for the Tyndale Benefice, the property is in Coombe and was completed a couple of weeks ago. The first advert for a new "Priest in charge (vicar designate)" has also been published in the Church Times (last Friday) - we shall see what happens with this, as we are not sure at the moment. So, things have started moving again!

So if we were to have any additional prayers it would be to ask for all to pray that the beginning of our recruitment process for our new priest in charge can overcome the current difficulties we all are experiencing.

We still plan to send out the weekly pew sheet and have other resources of prayer and support should anyone like them - if they haven't had them yet, please get them to email wotvicsec@btconnect.com

News from Blue Coat School

Teacher Jane Blaken tells us what the children and especially those in the Christian 'Ignite' Club have been doing

Schools are now closed for most pupils; however, learning hasn't stopped, and teachers have been busy preparing all sorts of exciting projects for the children to complete at home. School was in full swing and as always, a hive of activity with lots of learning taking place.

We thought you would like to hear of some of the activities that the pupils of Blue Coat School have experienced:

The children in Ignite Club have written some prayers that they were preparing to read at the service at St. Mary's Church on Mothering Sunday. Here are a few:

Thank you, God, for mothers. Thank you for their love.

Dear God, thank you for mothers and that they are so helpful. We are sorry that we sometimes shout at them. We are very thankful that we have a mum to look after us.

Dear God, look after all the mums in heaven this Mother's Day.

Dear God, please help adults and children with nobody to love them.

Dear God, look after all the parentless children.

Thank you, God, that we have been given peace. Thank you that we have families that love us.

Who is my neighbour? (Luke 10:29) Recently children in years 3 & 4 (7 & 8 years old) engaged their young and curious minds into thinking 'What kind of world did Jesus want?' We looked at the Gospels and explored how Jesus spread Good News among his people. The children learned how his teachings give guidance of how God wants us to live in the world and how Christians are inspired by the example and stories of Jesus. The Story of the Good Samaritan leaves the listener to interpret the message of the parable and in class we discovered there is more than one.

The story shocked us in several ways. Jews and Samaritans didn't get along, there was strong hatred between them. We questioned then 'who would most likely help the injured man?'. The Samaritan did the right thing when the priest and Levite did not. We then went on to find out more about ourselves and others, unpicking and trying to resolve the answers to the following questions:

1. How are we and others like the Samaritan?
2. What can we do to become more like the Samaritan?
3. Who is my neighbour? (Luke 10:29)
4. Can we consider helping or befriending someone who we don't usually have anything to do with?

We learn that in the parable Jesus was tested by the expert of the law who wanted to know how to inherit eternal life. The lawyer replied: “Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and “Love your neighbour as yourself.” These verses are often known as the Greatest Commandments. They are also the Christian Visions for our school.

We learn how Christians try and put his teachings and example into practice in lots of ways, from church worship to social justice. We encourage our pupils to think about who are our neighbours are, what showing love for your neighbours could look like, exploring how charities such as Christian Aid lead by example, by following the teachings of Jesus. Charitable actions help make the world more like the Kingdom of God, acting in the way Jesus wants and building the kind of world he wants.

We then return to the question: what was Jesus’s message in the story of The Good Samaritan? There are many and in short, once the children had fully explored and digested the story, we could summarise:

Actions speak louder than words

God loves humility

It’s not how you look, it’s what you are like that matters.

Love your neighbour as yourself.

There is no better time to action the words of Jesus as we all prepare for the testing times ahead of us.

As much of our day to day life goes on hold, the lyrics of the iSingPop song filled our hearts with the knowledge of God’s wonderful creation and the unity of people within his Kingdom as Blue Coat pupils and staff sang together in the school hall on the last day before closure:

“When the stars shine into the night
And the rain cloud passes me by
All creation singing a song
Bringing praise together as one.”

Sam from Ignite Club has designed a picture (see next page) using his drawing tablet:

Here is what Sam said about his picture: “This picture shows how the community can all help the fallen. The one that is helping the person on the floor are surrounded by people who care about them and want to help, and the girl is doing a thumbs up to show that. There is lots of people to help who are all a part of the community.”



An acrostic poem written by a member in Ignite Club:

Thank you for

Thank you for the kindness,

Happiness and madness,

And the flowers and the beaches,

Nice fruits and peaches,

Kittens and puppies,

Your amazing animals and the guppies.

Oceans and lakes

Universe and cakes.

Good friends and pets,

Octopus and vets.

Do please help us all to be better people and help each
other as much as we can!

In the Reception Class the children painted on egg shaped card to represent the cross and New Life.



Keep safe and well,

Love and best wishes to you all,

Jane Blaken

This news sheet is produced on behalf of Churches Together in Wotton. If you have any comments, or would like items included in future issues, please contact Judy Mills email judy.mills@live.co.uk