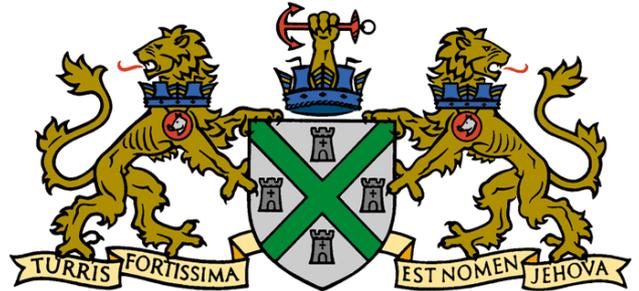




ST. PANCRAS CHURCH

## ST PANCRAS NEWSLETTER 4 – 1 JUNE 2020

The motto of the city of Plymouth is 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower', which is a quote from Proverbs 18 verse 10. The four stone towers on Plymouth's coat of arms are a picture of the spiritual refuge we have in God. Only a small fragment of those huge castle towers survives in Plymouth today (on the way down to Sutton Harbour), but God's promise endures.



This week we joined over 100 churches and individuals across Devon to pray for our city and nation as part of the Thy Kingdom Come movement. Praying together is not always easy, but it is a vital encouragement in our spiritual lives. As Jim Walker reminded us on Sunday, it is most often by gathering together that we are strengthened and grow in faith. The theme of our prayers was from Psalm 46 which Tricia Wass reminded us begins in a very similar way to Plymouth's motto: **'The Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.'** (Psalm 46.1)

God does not promise us a physical fortress that we can hide in during difficult times. Rather the Lord Jesus is our refuge and strength – His love and compassion and forgiveness do not change.

As we were praying, Mariska encouraged our faith by sharing that God had already put Psalm 46 on her heart this week with a picture. You see the psalm goes on to tell us about what it is like to live in the presence of God – in God's city. 'There is a river of joy flowing through the city. ... God himself is living in the city.' (Psalm 46.4, The Living Bible translation). In Mariska's picture, she saw the people of St Pancras coming to this river, bringing their sorrows and anxieties, and saw them washed away in the presence of God's joy. Sadly, she could also see the ways in which we sometimes hold on to these burdens and so dam the river and stop God's joy flowing into our lives and the life of our church. We hold onto them because they cause us, or have caused us, so much pain. God knows how very hard it is to let go but still his gentle voice encourages us..... and when we can let go the river of gladness is free to course through all our lives bringing freedom and joy

How can we stop anxiety, anger and uncertainty overwhelming us at this time? The Psalm provides the answer: 'Be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46.10). It is much easier to try 'doing something' to address the burdens we all carry than to trust in God. Sarah Sharland reminded us that 'being still' is often a really hard thing to do, especially when everyone around us is anxious. One of the first things that naval recruits are taught is how to stand still for long periods. This is the Christian way: to take refuge in God, to take time being still in His presence, to go to Him as our strong tower.

Every blessing in Jesus Christ, Lawrence

## **DATES FOR THE DIARY (VIA ZOOM)**

St Pancras Praise and Prayer – Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June at 8.00pm

St Pancras Sunday Service – All Age Celebration – Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> June at 10.30am

St Pancras PCC meeting – Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June at 7.30pm (PCC Members only)

St Pancras Bake Off – Saturday 13 June, (see more details later in this newsletter)

If you would like to join any of our Zoom services please contact  
lawrence.braschi@stps.org.uk

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**

Please continue to pray for John and Pauline Truscott. John is still in hospital after suffering a collapse at home. The medical team are trying to arrange a transfer for him to Mount Gould, but he continues to need ongoing treatment.

Jack Cartwright fell backward down the stairs at his home last weekend. Thankfully, neighbours heard his fall and were able to bring help and alert the emergency services. Jack spent a couple of days in hospital and is thankful for the care he has received, and the calls of support. His family are taking good care of him. Please pray for his continued recovery.

With the support of Provide Devon and the generosity of many donations to the Emergency Food Hampers, we have been able to continue this provision until the end of June. We are currently exploring with Transforming Plymouth Together and other partners how we can continue to help reach out in love to vulnerable families in our community during the summer holidays. Please pray for those conversations.

## **ST PANCRAS BAKE-OFF DAY, SATURDAY 13 JUNE**

Hi Everyone, in a rush of blood to the head it has been suggested as a bit of fun to have a St P's cake baking day. The plan is to meet on Zoom at 9:30 am for a short time of 15 minutes so we can have an official start. Ready, steady, bake!

Please read below before starting

The instructions are:

- You must have fun
- Choose a theme and bake your cake
- The cake can be as big or small as you like
- The decoration can be as elaborate or simple as you like
- We will then meet up at 5:00 pm where we each reveal our themed cake
- We will then enjoy a slice of cake together with a cup of tea.

## KNIT A SQUARE UPDATE

South Africa has been in 'lockdown', like much of the rest of the world including us. This has meant that the Barn at 'Knit a Square' has not been able to function as usual. As I am sure you can imagine, it has been very frustrating for them. It is winter in South Africa and with so many orphaned and abandoned children, it has been heartbreaking for the team not to be able to get out to the areas where blankets are so needed.



Then .....after 2 months of 'Lockdown', Ronda managed to get a permit from the Government to allow 4 of the team to travel to the KAS Barn! Everything thankfully was as it had been left on 24<sup>th</sup> March. In the short time they had, they managed to pack up 12 bags containing 80 blankets, 80 soft toys, 400 beanie hats and a few childrens' clothes they found in the barn. These were delivered to a squatter camp in a place called Krugersdorp on the West Rand by a pastor who came to collect them. A message had been received that around 1000, mostly white people, were in desperate need and so the four of them set to it and were happy to be able to help.

Even during 'Lockdown' the team have been pushing on where possible. The Gogos (The grannies in the villages) with no blankets to sew together set to knitting squares themselves. Alice Latha writes: 'With the donations we received we bought wool which was delivered to Gogos on Mother's Day (11 May). Me and my son Vuyane we did drop off into each and every Gogo's place. We bought them little Mother's Day presents from our pockets as a

token of our appreciation.' She goes on: "We don't know how long this COVID-19 will affect us. But with God by our side this will pass."



As for our 'St Pancras Knitters' group back home, we have been keeping in constant contact since Lockdown and are continuing to knit and crochet squares ready for the go ahead from South Africa that we can send parcels once again. We will certainly have a lot of parcels to send! Please pray with us that the families and children

in the villages will be protected from the virus and the work of 'Knit a Square' can resume soon so that many more children can be reached and warmed by blankets and the love sent with each one.

## SOMETHING SPIRITUAL IS STIRRING IN THE UK

By Pete Grieg, the bewildered founder of the 24/7 Prayer movement

I've hesitated to write this post. It's probably premature. We're still slap-bang in the middle of a vast crisis and no one really knows how it's all going to end. But here's the thing: over

recent weeks, and particularly over this last week, prayers that some of us have been praying for decades, suddenly seem to be finding answers in the most unexpected ways.

### 1. The UK Blessing

For starters there's the national blessing song. Released a week ago, it has now been watched two million times which is equivalent to 200 new people every single minute of every hour since last Sunday. Yesterday a BBC journalist asked me about the extraordinary unity the song displays. A lot of people are celebrating that. And stories just keep coming in from those who don't consider themselves religious, saying that the track has moved them unexpectedly to tears.

Is a worship song going viral everything we're praying for? Of course not! But is it something? You'd better believe it! Maybe something is stirring?

### 2. Prayer Surge

Then there's the research commissioned by Tearfund and released on the same day (quite coincidentally) as the UK Blessing song. This survey indicates that some three million new people have turned to prayer in the UK since lockdown began. The online British bookstore Eden reports a 55 per cent increase in sales of Bibles in April. And demand for prayer resources from 24-7 Prayer has been going through the roof. At Emmaus Rd our twice-daily prayer meetings are suddenly wonderfully well attended. Now we know why.

Is a sudden surge of prayer everything we need? Of course not! But is it something? Could it be a start? You'd better believe it! Something seems to be stirring in the UK.

### 3. Church Attendance

The Tearfund survey also indicates that record numbers have begun attending church online since the lockdown began. Generally we'd expect around 5-7 per cent of the nation to attend a Sunday service at least once a month. But over the past couple of months, this figure has jumped - in fact it has skyrocketed - to 24 per cent of the British population. Almost one in four. And 5 per cent of these people wouldn't normally be at church in, well... a month of Sundays! "I've never known a time in my life," says Nicky Gumbel, "when people are more open to [God's word] than they are now."

Is virtual church attendance everything we're praying for? Of course not! But is it encouraging? You'd better believe it!

It seems to me that people are far more likely to attend a normal church service if they've attended a digital one first. Here at Emmaus Rd we are by no means unusual in having more than doubled in size since lockdown and we have more people than ever signed up for our next Alpha course (online). It's not everything. But something does seem to be stirring.

### 4. Public Opinion

Slowly the national media is picking up the story. First the Guardian newspaper last Sunday, then Good Morning Britain on Wednesday, followed by a piece by my friend Krish Kandiah in the Times on Friday and a BBC News at 10 report last night.

What are we to make of this? Is a week of positive media attention everything we're praying for? Of course not! Is it widespread or prominent? No, not yet. But it's a pleasant change from the usual cynical sniping. Could it be an early sign that public opinion is preparing to shift? You'd better believe it!

#### 5. Young People

I would never have believed a few months ago that I'd be seeing a headline in a major British paper saying this: "British public turn to prayer as one in four tune into religious services online".

And then the stunning subheading: "Young people lead resurgence in faith".

Yep, you read that right: the demographic leading the charge to church is the sophisticated, supposedly post-Christian 18-34 year olds.

We do not pray ex nihilo. No-one can jump to the top of the staircase in one go. We find faith for the big things that God hasn't done yet, by celebrating the small things he's doing or he's already done. On a cold, dark night when we spot sparks in the hearth, we blow on them. We don't pour cold water on them. We pray: "More, Lord." We say: "Well, if you can do this, maybe you can do that?"

Are all these developments any more than embers in the hearth? Has this past week been without heartbreak? Are we experiencing some kind of revival? Are any of these encouragements guaranteed to last? To all these questions we must clearly answer with an emphatic "no!"

But could these sparks somehow become a wildfire? Does tragedy often precede resurrection? Could this really be the beginning of a spiritual awakening in our nation for which so many have been praying so faithfully and for so long?

My friends, this is a time to pray with greater faith, preach with greater confidence and plan with great ambition. Yes, let's dare to believe it!

#### **NEXT NEWSLETTER**

If you would like to include anything in the next newsletter do write or phone Lawrence Braschi (lawrence.braschi@stps.org.uk)