

ST PANCRAS NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2021

‘THE CROCUS OF HOPE’

Dear friends,

Conversations at the moment often seem to include the words: ‘keep going’. These past weeks have been a weary time for most of us stuck in lockdown. But, to quote the prime minister’s typically quirky phrase, the ‘crocus of hope’ is now growing. Spring has come, the days are lengthening, and we can see light at the end of this dark road.



During such times it’s helpful to hear a friend’s encouragement to carry on. Even if ‘keeping on going’ just looks like getting dressed in the mornings!

But what encouragement does God give us during these times? As we read through the Bible, we very often hear God saying: ‘Do not be afraid’, ‘Do not be discouraged’ or ‘Be strong and courageous’. We see that all kinds of people needed to hear that reassurance – ‘ordinary’ people like Joshua and Ruth and Mary, leaders like Samuel and Isaiah and Paul and kings and queens like Esther, Hezekiah and David.

Someone once counted the number of times in the Bible that God (or an angel from God) says, ‘Do not be afraid’ and worked out that there is at least one for each day of the year.

The Bible doesn’t talk about crocuses (at least not the kind of spring crocus that we know here in the UK). But at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, we see a conversation between God and the prophet. God reminds Jeremiah that He knew him even before he was formed in his mother’s womb. All Jeremiah’s fears do not mean that God will not fulfil his promises. And God asks Jeremiah to look out at the almond blossoms, which are the first signs of spring in Israel. Just as these flowers are the promise of spring days to come, so God promises to Jeremiah that He is watching to ‘see that His word is fulfilled.’ (Jeremiah 1.12).

So, as we watch the spring flowers sprout, grow and bloom, as Christians we are reminded of God’s promises. He knows us. He has called us by name. We are in His hands.

And during this time of preparation for Easter we are also called to look inward. To question where our hope truly lies. Illness, bereavement and sorrow will still be with us once the waves of this pandemic have passed by. Nevertheless, we have a Saviour who has been tested in every way, and He sends His Spirit to accompany us on this road. Let us keep our hopes fixed on Him.

Every blessing in Jesus Christ,

Lawrence

CHURCH NOTICES

- ❖ **BRIDGING THE GAP – Monday, 8th March at 7.30pm on Zoom** – A Boggle Evening so bring a pencil and paper. Before the meeting, you may want to take up the challenge to find as many words as you can using the letters in COMMONWEALTH. All are welcome.
- ❖ **MEN'S BREAKFAST – Saturday, 13th March at 9.30am on Zoom** – Speak to Derek if you need an invitation.
- ❖ Some of you will know that **Mr John Emmett**, who lived in the row of bungalows next to the church, has died. His family have asked me to let the church know and to thank you for your kindness over the years. The funeral will be at Weston Mill and will be available to watch over the internet. Please contact Lawrence if you would like more details.
- ❖ The **new church internet site** has been up and running for a month or so now, while we iron out any bugs. You can still find it at the same address www.stps.org.uk.
- ❖ This year at St Pancras, instead of a Lent course, we're suggesting that you find a '**Lent Buddy**'.

Make a commitment to meet another member of the church weekly and pray together. (At the moment that will still have to be online or on the telephone).

If you're stuck thinking about how to pray, there are lots of resources to help. You might want to look at the LiveLent2021 online prayers and readings from the Church of England. Or you may want to look at 'These are Our Stories', where a different person from Devon speaks about their faith each week (<https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/lent-course-2021/>).

Or you could choose to read through a book together. A particularly helpful one this year is Dane Ortlund's Gentle and Lowly which explores Jesus' character and love. If you'd like some help then do contact myself or Sarah.

A SHORT SERVICE OF SONGS, PRAYERS and READINGS for use during LENT

You may want to use this short service on your own or with your Lent buddy. Find a quiet space and a quiet time of day. You can listen to the songs online. During Lent we are especially encouraged to reflect deeply on our need for God, for God's forgiveness and loving mercy, so the service reflects these themes.

*Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you
(and also with you.)*

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.*

Song: Purify my heart

*Purify my heart,
Let me be as gold and precious silver.
Purify my heart,
Let me be as gold, pure gold.*

*You are the God of my salvation;
To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*

*In you I hope all the day long.
O my God, in you I trust.*

*Remember, Lord, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.*

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.*

(Repeat)

*Refiner's fire,
My heart's one desire*

*Is to be... holy;
Set apart for You, Lord.
I choose to be... holy;
Set apart for You, my Master,
Ready to do Your will.
Purify my heart,
Cleanse me from within*

*And make me holy.
Purify my heart,
Cleanse me from my sin, deep within.*

(Repeat the Chorus twice)

By Brian Doerksen © 1990 Mercy/Vineyard
Publishing, CCLI 487

Silence is kept.

Let us pray for God's grace and mercy.

*Holy God,
our lives are laid open before you:
rescue us from the chaos of our sin
and through the death and resurrection of your Son
bring us healing and make us whole
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

Reading: Psalm 130

Reading: Matthew 6.16-23

Silence is kept.

A poem for Ash Wednesday.

*'Remember, you are dust' the old words
Echo through my thought.
How well I know it,
Sitting here I scrape the barrels
Of my inmost heart to find
Some piety or prayer to give
In explanation of my day
But dust is all I find;
It's all I have to offer.
Dust from all my doing,
Dregs left after giving,
Dusty hands all caked with normal life.
I gather it and raise my hands.
An offering. Apology.
The house is still, the shadows
Grow. The night expands around me.
Then, a still, small voice;
'Remember, you are dust'.
The darkness draws back, startled,
So am I, I lift my face
My weary, ashless face,
To meet those words;
I find them this time, not as dare,
But as the sweet notes of a pardon.*

*I sit in their forgiveness
In the grace of being named
And in my frailty, known.*

*Silence deepens. So does peace.
And then, a presence
In the newly lighted chapel of my heart.
A hand extends within the quiet.
There, I see it, marked and scarred,
The same that formed us all
From dust, that made a masterpiece
Of mud; for whom our human dust
Has always been the very
Stuff created to be filled by grace
And formed afresh by love.
He reaches out a priestly hand
I wait, in awe, and hear the words again.
'Remember, you are dust',
This time, my Lover's invitation.*

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<https://sarahclarkson.com/.../on-my-ashless-wednesday-a-poem> (used with permission)

Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, when fear and anxiety attack us and hope is veiled in grief, hold us in your wounded hands and make your face shine on us again, for you are our Lord and God.

Gracious God, as we remember before you the thousands who have died, surround us and all who mourn with your strong compassion. Be gentle with us in our grief, protect us from despair, and give us grace to persevere and face the future with hope in Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

You may pray

- For today and its tasks
- For all those continuing to face illness, or the illness of loved ones
- For St Pancras Church, our life and witness

You may want to include prayers for

- People preparing for baptism and confirmation
- People looking for forgiveness
- People who are hungry or homeless
- People who are serving in the NHS and emergency services, schools and local council.

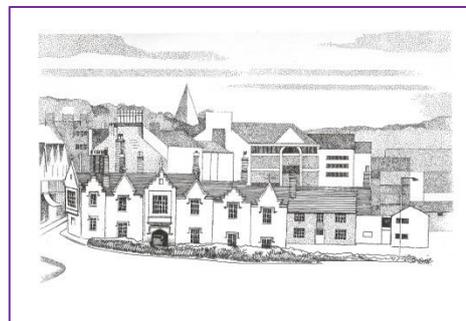
Trusting in the compassion of God, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
Now and forever.
Amen.*

The Municipal Charities of Plymouth

By Vanessa Steer

For those who don't know, I have worked for almost 11 years as Clerk and Treasurer to a charity in Plymouth, known as The Municipal Charities of Plymouth, which comprise several charities and has existed in various forms since approximately 1584, and is now an amalgamation of several different charities. The major arm of our work enables us to provide low-cost, self-contained housing, in our 16 Almshouses, in a safe and secure environment for single Ladies over the age of 60 with naval connections and who have been residents in the Plymouth area for some years. This ethos, which may have originally been aimed at helping naval widows, now means in these modern times the Ladies could have a son or daughter or grandchildren who may have served in The Royal Navy. My own



grandmother was a naval widow at aged 48 in 1949 and had to go back to work as she had no financial help at all.

The main benefit to Plymouth and Plymouth City Council is that our Almshouses allow the Ladies to live close to all amenities within the City Centre and local shops and businesses. There is a growing need for safe, low-cost housing for Ladies of this age and status who otherwise may not be able to rent in the private sector or who may struggle financially in retirement. Indeed, more Almshouses are being built now than have been for many years. The Almshouse Association says it has seen the biggest spike in development of housing run by charities since the Victorian era, with around 1,000 being built in the last 10 years and many more planned.

As a charity, we feel we have a strong pastoral duty to these vulnerable ladies and seek to ensure that they are happy, secure and confident in our ability as Trustees to deliver this service. Either I, as Clerk, or one of the Trustees, visits the ladies each month (in pre-COVID times!), to maintain our links and to demonstrate our pastoral commitment to them. In the COVID 19 crisis, we gave the ladies hand sanitisers and masks to enable them to shop safely and have kept in touch as much as possible. We have recently been gifted the freehold for the land on which our almshouses sit from Plymouth City Council for the princely sum of £1! This exciting development ensures that we can fulfil our ongoing commitment to those presently in our Almshouses and into the future.

At Christmas time we present our annual cheque for £500 to Shekinah, a charity which we have supported for many decades, for their work with the homeless and hungry, and in 2020 we were pleased to have become involved with the Uniform Pop-Up shop in the City Centre, run by Plymouth Vineyard Church, alongside The Orphans' Aid Educational Foundation, another arm of the Charity, offering grants for school uniform from Year 6 to Year 7. Another arm has enabled us to help Provide Devon with a grant towards their work in providing emergency food parcels to primary school children.

We currently have three Christians on the Board, Mark Parkman who was Church Warden at St Charles for many years, and now worships at Emmanuel, our own lovely Kerrie and me.



We currently have a Chair, a Clerk/Treasurer and 6 Trustees; 2 of whom are co-opted by Plymouth City Council for a period of 3 years, and who often commit to staying on the Board once their 3 years are up.

Our other Trustees have voluntarily been on the Board for many years and all of whom have given freely and willingly of their time. As most of the members are all becoming older, we are now looking to recruit more Trustees, particularly someone with legal or financial skills, and you may be interested in joining us. We meet 6 times a year in January, March, May, July, September and November, for approximately two hours, and very occasionally on an ad-hoc, emergency basis. No particular skills are needed, just a willingness to be part of this ancient Charity and a desire to help those less fortunate in today's society, relieving poverty in our fine City.

I was particularly challenged in our Service a couple of weeks ago, with the passage from James Chapter 1, and part of Verse 27 – *“Look after orphans and widows in distress”*. Strictly speaking, you are an orphan if you lose one parent, and many of the families we help and care for with our grants,

are single parent families through no fault of their own, as are the ladies who are widowed, or divorced or who may have finally plucked up the courage to leave an unhealthy marriage or relationship.

Points for prayer, please:

- ❖ Continued health and safety for all our lovely ladies, many of whom have found this lockdown so hard without their family and friends' support
- ❖ More links with local primary schools to enable us to give more uniform grants
- ❖ Younger people to join us to carry our work on into the future, particularly those with those skills some of us lack!
- ❖ Strength and a real sense of God's presence with those of us on the Board

St Pancras Knitters Update, February 2021

By Trish Gribble and Sue Maloney



We have just sent our 600th blanket!!!! How good is that?! What's more we haven't celebrated our 500th one yet so we will have to have a jolly good celebration once we are back! Our 500th blanket was sent on 19th March 2020 just before the first Lockdown so we owe you such a big 'thank you' because we have been able to keep up with the squares and actually beaten our previous target achieving another hundred within the 12 months! Add to that all the hats, handwarmers and little toys we have sent! That is truly amazing taking into consideration the difficulties. Thank you too to those in the community who aren't able to meet with us normally but who have also continued to contribute in a big way with squares and donations.

We received further encouragement just before Christmas when we received this email from Ronda, the founder of 'Knit a Square', which we have been looking forward to sharing with you all:

"Another 14 parcels received from you and recorded on our Aug-Oct squares lists – JUST finished by myself! I was moved to just tell you what a wonderfully generous and prolific group you are – and have been for some time now.

God bless you all – we love what you do for Knit-a-Square'.

It's been a tough year for all, but here's hoping that 2021 will be simpler, and that we may return to a semblance of normality in due course."

Ronda doesn't usually send the emails now, Leanne normally does so this was extra special and so lovely that she took time in her busy schedule to send it. We must also thank you for your continued support in providing donations covering all the postage including donations towards the cost of KAS receiving our parcels!



St Pancras Knitters Update, February 2021 – contd.

So.....What has been happening in South Africa?



Well firstly, sadly, several KAS volunteers went down with COVID in January.

This understandably is slowing things down but as KAS said, *“It is not stopping our dedicated volunteers!”* When they opened the door of the barn on January 19th this is what they found!



- I can spot at least one of our parcels to the far left of this picture!

Here is an example of the outcome of everyone’s combined contributions! Can you spot their little heads?



BOTSHABELO COMMUNITY DISTRIBUTION - JULY 31, 2020

Bringing colour and comfort to 91 more vulnerable children; Botshabelo Community Development Programme.



On July 31, Athele was finally able to make this distribution planned for earlier in the year. She writes on Facebook:

More of the 91 darling children of the impoverished Botshabelo Community in Magaliesberg, warmed by the loving hands of all those who labour so that ‘Knit A Square’ can bring colour, warmth and comfort to the vulnerable children of South Africa.

Finally, from Trish and Sue

A final prayer for those who feel they can join in with us:

'Lord Jesus

Would you watch over all these little ones who are so, so vulnerable especially at this time? We thank you for all the volunteers who seek to watch over and care for them. We pray for them and the team and the 'Go Go's' working with Knit-a-Square', especially those currently suffering with Covid, that they will make a full and quick recovery. We pray your protection over all the work they do and for an opening for them to continue the distributions to those in need.

*In Jesus name
Amen.'*

