

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley

Extraordinary Times

a magazine to help us through COVID-19

Issue 38

December 13th 2020

From your minister...

One of the big frustrations of Christmas 2020 is that we are unable to meet together to sing. Singing Christmas carols is central to our experience of the festive season – but at least you can join in on Facebook this year with our Carol Service, which goes out live on Sunday December 20th at 4pm. Members of our choir and the young people's singing group will be leading us in worship in a special live streamed service in the sanctuary at St Pauls.

Music is very important to me – I've loved singing and playing right from the point that I joined our local church choir at the age of eight. When I became a Christian the Lord called me to a ministry in music which I have followed ever since, and this has become a characteristic of my ordained ministry wherever I have travelled.

Now as most of you will know, it is contemporary music which has been my principal focus; both in worship and also as an evangelistic tool. Modern music can be different to classical or traditional music; it's called "pop" music for a reason, because it becomes "popular" for a while, and then we let it go and consign it to history. In modern churches we tend to introduce new songs quite regularly – we learn them, introduce them to our congregations, then sing them repeatedly over a period of a few months or years. Then we put them to one side and replace them with even newer songs. Contemporary Christian worship songs are effectively "pop" music; which we use for a time and then discard. I know that for some of you, you've learned a lot of new songs during lockdown, simply by watching me leading worship on Facebook!

But at Christmas we sing pretty much the same songs as we have always done since Victorian times (or older, in the case of songs like the "Coventry Carol"). Even though I prefer to use modern music in worship normally, at Christmas I see no reason to mess with the formula. Christmas music needs to remind you of Christmas! It brings the spirit of Christmas past into the present day – it links this year's festivities to the magical experiences of Christmas which we had when we were children. It is unashamedly nostalgic.

Even the writers of contemporary Christian worship music seem to acknowledge this – there isn't much new Christmas worship music around, and if there is, it tends to be written in a particular style which evokes the traditional. You know what I mean – when you hear a new song and it kind of reminds you of something you've already heard, even though it's original.

The great advantage of modern popular music, whether it is worship music or secular music, is that when you hear a song it reminds you of a certain time in your life. This brings a huge wave of nostalgia. Do you remember in the 1980s when we all used to sing "Shine Jesus shine" by Graham Kendrick? Oh my goodness, we sang that one to death, didn't we? After a few years it became so ubiquitous that all the churches grew fed up with it, and turned to newer material. When you hear it now it sounds both extremely dated and wonderfully reminiscent at the same time.

Interestingly enough, on occasion I've experimented with reintroducing it into worship at one or other of my churches. It has never gone well – the song was never intended to have longevity. And that's only one example of music being disposable, of having a "shelf life". Technically what we are referring to is music being written in a

particular style for a particular period of history; often referencing what the Spirit was doing at the time. This is known as the Zeitgeist, the "spirit of the time". It comes, it produces music and culture, then it blows away and is replaced by something else. That's why I often say that I don't encourage the singing of worship songs from before the turn of the century – I mean the 21st century!

I have an iPod which contains an enormous catalogue of music which I have collected, spanning the last 45 years of my life. I usually listen to it on "Shuffle", so the iPod randomly pulls up tracks and surprises me with them as I drive around or walk around. It's the "soundtrack to my life", you have one too. What continuously surprises me is that when a track plays it instantly reminds me of either the first time I heard it, or something in my life that I was experiencing at the time. Some of these memories which spring unbidden into my mind are wonderful reminders of wonderful happy times – but others bring back memories of darker more difficult times of challenge or suffering. The weird thing is that over time the songs which represent the bad times have come to bring me the greatest feelings of joy and wellbeing; it's as if the bad times have been healed, and the music has become a blessing. Some of these tracks are songs which I hated when I first heard them – but now I love them, they mean so much.

Life is a rich tapestry, and as we reflect upon it even some of the most difficult times become wonderful and significant, as the Lord teaches us and heals us, leads us through the often difficult and dangerous experience of being human. In future years, how will we reflect upon this Christmas? Will the carols which we sing every year have a special poignancy this year as we are obliged to have a simpler, leaner Christmas? Perhaps in the future this will add to the blessing of knowing our freedom post-Covid. I do hope so.

God bless, *Ralph*

What's On

Sunday 13th December 10:30am Worship with Mr Rob Burridge

Sunday 20th December 10:30am Worship with Rev Clive McKie

4pm Carol service with Rev Ralph Ward, **online only**

Thursday 24th 11:30pm Christmas Eve Midnight Communion with our District Chair, Rev David Hinchliffe

Christmas Day 10:30am Christmas celebration with Rev Ralph

Note that all services are at St Paul's and livestreamed from our [Facebook page](#) unless otherwise stated

Sad news

Dear Friends of Howard Llewelyn,

It is with great sadness that I must inform you that my father Howard passed away peacefully, with his two sons at his side, at St Catherine's Hospice in the early hours of the 30th November. He had recently been diagnosed with multiple cancers and it was only in the last couple of months that they caused him any significant issues. Thankfully, I was able to take him out to celebrate his 95th birthday on the last day before Covid lockdown 2 (November 4th). He will be sorely missed by myself, my brother Steven and by those whose lives he touched.

His funeral is on Wednesday 16th December 2020 at 12:45 at Surrey & Sussex Crematorium. The proceedings inside the chapel will be broadcast live and be available for a week after the event by following the web link below.

<https://www.wesleymedia.co.uk/webcast-view>

Order ID: 60615 Password: qwufssmb

If you would like to attend the funeral in person, please phone Simon on 07880 730936 or Steven on 07410 442052 to book a place.

We both want to spend time with those who knew our father so we plan to celebrate Howard's life in around a years' time when, hopefully, Covid is under control and we can all enjoy spending time together.

Simon and Steven Llewelyn

In your prayers

Pray for the family of Howard Llewelyn as they mourn his death. Continue praying for Sumangali (Kaanji Thanmbipillai's sister-in-law) about to undergo serious and lengthy surgery, Jean and Geoff Rose, and for others you know who need prayers at this time.

Send your prayer requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com

Permission must be received from a person before their name is put on the Church prayer list

Christmas cards for St Paul's

Sadly, because of the current Covid rules, it is not possible to have our usual Christmas internal post to exchange cards with each other. We must also ask you not to use the pigeonholes in the church, or to pass cards to each other on the church premises. This year, please use the Royal Mail postal service to send cards to your St Paul's friends or, perhaps this once, send E-cards. There are some excellent online suppliers and you can even design your own with some of them.

The internal post has been one of our regular ways of raising funds for *Action for Children*. Last year, along with some of the church cash collections over Christmas and refreshment money, we were able to send them £151. So that we don't let them down in this most difficult of years, please consider making a donation on the [Action for Children](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk) website, or by phone to 0300 123 2112 . May thanks, *Sheila Jones*

What's happening about Geoff's Christmas Quiz?

If you enjoy the yearly challenge of Geoff Ridgway's *Christmas and New Year Quiz* you will be pleased to know that, even in these difficult times, we can still rack our brains, or go a-Googling. This time there's no entrance fee and no prizes – just the fun and satisfaction, or despair, of doing it. If you receive ET by email, the quiz is attached for you to print at home or fill in on your computer. If you receive ET by post, your paper copy is enclosed. Don't return it to Geoff this time. You'll be doing your own marking, so the answers will be delivered in the same way with the ET for 17th January. If you haven't done these before, do have a go. This year's theme is *Capital Cities*.

Did you catch this?

The subject of Melvyn Bragg's Thursday morning radio programme, *In Our Time*, this week was *John Wesley and Methodism*. It made interesting listening and you can hear it here [on the BBC website](http://www.bbc.com/1/programmes/b0000000).

'The one thing needful' Luke 10: 42

Rev Julian Pursehouse, Chair of the East Anglia District, reflects on how the pandemic presents challenges but also offers the gift of refocusing on our calling:

In May 1734, John Wesley wrote sermon no: 146, *The One Thing Needful*, in which he offered an allegorical reading of the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) with a particular focus upon verse 42. He argues persuasively and passionately that *the one thing needful* in all creation is the renewal of our human nature in the Image of God through the gift of divine love – love being the very image and glory of the living God. This being the case, our life of faith is lived with *singularity* and *intention* to ensure that all our thoughts, words and works tender to this great design of grace.

One of my observations of the church in lockdown is that in a situation of adversity and extremis; we are being invited to focus upon what really matters and to relinquish that which is no longer needful. The public restrictions of lockdown have forced us all to live life on a much smaller footprint and by necessity we have had to think through what we can do and what we cannot do. The church is no exception - but along with this challenge comes the gift of refocusing upon our calling from God.

As I reflect upon these sentiments, I am reminded of my work as District Chair in the East Anglia District. I have witnessed moments of joyful focus and renewed energy as both churches and ministers have rediscovered their calling.

I think of the ordained minister who said to me that she felt that she had rediscovered the pastoral office because suddenly she had uninterrupted time to speak with her people on the phone and really get to know them well.

I think of the church that began to help a local chemist with the unending task of delivering important prescriptions to people in the local community – church members were drafted into a hastily made rota of volunteers.

I remember the story of one of our more traditional churches that migrated their worship on to the Zoom platform soon after lockdown began in March of this year. I was able to witness for myself, the simple but profound joy of a community who were reconnected with each other through online worship! At a time when the public gathering for worship was prohibited and our churches were closed; the church was very much alive through a renewed and simple focus upon *worship, pastoral care and loving service*.

Perhaps this is the very time when we have discovered the one thing needful and indeed the things we need to relinquish.

The Revd Julian M. Pursehouse

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St Paul's website www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk

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