

Assembly – July 2020

'The World "After" Covid'

Survey

1. **What is the single most important thing you have observed during the Covid crisis?**

Neighbourliness
Exacerbation of inequality
People's need to tell their stories, and how varied those stories are.
Neighbours providing care and support for those in need: increased feeling of belonging to a community
People following services online
That great changes can be made very quickly if there is the will and perceived need to do so. Personally, I have observed my own need for God above all things, and that my life is not ultimately sustained by anything else.
The amazing virtual Services created and posted on YouTube by St Barnabas Cluster and music from Christ the Cornerstone.
Community
The most important thing I have noticed about the Covid crisis is fear - for oneself or family or friends contracting the disease, and hence a pervading sense of isolation and anxiety for many people.
Fellowship
The creativity amongst churches in reaching out to their congregations; online services, bible studies, fellowships and that in doing this they have reached a wider 'audience' - visibility has increased and in turn people's accessibility to the 'gospel' including those who would never dream of entering a church building.
I would say the opportunity to just Be.....but biggest bugbear is Rubbish and lack of interest by some people to take responsibility of their actions.
These observations have been personal as well as general. On the whole, I have loved the extra quiet and space of not being too busy. However I, like many others, have keenly missed worshipping together even though Zoom meetings for worship have worked amazingly well for us. Over 40 people sitting in silence in their own homes united by Zoom has been very powerful. I observe the importance of touch and its absence is tangible. I observe how beautiful this Spring has been. I observe how blessed we have been by the technology but I also observe how much it has left some people behind through frailty or economic disadvantage.
That having good relationships are important. Most people are doing their best to be sensible. A minority are stupid or selfish, or maybe both. Loneliness of isolation In the city I have noticed fear and isolation as the major responses.
Faith became more important, stronger and deeper understanding on a personal basis.

<p>Polarisation</p> <p>eg (a) increased friendliness and looking out for one another by many vs those who've behaved selfishly – flytipping, speeding, ignoring social distancing, etc</p> <p>(b) pensioners experiencing no loss of income vs (especially) youngsters losing jobs and becoming even worse off than they were before</p> <p>(c) those living in nice houses in nice areas and with decent gardens having a reasonably good experience of lockdown vs those living on their own and/or in flats in inner cities having a bad experience of it.</p>
<p>An increased connection between people who seem more willing to talk to each other and to strangers.</p>
<p>Enforced / time for introspection. New and old priorities have emerged or re-emerged, and life has become more balanced.</p>
<p>Initially: clearer skies, silence, more people out exercising</p> <p>Gradually: People experimenting with different ways of communicating and/or using common means more frequently and creatively.</p>
<p>The need for constant and flexible, responsive learning.</p>
<p>That life has changed and it is not clear how life will be lived in future with coronavirus.</p>
<p>The ability for individuals and communities to make huge changes to the way they live their lives, which shows that it is possible to make the major changes required to make a better and more just society.</p>

2. What are the two most pressing issues arising from Covid that you believe churches should seek to address locally?

<p>Food poverty.</p> <p>Loneliness.</p>
<p>Money / Debt advice.</p> <p>Mental Health.</p>
<p>Reconnecting with people.</p> <p>What needs to be different from before and what needs to remain the same.</p>
<p>Keeping in touch with church members, especially those without computer or smart phone.</p> <p>To provide spiritual and practical help to anyone in their community who seeks it.</p>
<p>Bereavement needs.</p> <p>Continuation of online services perhaps by live streaming to those who cannot get to church, or are reluctant to.</p>
<p>The need for connection with God and each other.</p>
<p>The practical obstacle to meeting of the Ecumenical Council and postponement of the Annual Congregational Meeting. Lockdown has made it more difficult to prepare for LEP CIO, as also has the delay in CTE finalising the model documents.</p>
<p>Grief and loss.</p> <p>Loneliness and isolation.</p>

Somehow, the church needs to foster groups who can meet safely to support each other within the community. People are experiencing grief at all kinds of levels: for those who have died, but also loss of freedom, loss of wages from regular work, loss of physical contact, loss of the normal rhythms of life...the list could go on. I know we are already active in planning bereavement support groups, which is great and, for which within the bounds of safety, I would like to take part.

Racial justice and care for the bereaved.

Isolation of people/groups/communities - imminent need for counselling/listening - mental health issues - People need hope!!

Families and youth - mental health, practical assistance and support - again helping people find hope!!

Mental health issues.

Poverty.

Ageing congregations. I am from the Bahamas and my old school friend there tells me the Bahamian government has advised that no one over 65 should attend church after lockdown - this would make some/several MK churches not re-open.

The loss of income from both collections and not hiring buildings out.

Thirdly (if allowed!) the church just has not been in present voice in the current media. It would have been good if it had provided a more spiritual need and spoken more visibly into the situation.

Debt & combating loneliness in the community.

Loneliness, because so many are locked down and seeing nobody.

Exhaustion, especially single parents with kids off school, and also overworked healthcare workers.

The church needs to address the issue of poverty and isolation of our elderly folks.

How to connect with whole community (even those not computer savvy).

Loneliness and mental health of people living on their own and within families.

Being at the heart of Build Back Better – contribute to the movement to tackle inequality, address climate change, which may mean increasing our engagement with the Council and our local MPs.

Finding a way to include those who were lonely already and for who their isolation has become worse during the lockdown.

Increased needs and the reality that the virus has affected everyone but not in the same way. How do we take forward the benefits we have learned from technology over the last 16 weeks.

The needs to consult, listen to and act on the views and perceived needs of the laity. In rushing to deliver online packages to replace traditional Church worship, the clergy have focussed on getting a new digital process in place, regardless of what the members are experiencing and thinking, in extraordinary times.

Relearning that small is beautiful, (in the spirit of Schumacher). Matthew 18.20 *“For where two or three **gather in my name**, there am I with them”*

Greater engagement in social and justice issues: loneliness, possible increased mental health/behavioural issues amongst school children and young people, hidden poverty, job losses.

Re-shaping services of worship to become more inclusive – within and without the walls of a building while not losing the sense of sacred place and legacy of the past.

The need for good neighbourliness.

The building of social contact; reduction of loneliness.
Develop a clear long term strategy and new sustainable model for church. This includes clergy developing their leadership skills and becoming less managerial. Online worship continues to develop.
Provide a vision for a better, kinder and more just communities in Milton Keynes. Support individuals affected and work jointly to provide support to the vulnerable within Milton Keynes communities.

3. What single word/phrase should best describe churches over the next year?

More open/willing to using technology in church and mission
Humble
Present in the community
People not buildings
Having to cope with less income due to loss of income in 2020, especially if there is no temporary Parish Share relief from Oxford.
Welcome
CIO: simpler more direct structure, with a renewed sense of Mission.
Creative
'Part of a growing community'
Outward looking
'Hope'; we need to be a beacon of hope for people. Not just in the practical, physical but spiritually...'salt & light'.
Welcoming and inclusivity.
Rebuilding our church communities so we can be part of rebuilding MK.
They cared. Be proactive. Don't wait to be asked but ask/discover/guess what is needed and DO something. Active outside the buildings clearly showing to all the love of Jesus. (ie helping those grieving family, lost jobs, financial difficulties and much more with no questions asked about beliefs.) The church should be seen as caring. Compassionate.
Maybe growth and closer within the communities within the parishes.
Exploring God's kingdom in the new normal.
Back to the future, where the basics count.
Re-visioning towards Re-shaping towards Re-energising
Courageous
Active and innovative not reactive.
Sources of hope and support.