

The Parish of Christchurch

*The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell*



For Sunday 7th June 2020

Dear Friends,

As June begins, I sense that we are beginning to look forwards and start to think about how our society, and our Church, is going to begin to emerge from the long period of shutdown. We have seen primary schools start to welcome back more pupils and staff (many of them have, of course, been open continuously, even during the Easter holidays, to provide care for children of key workers and vulnerable children) and more shops and businesses are re-opening. And we have seen restrictions on our own movement and ability to meet people relaxed somewhat. We are still waiting to hear when we may be permitted to re-open the doors of our church buildings.

It is obvious that people are reacting in different ways to these changes. Some are attending large gatherings with lots of people, seemingly paying no heed to the rules about social distancing – just think of some of the pictures we have seen of packed beaches and large BBQ's and picnics in beauty spots. But others are still staying at home except when it is necessary to go out for shopping etc. And many are somewhere in between these two extremes. I have heard many people expressing strong disapproval of others' behaviour and others expressing a determination to live more freely in the belief that the infection risk is very low.

As we all tentatively feel our way towards a way of living in community that takes due account of the health risks that we may pose to others and they to us, I think we face a risk that we might lose one of the good things that has emerged during the long period of isolation and shutdown. During that time, it seems to me that we have become more attentive to one another – more aware of each other's needs and more appreciative of each other's presence. When out walking or cycling, I noticed that many more people were now making eye contact and offering a cheery 'good morning!' than was the case before the Covid pandemic. We had begun to look at the people we meet not as irrelevant, or as objects, but as people like us, with the same concerns, hopes and fears, the same vulnerabilities. But just recently, a harder edge seems to be creeping in, and we risk starting to look at other people differently – either as a direct threat to our own health and safety (reckless infection spreaders) or as unjustifiably judgmental and authoritarian (killjoys and doom-mongers). In doing so, we begin to treat those whom we meet more as objects than as people. How good it would be if we could find a way to retain the attentiveness that we have been showing to each other – to see the other as a person having hopes, fears, joys and vulnerabilities just as we have and not as an object opposed to or threatening our own well-being, and to be willing to modify our own behaviour in the light of the desire for the other's welfare.

The 20th century writer and philosopher Martin Buber wrote about this in his book *I and Thou*. He described two attitudes to life: in one, our encounters with other people are in the form 'I : It', and

in the other they are in the form 'I : You'. Whether we see the other person as an object (an 'It') or as a person (a 'You') has huge implications for the way in which we treat them and relate to them. And this impacts on our understanding of God too, for we cannot relate personally to an 'It' but only to a 'You'. Our life of Christian discipleship is about learning to relate to God in this 'I : You' way and our life in community should likewise be about living in relationship and not in opposition or competition with the other members of our community.

As we move forwards into the uncertainties that no doubt lie ahead, we should pray for God's grace to help us live attentively to the needs of others, to see others as 'You' and not 'It' and to be willing to modify our behaviour in the light of the demands that such relationships necessarily make on us.

As mentioned at the start of this letter, we are waiting for further guidance about ways in which we may be permitted to make use of our church buildings and we will keep you informed about this as and when the situation changes. In the meantime, we continue to do what we can to maintain contact with everyone through our online times of prayer, our online services on Sundays and Wednesdays and frequent posts on Instagram, Facebook and our parish website. We also try to make sure that those who do not have access to the internet receive a friendly phone call now and then (not always from a member of the clergy). If you know of someone with whom we are not managing to stay in touch, do please let us know.

We are also planning ways of continuing our life of discipleship online, recognising that it may be some time before we can meet together in groups inside. On that subject, the Vicar has something to add, so I will sign off with my love and prayers for a peaceful week ahead, and add Charles' text below.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Evans', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rev'd Jonathan Evans

The Vicar writes:

In the past three months Zoom has entered the life of many parishes, including ours. Its benefits are too many to mention. Allow me to tell you about two more which we hope may be of interest.

Sunday Elevenses

Many of you are watching our weekly online Sunday services from home, but have missed the fellowship that has grown up over coffee after the service. We want to do something about that. So, from Sunday 14 June, you can join 'Sunday Elevenses' to meet for a chat,

while enjoying a cup of coffee or tea at home. (The idea has come from Morning Prayer, where on Saturdays people are staying on afterwards for coffee.)

The way this works is that, once you've arrived, everyone will be allocated to a 'breakout group'. This way we have the benefit of conversation with a smaller group, much as we would in Priory House or St George's Hall.

If this is of interest, please email conference@christchurchpriory.org and we can give you the details needed to join us on Zoom. If you wish to join by telephone rather than using the internet, please call on 01202 800888.

Small Groups ...

... have not been able to meet since lockdown began. Knowing how much they are missed, we want to provide two opportunities for you to be part of a small group discussion. For the coming weeks, therefore, we are offering:

Wednesdays at 2.30pm

A session in which we'll be looking ahead at the Bible readings for the following Sunday. After some initial input from one of the clergy team, there will be time for discussion and questions. To join this, again, please use the email address or phone number above and we can give you details.

Thursdays at 7.30pm

For those who work during the day, Join the small group that (pre-lockdown) met at Will & Jen Howard's house. In the coming weeks they'll be looking at some difficult passages of the Bible. To join this group, please again contact us as above for the access details.

Important: All these meeting IDs and Passwords that will be distributed must not be passed on to anyone else. By joining any of these meetings, you will be agreeing to the terms and conditions of Zoom meetings administered by this parish, which can be viewed in the 'Policies' section of the parish website. Any questions about this, please contact vicar@christchurchpriory.org