IAFN

August 2020

COVID-19: Church and Family

Responding creatively in a time of pandemic

International Anglican Family Network

celebrating the God-given potential of the family as a source of thriving relationships, identity, belonging, discipleship and reconciliation

COVID-19: Church and Family

Editorial

By the Primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

In the nations in which Anglicans live, the coronavirus pandemic is revealing both the weaknesses and strengths of our lives and societies, from our health systems to the living conditions of our neighbours and communities. In South Africa for example, COVID-19 is exposing the rot in parts of our health system as well as the shocking inequality that results in the poor and marginalised being far more likely to suffer the consequences of the virus. Our death rate has been lower than in many other countries, but within a month of strict measures being taken to stop the spread of the virus, three million people had lost their incomes. After three months, half of all households had reported going hungry.

Less apparent has been how the virus has highlighted the crucial importance of family life to our common existence. By confining us to our homes, the strict 'lockdowns' that have been imposed in a number of Provinces in the Communion have thrown many of us together in our households far more than usual, putting the quality of our relationships firmly in the spotlight. Hopefully, most of us are enjoying anew the richness of stable, happy Christian family life in the long hours of being together. But lockdowns have also entrenched separation for family members who live apart, and in cases where people live on their own, they have shown how lonely life can be when one is physically distanced from one's family. Where families are dysfunctional, there is real physical danger, especially to women and children. Before the novel coronavirus appeared, we already had a gender-based violence (GBV) crisis in South Africa. Now our GBV command centre is reporting a spike in gender violence-related calls. The problem is challenging other nations as well: the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, says there is a "horrifying global surge in domestic violence" since lockdowns began.

In my case, spending so much time with my family in our home in Cape Town helps bring me down to earth, teaching me humility and forcing me to keep my sense of humour. It also challenges me to reflect on whether what I value at the level of family is congruent with what I value and practise in public. In my work and public life, do I act with the same integrity as I must with the members of my family who know me well?

Defining family more widely, in a time such as this, not only our nuclear families but our wider church and community families deserve special love, care and attention. In communities with access to the internet, virtual worship has helped to fill the gap created by the inability of congregations to gather for worship. In many parishes, we are seeing as many joining online worship as we would normally see in church and sometimes the services attract members of the family who rarely attend in person.

God be with you and your family as we all navigate this crisis. May it strengthen our common resolve to pray for and spend time on building the lives of our and our neighbours' families.

Coronavirus resources for prayer and worship from the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, see https://bit.ly/2VV9CzV

International Anglican Family Network (IAFN)

IAFN networks across the Anglican Communion to celebrate the God-given potential of the family as a source of thriving relationships, identity, belonging, discipleship and reconciliation. Out of this celebration IAFN is an advocate for the family in the face of behaviours which diminish this potential, sharing stories of hope, promoting family care and sustaining the family as the cradle for human dignity.

Contact IAFN to subscribe to our newsletters or to share your stories:

iafn@anglicancommunion.org

c/o The Anglican Communion Office, St Andrew's House, 16 Tavistock Crescent, London W11 1AP, UK

http://iafn.anglicancommunion.org

https://www.facebook.com/AnglicanFamilies

Front cover photo by August de Richelieu from Pexels

Contents

'Our people stood up' .. 3
Side effects in the Solomon Islands .. 4
Love in the time of coronavirus .. 5
Children's and Family Ministry: A parent's perspective .. 6
All in this together .. 7
Lockdown generosity .. 8
Tuning in to God and neighbour .. 9
Mothers' Union responses in Myanmar and Sri Lanka .. 9
Support for a migrant community .. 10
Kindness generates kindness in Rio .. 11
Some more resources .. 12
Prayer .. 12

‘Our people stood up’

The Revd Gillian Rookyard is Rector of St Anselm’s of Canterbury in the Anglican Parish of Kingsley North-Woodvale in the Diocese of Perth, Western Australia. Here, she offers a glimpse into life in her parish during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is Sunday morning. He dresses in his Sunday best and, using his long white cane, steadily makes his way next door to his neighbours. They sit down in front of the computer to participate in our streamed worship.

These are unprecedented times, but even at 98 years of age, he is a vibrant and authentic example of faithful Christian discipleship. Not even a pandemic will keep him from gathering for worship with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

At St Anselm’s we strive to be a vibrant, welcoming parish reaching out to the community and offering a place of belonging where all can know Christ and respond to the living Gospel.

Anticipating that church closures were imminent, we had planned for Sunday 22 March to be a kind of dress rehearsal for using Facebook Live, but as it turned out became the first of 11 weeks of livestreaming to our congregation, and unexpectedly – even beyond!

As I walked into church on that morning I said to my colleague, ’Today can only go better than it did in my dreams!’ All night I had tossed and turned, dreaming about every possible technical mishap and disaster. With just an iPhone perched on a flower stand, it did go better than all of that! While it wasn’t ‘perfect’ (whatever that is), we were thrilled to receive affirming support and encouragement for our efforts, and were satisfied that we had honoured our commitment to continue offering an opportunity for our people to gather, albeit virtually, for worship.

In the weeks that followed we refined our setup, tweaked our sound, and got better at framing the liturgy for the online environment. Thanks to a technology grant from the Anglican Diocese of Perth, we purchased new equipment which enabled us not only to enhance our online offering during this time, but also to continue livestreaming into the future.

But Sunday mornings were only one part of a much bigger picture. The fundamental questions remained: What does it mean to be a parish when our people can’t meet? What does it mean to be the Body of Christ when the people of God can’t gather? What does it mean to be a place of hope and welcome to the wider community when the sign at the front of the church says ‘CLOSED’?

As we grappled deeply with these questions, our people stood up. And as they did, they showed us just what it means to be all these things.

They started praying the Offices with one another online; they formed phone networks; they gathered in groups on Zoom for morning tea and to participate in study groups; they arranged a contactless drive-by to deliver their mission-giving donations for Emergency Relief; they distributed weekly material for families to work through with their children, and they shared themselves with one another by opening their hearts, homes, skills and stories in remarkable, beautiful, and humbling ways. Our elders offered an online Lenten Quiet day, reflections on topics like resilience, and even broadcast a weekly worship service into the local aged care facility.

Many in our congregation have expressed that they have felt more spiritually fed during this time than they have in a long time. Others are grateful for the rest. Some have found it extremely difficult, and everyone is just so grateful to be able to worship in person again, now that our church building has re-opened. We are deeply aware that this is something that many of our brothers and sisters around the world are not yet able to do and we continue to offer our prayers and love to all.

In our preparations for re-gathering, we have been intentional about incorporating what we have learned during this time into new ways of being the Body of Christ in our little patch. We have seen in the imposed restrictions an opportunity for growth and for exploring new ways of gathering and have given ourselves permission to be open to new possibilities. And we look forward to where God will lead us.

On our first Sunday back in the building for corporate worship, we shared this litany at the beginning of the service:

> *From our kitchens and our patios, our couches and our beds.* ***It is good Lord to be here.***
>
> *With our brothers and our sisters, our children and our elders:* ***It is good Lord to be here.***
>
> *Filled with joy and hope and longing:* ***It is good Lord to be here.***
>
> *With Word and song and prayer and bread:* ***It is good Lord to be here.***
>
> *After eleven weeks of distance:* ***It is good Lord to be here!***

The Revd Max Pengelley, at 98 years old, continues to inspire us all! It is a blessing and privilege to worship and serve beside him, and to share so deeply in his journey of faithful discipleship. God bless him.

Contact: The Revd Gillian Rookyard,
rector@kingsley.perth.anglican.org

Side effects in the Solomon Islands

Sister Veronica Vasethe is a member of the Community of the Sisters of the Church in the Solomon Islands in the Anglican Church of Melanesia. She reflects on the extra challenges that the pandemic has imposed on people who are already vulnerable and how the church continues to serve at the heart of people's lives.

Students in Honiara and on Guadalcanal are the most affected victims of COVID-19 in the Solomon Islands. Their education has been disturbed because schools are closed down and the government moved them to their respective islands. Most of them do not know what to do in their villages as there is no access to any learning facilities. Now the schools have re-opened but the students from remote islands could not make it back in time. Boats travelling to remote islands like Temotu are rare, because of the great distance and boats have to be seaworthy.* Furthermore, students do not have the money to pay for their return fares, because the government sent them home. Most of the students have outstanding school fees and COVID-19 has added another burden to their parents.

The Ministry of Education provides lessons for the students through the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, but the network is very poor in the remote islands.

Most parents depend very much on the sale of the crops they grow to meet the need of their family, especially school fees. COVID-19 hit hard on such people as most markets in Honiara closed down. There have been complaints in the media against the Prime Minister with appeals to re-open the small markets in Honiara. The government has to protect the people from the virus and stand firm against the market vendors. The economy of our country is affected both locally and internationally, with resources no longer sustainable to keep up in the world market. Agriculture, fisheries, mining, and tourism have all been badly affected. Last year, tourism was picking up in this country after been affected by the Ethnic Tension. However, COVID-19 has put tourism back to its knees. The hospitals and clinics are also affected, and rural clinics are badly needing new stocks, but nothing is provided and so put a great risk to the life of our people.

Tropical Cyclone Harold caused widespread destruction in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga during April 2020 and multiplied the challenges of responding to COVID-19. With generous assistance from its partners, the Anglican Church of Melanesia donated essential items, including hand washing facilities to address proper hygiene and COVID-19 awareness. Photo: Anglican Church of Melanesia https://bit.ly/3fBFGQE

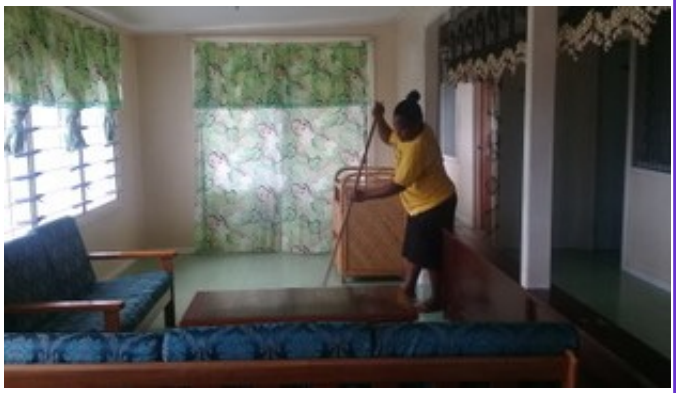
People working for the government had been repatriated and so most offices are closed. These people too found it hard to sustain their families as they returned home without jobs. Some people lost their jobs, especially those working in hotels and motels, because of no customers. People are encouraged to work from home but this is a huge challenge, as most houses are crowded and have a lack of privacy.

Social distancing is one of the challenges in the field of pastoral ministries. Fortunately, church services are not closed in the Solomons, because this is the very heart of the people. People are more committed to attend church services and more connected with their neighbours and are kind to them at this time. Although, the government, through the leaders of the churches, discourages big gatherings and conferences. Christian people are really committed to their faith and belief.

* Mothers' Union Provincial President for the Anglican Church of Melanesia Pamela Abana reports that 27 lives were lost at sea in April when a passenger boat was repatriating people to Malaita during Cyclone Harold. Those who died were washed into the ocean and were drowned when a huge wave hit the boat. 'Most of those lost were students who unfortunately were excited to go home, only to lose their lives. The government and the church are still dealing with the survivors' parents, guardians and relatives with their trauma and grieving.'

Mrs Abana also writes that the Mothers' Union grassroot programmes and activities continue, except for the closure of their provincial and diocesan offices. 'Mothers' Union members in Honiara lately have reached out to satellite members and did cooking lessons on preparing simple breakfast and meals. The result was excellent as it brings women together by sharing their cooking skills with one another in such a time, truly it promotes Christ love and care in his mission.

'Overall, families and the church embrace the situation of COVID-19 with nothing but continuous prayer for guidance. For whatever may happen we will put it all in God's hand. At the same time it is also a time to reflect on our daily lives that nothing is permanent but always to seek the mind of God as we continue to share this life with Christ Jesus.'



A staff member cleans the Mothers' Union St Agnes Guest House in Honiara where there are no guests and staff are on indefinite leave.

Religious Communities' pastoral ministries are scaling down and this is another challenge for the Sisters and Brothers. Although we minimise our visiting to villages and communities, we still attend to calls coming to our doors. People are desperate to hear the good news and be encouraged to stand firm in their faith.

Contact: Sister Veronica CSC, c/o mission@mmuk.net

Love in the time of Coronavirus

The Revd Diana Hall is Rector of St Anne's Scottish Episcopal and Methodist Church, Dunbar, Scotland. She describes how life has changed during the pandemic and how the church community is responding.

At St Anne's church, like others across the UK, life has changed radically since the middle of March. The congregation serves the small coastal town of Dunbar in southeast Scotland. Sitting at one end of the High Street, it usually offers a seven-days a week welcome and a quiet space for prayer to local people and tourists alike.

But in the UK, the spread of Coronavirus meant that church gatherings were stopped in mid-March, and when the town was placed into lockdown a week later, the Scottish College of Bishops required churches to be completely closed to the public for the first time in several hundred years.

The closure of church buildings was carried out as an act of love, to embody concern for the welfare of the local community. However it also begged the question, 'What does it mean to be the Body of Christ in our community in this season'? The answer became clear as we watched and listened to the needs presenting in the town and were inspired by God to respond

St Anne's quickly became involved in a number of initiatives. One was to move the congregation's pattern of regular worship online, broadcasting a weekly Eucharist live from the church using videoconferencing software. Only the priest is present in the building, but anyone with an internet connection and a smartphone computer can see the familiar church setting as they join in with worship. The church family can also see and talk to one another this way, and so the sense of a genuine gathering is sustained. A nightly Compline service was added as a trial, and has continued ever since, offering a gentle meditative end to the day for those who might be anxious or lonely.

Online worship has been attractive to people whose circumstances made it difficult for them to get to church for a 10am start, while the possibility of relative anonymity has helped some who had lost their church connection, or are exploring faith for the first time, to join in. Younger members of the congregation have helped older ones to master the technology required, and people without the necessary equipment have received gifts or loans to meet their needs.

For the town at large, the church began producing a weekly newsletter with both faith-related resources and local news and public health information to help people know what help is available as the situation develops. It is emailed to those with capacity and posted or hand delivered to those who need hard copies, including those in care homes.

The Local Authority asked for a community resilience team to be established. Members of the church family have been integral in the formation of the resulting 200-person volunteer team. Congregation members are involved in its organisation and management, as well as being good neighbours to those among whom they live. The porch of the church building has become a rendezvous point from which volunteers collect resources and personal protective equipment. Helpers have assisted local residents with everything from shopping for groceries to picking up prescriptions, dog-walking and gardening.

Staying at home during the pandemic: Children display their Easter egg drawings to cheer up passers-by.

The Rector is the point of contact for the team covering the area around the church, and this has helped strengthen existing friendships and create new ones in the neighbourhood. Approaches being made to the church suggest people have begun to see it as available and willing to serve them with their daily needs, or when the don't know where else to turn.

Many of those being served by the resilience team are not allowed to leave home at present because their age or health means they are considered to be at risk. A congregation member involved in the team suggested, and in collaboration with the local community council and a small charity, initiated a Hot Meals Service which provides a home-delivered two-course meal to anyone in need, seven days a week, to lighten the burden of providing food and cooking.

For many the lockdown means plummeting income and increased utility bills. The church refers people to the local foodbank run by another of the town's churches. It also runs a debt advice service, which has moved to online working during the lockdown and is currently working to treble its capacity by training up new advisers in anticipation of worsening economic conditions in the coming months.

Continuing to care for vulnerable young people has been a particular challenge. Online worship has given opportunities for young people to be included, for example in an Easter Art Competition.

The church's Youth Club, which usually offers safe space to around 20 vulnerable children each week, has had to stop meeting. Thankfully, contact has been maintained with these youngsters, for whom, in an important sense, St Anne's is regarded as 'home'. The local Christian Youthworker has been able to liaise with local schoolteachers as well as phone families to enquire after the welfare of children and adults, identify needs and engage in problem-solving, trying to ensure children remain well cared for, engaged in home schooling and have their needs met. Young people have been helped to obtain tablets and laptops and parents struggling to cope have been offered support. The church has been able to help with practical needs here too, from offering pastoral support to school staff to delivering surprise care packages of groceries or whatever else is needed to prevent a family reaching crisis point. Offered as simple acts of kindness, each is a practical way of sharing God's love and helping people to preserve people's dignity and sense of value.

In Scotland as elsewhere, the toll of COVID-19 is significant in both human and economic terms. In this context the church is able to show even more than usual the expression of God's care for the whole human family. This time of difficulty is also a time of growth for individual disciples, and of the congregation's integration and witness in the wider life of the town. We continue to offer a source of hope as we share God's provision.

Passers-by stop to enjoy well cared-for flowerbeds in St Anne's church garden, which provides much-needed beauty and tranquillity. In a sunny corner, sunflowers will be ready in a few weeks time when we hope young people will be able to gather outside the church. Everything we do offers a reminder that the local church is in the community, for the community, embodying the love of God even in the time of coronavirus.

Contact: The Revd Diana Hall,
rector.stannesdunbar@gmail.com

Children's and family ministry: A parent's perspective

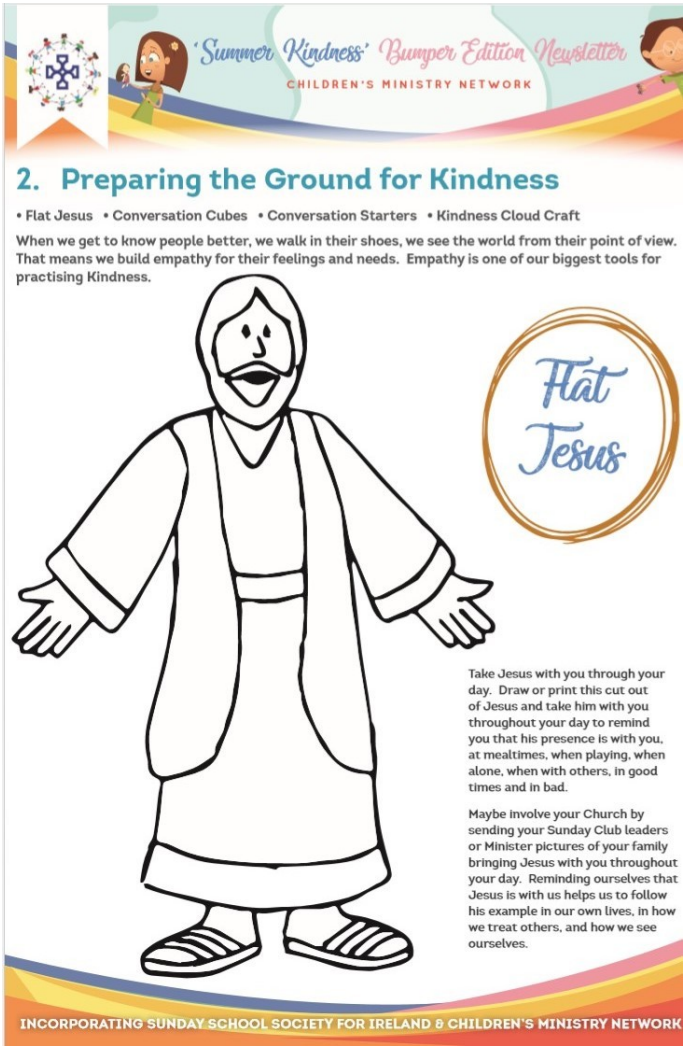
Lydia Monds is part-time Children's Ministry Development Officer for the Sunday School Society for Ireland. Within this role she coordinates the Church of Ireland Children's Ministry Network which connects representatives from all 12 dioceses. However, Lydia reflects here first and foremost as a parent of young children.

ZOOM ZOOM ZOOM! Thankfully this is not the sound of another video meeting, rather it is the sound of my children and me pretending to fly in-between the trees in our local park as we steer clear of people on the paths. As we move, we find things to be thankful for, first in our bodies, then in each other, then in our surroundings. We have a picnic (a banana!) and say thank you to God for being with us.

We are grateful for the resources flowing from the Church of Ireland and from further afield that not only provide online lectionary-based activity sheets, All Age services, Zoom kids Clubs, quiet time podcasts and toddler story times, but also prayer scavenger hunts and fun family games that can be done around the kitchen table or outside, with not a screen or a printer in sight, but with a boost and a nudge that we can 'do faith' ourselves as a family unit. When life is so drastically changed and stresses weigh down on us, there is a need and a longing for a renewed sense of God's presence with us in the pain, the joy and the humdrum of everyday life. Wanting to do it is one thing, having the confidence and resources is quite the other.

And there have been days when there was no zooming or thankfulness. Where I didn't engage but struggled through work and family life, failing at both, without even a nod toward faith formation.

But those in ministry reaching out to families have consistently encouraged us to be kind to ourselves, to forgive ourselves, and to take one day at a time. So although it has been tough, I think I will look back and remember when we had a competition to see who could best draw the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and when we built (and knocked down) toy construction brick towers to help us learn a memory verse, when we painted our feelings and talked to God about them, when we made and posted origami doves with peace prayers to a Cathedral for use in their online service, when we said the Lord's Prayer using Makaton [a language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate], and when we challenged ourselves to find as many different



leaves as we could and tried to identify them (using an App!) - and then thanked God for his creativity.

All of these ideas came from different parishes, dioceses and children's and family workers and were disseminated widely by the Children's Ministry Network. We are so thankful to the 'resourcers' who have been willing to share their gifts and ideas freely with the rest of us.

The Church of Ireland Children's Ministry Network has just put the finishing touches on its Bumper Edition Summer Kindness Newsletter that is packed full of simple ideas for bringing faith into everyday life. It emphasises kindness to ourselves and others and the infinite Kindness of God whose face is towards us: http://www.cm.ireland.anglican.org/childrens-ministry-summer-kindness-bumper-edition-newsletter

As much as possible the ideas are simple. They don't need unusual resources and most don't need a printer. One activity involves growing food from scraps as we are conscious that not everyone has access to seeds. We added several ideas (check out Flat Jesus and Prayer Tree collages) that some clergy and family workers may want to do with the whole parish so families can get involved at home and then their activities/crafts/prayers can be used as part of a Service.

This resource is being offered alongside some amazing online Holiday Bible Clubs and the weekly Church at Home resources that have been faithfully disseminated since March. And we are learning to find what works for our own families, 'pods' and 'hubs' in order for us to stay connected. And so we ZOOM: on screens, through trees, towards the 'new normal', knowing that as we navigate change, we are held together in God's Hands.

Contact: Lydia Monds: admin@cmn.ireland.anglican.org

See https://bit.ly/3dCXKbY for more resources gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic by the Church of Ireland.

All in this together

In this story from the Anglican Diocese of Perth in Western Australia, the Revd Nicholas Lockwood, Priest-in-Charge at Christ the King, Parish of Willetton, describes some of the unforeseen benefits of going online during the pandemic.

"Family are God's gift to you, as you are to them", *Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu*

One of the challenges of being a family in the 'developed world' in the 21st century is busy-ness, and anyone who leads a church knows that we often find ourselves providing programmes and services *for* families. For our small parish in the suburb of Willetton, with a predominately older congregation, it was a real joy to see the younger families step up and contribute significantly when we were forced online by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At a time when there was a real risk of isolation and loneliness, it was such a gift to be able to anchor ourselves in worship together Sunday by Sunday, and respond to the love of God in loving one another.

The first week of lockdown was a whirlwind of getting prepared to go online, including video tutorials and phone calls to help older members get connected and confident in using online platforms. In order to build congregational connection, I visited different homes each week to video the bible readings and prayers. In the first instance, it meant that people in the congregation were able to see their church family online over the weeks of social distancing. But the families really came into their own in leading us in the Psalms. Our tradition of praying them responsorially meant that family members could contribute multiple voices, so that those on the other side of the screen felt invited to actively join in too. Moreover, we could video families sitting *together* on the sofa, creating the sense that we were all in this together. We saw sisters, brothers and kids from our church family sitting opposite us on their sofa (albeit through a screen!), leading us in worship while we sat on ours.

As the weeks went on, young adults stepped up to offer their time and technological skills to make our Sunday worship *Online at Nine* an amazing experience of community and worship for our people. The live chat function on the pre-recorded service meant that we could still 'talk' to each other, and we even had morning tea over Zoom after the Service (bring-your-own cuppa, of course!). All this was intended to keep our own community connected, and a huge 96 per cent of our congregation made the move to worship online.

The pleasantly surprising consequence of moving online was that our worship was now accessible to others too. Family members who rarely joined us in church on a Sunday morning were now joining their family *Online at Nine*. People connected to our community outreaches took the opportunity to quietly and comfortably explore Christian worship, without the discomfort of entering a building and facing strangers. Parishioners invited family and friends, locally and abroad, to join them *Online at Nine*; it proved to be a real gift for those whose churches were unable to go online. And significantly for us, one of our people who had recently moved into aged care was able to rejoin her church family for worship.

Revd Nicholas Lockwood and family join the 'Online at Nine' virtual gathering from their sofa.

For my family, including the two dogs, it proved to be not only a real honour to lead God's people in worship during this season online, but a lot of fun too. Because we all work and study, Monday evenings were the only time we were all

available to pre-record our part in leading the church service; however, evenings are also playtime for our dogs! We oscillated between frustration and laughter as the dogs would sneak onto the sofa for pats and scratches while we were trying to do the video recordings. Eventually, they just became a part of church online, and so we made sure we regularly sang the good old hymn 'All Creatures of our God and King'.

Many fellow pastors will have shared my anxieties around pastoral care. Much of our pastoral care usually stems from the face-to-face encounters we have with one other on a Sunday morning. To mitigate this loss we divided the congregation up over the days of the week, and committed to pray for each other daily. For many, this led to a deeper connection with new or other people in the parish; and one young family even took it upon themselves to write and post letters to all on the parish list who lived alone.

Whilst many are still struggling with the impact of the pandemic, thankfully, for us at Willetton now that we are able to worship together again physically, the biggest struggle is no longer being able to roll out of bed for *Online at Nine* in our pyjamas and with a coffee in hand!

Contact: Nicholas Lockwood, nicholas@christtheking.com.au

Lockdown generosity

The Revd Dr D Isaac Devadoss, Associate Professor of History of Christianity, at Bishop's College, Kolkata, India, writes about steps taken in response to government pandemic lockdown measures by his College and by St Saviour's Tamil Church, Church of North India, where he has a pastoral ministry.

The year 2020 started with great expectation in the Church of North India (CNI) and the Bishop's College in Kolkata. The CNI was planning to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of its formation and Bishop's College was planning its Bicentenary celebration. While they were busy planning, the COVID-19 Pandemic broke out and the whole world stumbled into lockdown. Our churches closed for worship and other activities. The educational institutes closed down. On 19 March, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide one-day *Janta* (people) lockdown for Sunday 22 March. On 24 March, the Prime Minister announced a further three-week lockdown from midnight of the same day. People rushed out to buy essentials but they were not given sufficient time to prepare. The lockdown period was then extended for three further periods to the end of May.

Life before lockdown: A Christian music festival at Bishop's College, Kolkata. Photo: Bishop's College https://www.bishopscollege.ac.in

St Saviour's Tamil Church is the oldest Tamil congregation in South East Asia outside of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. It was started in the year 1850. The church is situated in the midst of a Muslim locality. There is a middle school in the church compound which is established for local poor children.

Around 30 families worship in this church, with church members living in different parts of Kolkata - no one lives close to the church. So, when the lockdown started abruptly we could not plan anything for the long lockdown period. Though the majority of the congregation members are working in offices, a few families are daily labourers. As a church we periodically help the needy of the congregation and the neighbours of the church who belong to the Muslim community. Since we are scattered around the city we were unable to release any funds from the church account or easily reach the needy of our congregation. In this situation, our church committee had an online meeting and decided to help the needy and the local missionaries who are supported by our church. The challenge now was where to get the money and how to reach them. At this juncture our committee members came forward themselves to advance some amounts for immediate help. We were also able to help a children's home and people who are visually challenged. Apart from this, the members helped the poor and needy among their own contacts with generosity. With the lockdown being extended further, it is a great challenge for the Church to continue supporting the needy.

Another new development is online worship. Since churches are closed, in order to encourage the congregation, online worship has been initiated. Every Sunday our Assistant Pastor, the Revd Dr Sam Thinakar, is keen on offering online worship with a relevant message. Also, we as church members often connect with each other over the phone and encourage one another to be helpful to others.

Bishop's College was established in the year 1820. Our programme of Bicentenary celebrations came to an abrupt end when the College closed on 16 March. All but eight students left for their homes within four days. All the faculty members and some of the service staff families were left on campus. The College took care of the stranded students and our Principal approached the nearby Boys Club and donated money to distribute food relief to the poor who are near the college. The college also donated money to diocesan relief work and continued to pay full salaries to the watchmen and service staff who work on the basis of 'no work no salary'.

Cyclone Amphan devastated our city on 20 May, causing further problems. Everywhere trees had fallen, electricity and water supply was disrupted and millions of people lost their homes and livelihood. It became another great challenge for the people of the 'City of Joy'.

We as a Christian community learnt to be generous and show the world that we are not only a worshipping community but also a serving community. COVID-19 has taught us lessons in

During the pandemic, St Saviour's Tamil Church, CNI, provides food to families with visually impaired members

the midst of adversity. We pray that the Almighty God may grant us wisdom and knowledge to overcome the pandemic.

Contact: Revd Dr D Isaac Devadoss, issakdoss@gmail.com

Tuning in to God and neighbour

Dr Ida Joseph is a retired Principal of two mission colleges in Tirunelveli Diocese, Church of South India. She is a mission enabler at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Palayamkottai, and a member of the Cursillo movement in India.

The lockdown was unexpected, trying and sudden. There was fear in the hearts of people. The dense population and congested living conditions of our dear land India were real threats. The government authorities were the most stressed, burdened and baffled. But today we can boldly say with the Psalmist, 'I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and deliverer.'

One of our popular evangelists in neighbouring Thoothukudi-Nazareth Diocese organised a two-hour evening public prayer session on one of the TV channels and using local social media. He encouraged, informed and enabled the lakhs [hundreds of thousands] of people who were watching the programme from all over the world during lockdown, to pray for the nations of the world, our country and themselves. This concentrated biblical effort based on 2 Chronicles 7.14 paved for us a strong base on which we could stand firm, look to God and live trusting God.

Online services and vacation Bible schools are going on. God in his own way has turned many Christian homes into house churches!

It was amazing to hear from our Presbyter at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Palayamkottai, that people in need, identified and directed by the congregation, are approaching the Pastorate Office for help. They are local people who became jobless overnight, such as roadside dhobies who iron clothes on carts, auto rickshaw drivers, petty shop owners, cobblers, daily labourers and widows. Each person is given a 10 kilo bag of rice, groceries and some money for buying vegetables. Our pastor shares the gospel and comforts them. Most of them are non-Christians. This activity is voluntarily funded by the members of the congregation.

A police official approached the Cursillo Tirunelveli Spiritual Director, who is a Presbyter in a local church, and told him about 18 North Indian migrant workers, now jobless and put up in a distant village. The Spiritual Director took another Cursillo friend, approached them, shared the gospel and gave each 20 kilos of wheat flour, oil and groceries. They were greatly encouraged by this timely help.

Several youth groups, social service organisations and prayer groups are given information by government offices and police personnel, and voluntarily distribute food wherever there is need. One such agency is taking care of nearly a hundred deserted elderly people and beggars gathered at a makeshift centre. They have been taught to make paper bags and sell them for their livelihood.

Most members of the congregation are aware of the plight of needy neighbours and lend their helping hands. Most families that employ housemaids, helpers and gardeners – now unable to work, continue to pay their salaries and look after them.

Some of the missionary children studying in the school for 'MKids' in Tirunelveli could not make it back to their homes in North India. All transport was cancelled. Nearly a hundred of these children are being looked after in their hostels by the school staff.

As people do their best to be in tune with God, nature and neighbour during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been given a foretaste of heaven. Immanuel, God is with Us!

Contact: Dr Ida Joseph, Prem_ida@yahoo.com

Mothers' Union responses in Myanmar and Sri Lanka

Roshini Mendis, Worldwide Mothers' Union Trustee for Asia, describes how churches and Mothers' Union members have been undertaking local outreach, both spiritual and practical.

Myanmar

Mothers' Union (MU) members in Myanmar have been very active during the COVID-19 lockdown period. During April and May, five people or fewer were allowed to work together provided they abided by the COVID-19 health guidelines such as using face masks and social distancing. So MU members could work together in small groups and start sewing face masks and making liquid soaps and hand sanitizers.

In Hpa-An Diocese 180 bottles of liquid soap, 41 bottles of hand sanitizers and 165 face masks were handed over to the village Health Centre to be distributed among the families. With the support of World Vision, the MU was also able to distribute bags of rice and cooking oil among their members who badly needed essentials to feed their families.

In Toungoo Diocese 45 bottles of liquid soap, 25 bottles of hand sanitizers and 50 face masks were distributed among the

community. Purified water, milk, sugar and snacks were also provided for needy families. MU members voluntarily cooked meals at a quarantine centre run by the Government.

The MU members of Mandalay Diocese distributed rehydration drinks among the sick people and in Pyay Diocese members managed to make and distribute 150 face masks.

The MU of Myanmar has started programmes to make people aware of gender-based violence. They have donated books relevant to the subject to village libraries so that people who read these will be aware of the issue. In future with the support of the Anglican Communion and under the guidance of the Central MU they hope to do more programmes on this subject which has affected many people during the lockdown.

Sri Lanka

As the entire world was struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Diocese of Colombo in Sri Lanka, through its Board of Social Responsibility, put into place a programme to educate parishes through their clergy to carry out humanitarian assistance by providing dry ration packs and monetary assistance for the needy in their communities. This was undertaken regionally and assistance was provided to 2,260 under-privileged families with the consent and guidance of Government officials, the Police and the Health Authorities. Many families who benefited were daily wage earners, estate sector labourers and people involved in small scale businesses.

Another project was to assist internal migrant workers who were in cities working at construction sites and factories far away from their villages and families. The lockdown and curfew came upon people so unexpectedly that some did not have time to get back to their homes. The church coordinated through the police who had identified these isolated individuals, and succeeded in helping 100 workers who were facing financial difficulties.

During this difficult time the Church of Ceylon MU was involved in uplifting the spiritual lives of mothers by keeping in touch with their members to ensure that all are safe and finding out their needs. Since Sri Lanka was under a curfew for almost two and a half months, it was not possible for members to go out of their homes to do relief work. During this period we had to have a curfew pass issued by the police stating a valid reason if we needed to venture out. While staying indoors the members prayed for each other's families and many prayer request groups were formed to support one another spiritually and also to support housebound seniors.

Some MU branches were also able to help their communities in more practical ways. The outreach work done by the St Matthias Church Laxapathiya MU is one such story. They first managed to distribute dry ration packs to 20 poor families whom they felt were needy in their community. They were under-privileged families who were living along the coast near to the church. The breadwinners of these families were daily wage earners who were badly affected and during the first few weeks of lockdown were not getting any assistance from the Government.

Upon further inquiries the Mothers' Union discovered that many of their members and also other families belonging to their church were going through very difficult times without an income. Some of them were self-employed and some owned small scale business ventures but due to the situation they were finding it very difficult to meet their basic needs. Some of these families were the same people who on several occasions had been very helpful and generous towards MU activities. A generous donor had, a month before lockdown, gifted money to facilitate the MU annual day out for members. The membership at this point decided to utilise this money to support the families in need. The requirements were ordered online and delivered to the church. Three members then gathered in the church hall and made provision packs for 60 families.

The Vicar of the church, Revd Sagara Perera, was with the Mothers' Union giving them all the support needed and, on the day the packs were distributed, initiated formalities with the police of the area and obtained permission for the recipients to come to the church to receive them. Health officials were also notified and the people gathered according to COVID-19 safety guidelines. Some of the families who were helped through this programme were parishioners of the church while some families were from the church neighbourhood belonging to different religious backgrounds.

Contact: Roshini Mendis, roshinimendis@gmail.com

Support for a migrant community

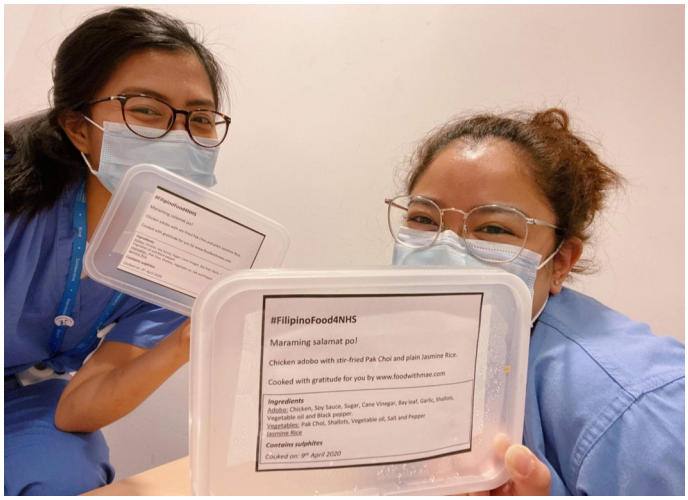
The Revd Canon Salvador Telen is vicar of St Saviour's in Walthamstow, England, and also serves as a chaplain of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) which is a church in the Philippines in full communion with the Anglican Communion. He writes about the experience of the IFI chaplaincy to the Filipino communities in the UK and makes an urgent plea for undocumented Filipino migrant workers.

Our experience in this time of the coronavirus pandemic has been very challenging and emotional. We started to discuss our COVID-19 response project on 15 March after our Mass in the Tagalog language at All Saints Battersea.

I met with some members of the chaplaincy who are also members of Filipino Organisations like the Filipino Domestic Workers Association, Gabriela London (the first overseas chapter of a national alliance of women in the Philippines), Migrante International and Kanlungan Filipino Consortium, and we discussed what we could do.

For us, COVID-19 means 'COnnect, Volunteer and 'I Donate''. In the week before the UK government declared lockdown we organised volunteers to help us deliver groceries and medicine as well as help frontline workers.

During the lockdown, we have looked after our community by phoning our vulnerable members and delivering food and medicine to our elderly and those who have problems with their health. We also deliver to our frontliners who work long days so that when they get home they have food to eat and do not need to go out and buy groceries.



Food is delivered to frontline workers as well as vulnerable people

We used the money that we saved from the chaplaincy and other donations to buy the groceries and food. Because our savings were not sufficient we applied to the National Lottery through the Kanlungan Filipino Consortium. The application was granted so now we can continue our project. We are also grateful to the acting Bishop of Chelmsford for his support.

After a month of lockdown our response to our community is more challenging. Now we are not just responding to the elderly and vulnerable members and to the frontliners. We are also supporting those who have lost their jobs because of the closure of businesses, restaurants and hotels, and domestic workers who have no pay because they have no work.

We are supporting the families of those who have lost loved ones and the families of frontline Filipino nurses and key-workers. For example, in our core group we have a person who looks after the mental health and provides psychosocial services to families who are in mourning because they have lost parents, children or friends. We have helped almost 400 households. And, for context, there may be two families in each house and four to five people sharing each flat.

From our records we know that almost 100 Filipinos have died in the UK because of COVID-19; most of them were working in hospitals. This is tragic for our Filipino community, especially for the thousands of Filipino frontline and key workers who have come to the UK to offer their skills and many of whom have now sacrificed their lives to save the lives of others.

We are aware of undocumented people who are fighting the coronavirus inside their room and do not access the national health service (which provides free healthcare to residents) for fear of a hefty bill or deportation. They can only ask for help by contacting friends on their phones.

There are currently around 300,000 Filipino women and men in Britain who have 'Leave to Remain' or British citizenship, 75 per cent of whom live in London. But there are also estimated to be almost 50,000 undocumented Filipinos who have been working hard in the informal sector and many of whom can no longer work because of the pandemic.

They have made the sacrifice of leaving their homes and travelling abroad so that they can send money back to their families in the Philippines, so that their children can to go school and can graduate from university, and to ensure that their families can have life in abundance.

I remember the Gospel of Matthew 25.35-40: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Therefore, at this time, we are also campaigning to protect all undocumented people. Alongside the Europe-wide April 28 Coalition for Migrants' and Refugees' Rights and Welfare (https://www.facebook.com/April28Coalition), we call the UK government to grant 'Regularization and Full Citizenship Rights Now!'

Contact: Canon Salvador Telen, salvadortelen66@gmail.com

Kindness generates kindness in Rio

Brazil has one of the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the world. The Revd Inamar Corrêa de Souza describes how the pandemic has affected her neighbourhood and how her church has responded to local familes.

St Paul the Apostle Church is located in Santa Teresa, a historic location close to downtown Rio de Janeiro, which was quickly hit by several cases of COVID-19 due to the high turnover of tourists from Europe and the USA during our summer in the southern hemisphere. The region has remained in lockdown since 16 March, the official date of the pandemic decree in Rio de Janeiro.

Families in the neighbourhood who depend on local businesses find it very difficult to survive. Small traders who have not been selling for 100 days depend on other people's solidarity for food because most of them have not received

government assistance. The families of self-employed workers were also left without income. Artists are unable to sell their handicrafts.

Residents in the neighbourhood remain in their homes as a form of protection, following the guidelines of international health authorities. The Brazilian authorities disagreed on the direction to follow and chose to save public resources instead of testing the population or disinfecting public places. They allowed shops and tourist spots to open and close at different times causing confusion among the population. The president, governor and mayor have a political alliance, but they do not speak the same language. Our governor is now undergoing an impeachment process for corruption in the management of pandemic resources.

Our parish suffers from the lack of payment of rent from tenants, and the lack of income from activities, classes, festivals and donations for the maintenance of the building. Some parishioners were fired from their jobs and others have reduced incomes. Not everyone pays tithes to the church, so we are already in debt. We hope in God to survive in these difficult times.

Our church building remains closed and activities have been suspended. Worship has taken place on Facebook and Zoom. Study and prayer groups take place via WhatsApp. Families come together over the internet and take care of each other. They went back to using the telephone to find out how older members are dealing with social isolation. We observed that concern for others increased during this time of pandemic.

With regard to social action, we need to be creative since we have few financial resources. A team of young adults goes shopping for elderly people. Another team orders basic food supplies online and for security reasons asks for delivery to the door of those who live in slums. Others collaborate financially with a city network called Solidarity Action which distributes food to homeless families.

In terms of political action, Anglicans are compelled to sign online petitions trying to prevent our country from regressing on human rights, labour rights, water legislation, free education and public health policies. We have a task force sending out information messages to counter fake news. We cannot work on every front because the congregation is small - around 50 families, but we do what we can.

Currently (July 2020) we have officially reached 100,000 cases of COVID-19 in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which means one million because the authorities are hiding the numbers. In our diocese we know many infected people and some have already died. Many families are begging on the streets. We live in the middle of chaos intentionally orchestrated by the authorities in a genocidal policy. We know that we are becoming poorer as a nation. We live on faith and we do what is possible, even if it seems very little.

We continue our work and ministry among families, remembering in our prayers the theme for the 2020 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: 'Kindness generates kindness.'

These are the words of a street prophet who wandered the streets of Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s. He left his written work on city walls and viaducts and was known as Prophet Kindness. We are all 'Profeta Gentileza'.

Contact: Revda Inamar de Souza, inamardesouza@gmail.com

Some more resources from around the Communion

The Church of England's 'Faith at Home initiative https://bit.ly/3iBK4By

'Domestic Abuse and COVID-19: How Churches can respond', a joint resource from the Anglican Consultative Council and the Anglican Alliance http://aco.org/media/415112/201905-da-covid-19-churches.pdf

'Resources to support us in challenging times', from the Mothers' Union https://bit.ly/2ACAiOz

God of the present moment,

God, who in Jesus stills the storm
and soothes the frantic heart;
bring hope and courage to your people
as we wait in uncertainty.
Bring hope that you will make us the equal of whatever lies ahead.
Bring us courage to endure what cannot be avoided,
For your will is health and wholeness;
You are God, and we need you. Amen.

From A New Zealand Prayer Book/He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa (adapted)

IAFN

The views of individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the International Anglican Family Network.