

EDINBURGH CHURCHES TOGETHER NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2020

 HOLY CROSS
CHURCH 

coronavirus...

Our buildings
are temporarily closed for safety

but...

Our Community
is still active
in prayer and service

Jesus said: love your neighbour
& do not be afraid



WELCOME!

The last Edinburgh Churches Together council meeting was held on March 12th shortly before lockdown. We were all feeling pretty gloomy about the prospect of weeks or months of church closures. However, as the Holy Cross leaflet on our front cover shows, despite the buildings closing their doors, worship continued unabated: clergy and pastoral networks embraced all forms of technology to continue to bring people together despite the anxiety, restrictions and uncertainty brought upon us by covid-19. Currently, on-line services continue to be held in living rooms and gardens, Zoom coffee mornings and telephone calls replace face-to-face meetings and people help and comfort others with extraordinary acts of charity and kindness. You can read about some of them in this edition as well as reactions to the Black Lives Matter movement which has swept the world. Read on to find out more. But first, a little poetry...

Tae a Virus

Twa months ago, we didna ken
yer name or ocht about ye.
But lots of things have changed since then,
I really must salute ye.

Yer spreading rate is quite intense,
yer feeding like a gannet.
Disruption caused is so immense,
ye've shaken oor wee planet.

Corona used tae be a beer,
they garnished it wae limes.
But noo it's filled us awe wae fear.
These days are scary times.

Nae shakin hawns or peckin lips,
it's whit they awe advise.
But scrub them weel, richt tae the tips,
that's how we'll awe survive.

Just stay inside the hoose ye bide
Nae sneakin oot for strolls.
Just check the lavvy every hoor
And stock-take your loo rolls.

Our holidays have been pit aff
Noo that's the Jetz patter
Pit oan yer thermals, have a laugh
And paddle ` doon the waater `

Canary isles, no for a while.
Nae need for suntan cream.
And awe because o this wee bug
We ken tae be 19.

The boredom surely will set in
But have a read, or doodle.
Or plan yer menu for the month
Wi 95 pot noodles.

When these run oot, just look about
A change, it would be nice.
We've beans and pasta
By the ton and twenty stane o rice.

So dinny think ye'll wipe us oot
Aye true, a few have died.
Bubonic, bird flu, and Tb
They came, they left, they tried.

Ye might be gallus noo, ma freen,
As ye jump fae cup tae cup
But when we get oor vaccine made
Yer number will be up.

Willie Sinclair, 2020

EDINBURGH CHURCHES TOGETHER DURING LOCKDOWN

Some of our ECT council members report on how covid-19 affected the life of their places of worship.

Doris Caldwell, United Reformed Church lay representative

Augustine United Reformed Church has an 11am service every Sunday on Zoom which has even attracted newcomers from around Britain. Contextual Bible Study continues on-line on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12 noon. Young members of young LEP "meet" on Sunday afternoons, as does the LGBTQI and friends at least every month. Elders and managers use remote contacts too and members phone round a lot. Think of the carbon footprint saved!

David Clarke, Quaker representative

Edinburgh's Quaker community has, like other denominations, embraced virtual meetings and worship during the lockdown period. In some ways we were already well set up to do this, with our distinct, simple form of worship unencumbered with issues that may have vexed others, such as music or sacraments, for example. For us, we sit in silent expectation and when moved by the spirit can partake in vocal ministry. While being physically present with other friends is at the core of our meetings for worship, during the period when we have not been able to meet up together these virtual meetings afforded by Zoom and other similar services have helped us maintain continuity of worship and have brought us together as a community. We send our greetings to other churches throughout the city and hope that they are in good spirits even in this most difficult time.

Fr William Pearsall, SJ, Roman Catholic clergy representative



Members of the Jesuit Community at Sacred Heart ringing bells in a salute to the NHS.

Our last public Mass at Sacred Heart, Lauriston was celebrated on March 19th, the feast-day of St Joseph. St Joseph is the patron saint of many causes but we might look upon him especially as the patron saint of changed plans. Certainly, when we entered upon the new conditions of life imposed by the coronavirus emergency, we had not only to re-arrange our plans but in some ways to re-design our lives. We felt our way forward day by day as we began to see and appreciate the scale of the

changes ahead of us. We were aware of the global perspective - this was a pandemic, after all - but also and more immediately we were focused on our own lives: our families, our livelihood, our community, our schools, our churches. The introduction of lockdown was a surreal experience. At first it was a novelty and we entered into it in the spirit of the Blitz. We were facing a grave situation together and our anxieties were shared. In time we began to be more personally affected by the unnatural conditions of enforced isolation, the social distancing, the suspension of normal activities and routines of work and study. For the Christian community the reality of closed churches was hard to bear. For Catholics, accustomed to dropping into a church at any time in the week for private prayer or for confession or daily Mass, this was a particularly painful privation. The heaviest blow perhaps was the loss of Sunday worship and all that goes with the sabbath-day gathering. This loss we shared with all the churches. Gradually, the parish began to establish new networks of communication. We were fortunate in having taken a parish census in the

autumn and so we had the makings of a usable database. Although there were gaps, we were able to ensure that no-one we were aware of would be left out of the fellowship of contact and care in the months ahead. Through phone calls, emails, newsletters, through a continuing stream of video posts on Facebook and the church website, the parish community kept itself going with news, shared stories, music, liturgical celebrations and helps to prayer. Everyone found a live-stream transmission or TV broadcast of Sunday worship. We experimented with a live transmission from Sacred Heart. People in the parish have said that in some ways the experience of Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost this year was like witnessing the early church being born. We improvised and we adapted. We learned to be creative. We focused on the essentials. Our outreach to the needy continued thanks to the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Our Justice, Peace and Green group, our care of the elderly and sick, our catechetical programmes, our Lauriston Centre speaker events -- all continued to function within the conditions of the "new normal". And thanks to zooming we were able to create new parish groups: coffee mornings, young adults (reading *The Screwtape Letters!*), a Faith Matters discussion forum and weekly Taizé worship. An added blessing has been the new faces emerging thanks to these new ways of being Church.

Duncan Whitty, United Free clergy representative

At Corstorphine Community Church we have been keeping in touch with each other over the weeks of lockdown through a weekly Zoom prayer meeting plus phone calls! We haven't moved our Sunday services online, but reckoned there were many online church services that other churches were holding which our people could tune into. Our building is normally heavily used by various community groups, but off course they are no longer there. A welcome grant from the Corra Foundation has been a financial blessing to help us. The building isn't totally empty though- our Thursday food bank (called a Basics Bank) is busier than it's ever been. We are doing deliveries of food to many people who need to self-isolate due to Coronavirus. Other community groups have sprung up also providing food to those in need and we are working together. We have also set up the 'garden library' (pictured) for those passing through to borrow a book from or donate a book to. These book boxes are popping up



round the country. We are also encouraging people who may be under pressure right now to pray by putting up a little 'Try Praying' booklet dispenser at our gate. Also a local group called 'Breathe Easy' (www.breathe-easy.info) have started producing face masks including ones which are transparent for easy lip reading. Their office is round the corner in Corstorphine and due to high demand, they are expanding into our church hall.

Judith Scott, Scottish Episcopal Church lay representative, speaking on behalf of Murrayfield Churches Together (MCT)

A strange time. It has been a period of continuously making adjustments, with steep learning curves in the use of technology and communication skills – the starting point being low for many of us! The three congregations of Murrayfield Churches Together (MCT) have all responded to the closing of places of worship with differing successful approaches to on-line services. The pandemic has also affected our MCT joint fundraising projects in particular our support for Christian Aid and for ECUDARE (Ecumenical Day Care and Support Women Project: the project based in Kenya, that MCT has supported since 2008). The covid-19 pandemic has greatly increased the needs of the people in the poorest countries of the world. The partnerships and projects supported by Christian Aid over the years have worked to improve the lives of the globally most disadvantaged people. This

need for support and funding is now magnified by the conditions created by the pandemic. On 10th May, MCT held a very successful on-line Joint Christian Aid Service led by our 3 ministers, and featuring a 'guest speaker' in the form of Rowan Williams, who carefully put the effects of the pandemic into a global perspective. In terms of fundraising we had to cancel our Quiz in aid of Christian Aid at the very beginning of the lockdown; it then became apparent that our normal fundraising in Christian Aid week involving the 3 churches organising House-to-House collections during May 10th – 16th, was not going to be possible either. We circulated details of online donations <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week> to our congregations, being very aware that this was not able to reach the wider population reached by our normal Christian Aid Week collections. Just when it is needed most our fundraising ability is being considerably reduced – forming a double disaster for those in most need. At MCT we have been able to see the effect of this double disaster at first hand through the experience of the Kenyan project (ECUDARE) we support. In Kenya they closed all the borders, lockdown was instituted, schools closed and a curfew was imposed from 7pm till 5am, with police action appearing to be brutal in enforcement of the curfew. Informal workers (who constitute the women of the ECUDARE project) disproportionately bear the brunt of the curfew crackdown. Street vendors and workers with long commutes - some of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in Nairobi - are the ones most at risk of being caught outside and punished by the police. The curfew also reduces working hours for those selling goods from roadside stands and outdoor markets – again, the informal workers are those affected. The prevention of starvation therefore becomes an equal priority to the prevention of infection with Covid-19. The expectation is that the virus will peak in August. With the collapse of the informal economy, the ECUDARE project has had to halt their normal programme and to prioritise and concentrate on providing food packages, soap and masks to the families, women and children in the Ngong locality. The pandemic has also meant that rather than continuing with the exciting plans for a visit from Esther Wanjohi, the Director of ECUDARE, to Edinburgh in September this year, MCT have been engaged in raising funds to provide basic support for ECUDARE at this critical time.

SOUL FOOD

Liz Jarvis describes the response from Mustard Seed church to the covid-19 pandemic.

In normal circumstances, every Thursday and Saturday afternoon Mustard Seed transforms St. Margaret's Episcopal Church on Easter Road into a pop-up restaurant with tablecloths, napkins, china crockery, proper cutlery, and a free, home-cooked two-course meal. There is an open invitation to anyone who needs a meal, and numbers of guests have steadily grown to the point where we now serve around 70 - 80 meals every Thursday, and around 35 - 40 meals to families on a Saturday. Soul Food is a place where people come knowing that they will receive



a warm welcome and be treated with respect and dignity, where they are among friends and can seek help for whatever issues they may be facing. Each week, volunteers eat with our guests (many of whom experience homelessness, poverty and isolation), building community beyond just another transactional service. Obviously, Coronavirus and the

resulting lockdown has meant that we are no longer able to host a sit-down meal, and have therefore had to change the way we do things.

On Thursdays, for example, we have adapted to deliver up to 110 meals to people all over Edinburgh, and have a 'Grab & Go' stand for those who are able to come to the church. All whilst observing physical distancing!



Queueing up outside St Margaret's Episcopal Church for a hot meal

With each government update we have had to plan, re-plan and adapt. We have re-skilled. We have strengthened and developed our own network of community links. Volunteers have turned themselves into delivery drivers and we have been greatly blessed by professional chefs who have volunteered to cook for us. The Little Chartroom restaurant has cooked for our Families Meal on a Saturday regularly as has La Riva Pizzeria - both restaurants covering all the costs. Hawksmoor Restaurant is also cooking and hosting a 'Grab & Go' Sunday Lunch Stand each week. The number of meals we provide each week has more than doubled. Lockdown has resulted in people experiencing social isolation, increased distress for those with existing mental health conditions, increasing financial worries and food insecurity more than ever. The phone calls and delivery visits we make have given many people much needed contact with the outside world and a very real sense that they are cared about and not simply forgotten. We are already noticing that the connections we are making with some of the people we did not

know previously are growing and deepening. We knew that we instantly had to change the way we

did things in order to support our Soul Food community - many of whom are living in B&B's across the city. God's provision to enable us to do so feels like a modern-day miracle, a 'feeding of the 5,000' if you will. We have the privilege of being God's hands, feet and love in a time that often feels very dark and completely overwhelming. As our Pioneer Priest, Rich Cornfield, said in a blog post near the beginning of lockdown: "It's as if we're doing what we're meant to be doing and we're being in the places we're meant to be in and we're working more closely and precisely with the people God has given us." Please do pray for us as we continue in our ministry. Our Mustard Seed Soul Food meals are just some of the many Soul Food meals that are hosted throughout the city under the umbrella of Soul Food Edinburgh. You can find out more about Soul Food Edinburgh at www.soulfoodedinburgh.org. For more information about Mustard Seed Edinburgh, please visit www.mustardseededinburgh.org.

STEPS TO HOPE

Rosalyn Donaldson reports on how the charity Steps to Hope has responded to the pandemic.

Steps to Hope SCIO is a Charity providing aid and support to the homeless and those suffering from addiction in Edinburgh. Homelessness is one of the most common social problems that we see on our streets every day. At Steps to Hope we have a dedicated team of 60 volunteers, headed up by our Operations Manager, Richie Roncero. Before the lockdown rules were imposed, we had 2 soup kitchens in operation. One on a Monday from St. Columba's by the Castle, Episcopal Church in Johnson Terrace and another on a Sunday, from The Parish Church of St. Cuthbert in Lothian Road. In addition, we had



Cook Kirsten Swales in the kitchen of St Cuthbert's

an established overnight shelter in St. Cuthbert's where we were able to accommodate and support some of our most vulnerable street friends. Our kitchens were well attended with numbers often in excess of 95 at any one sitting. We offered nourishing, home-made 3 course meals served up with love, understanding and good humour. The relaxed atmosphere in the soup kitchens gave us a unique opportunity to engage with service-users who were suffering from addiction and we were able to gently encourage them into recovery and a new way of life. Many of our volunteers are themselves recovered addicts, who understand the challenges of living on the streets with addiction. We had plans to expand the soup kitchens to one more, on a Saturday, at Old St. Pauls Church in Jeffrey Street where we could provide a breakfast club and drop in social space for our service users. The coronavirus pandemic has brought lots of challenges to Steps to Hope and we have had to re-evaluate the way in which we deliver our

food services and connect with our street friends. We were extremely fortunate to have bought a catering van just before lockdown. We managed to acquire the van with a Grant donation we had received and through the magnificent fundraising efforts of our volunteers. This van has proved to be a Godsend for our friends. We are able to deliver hot rolls and drinks directly to them and at the same time continue to forge the unique relationships we have with them. We currently take the catering van out 7 days a week

and on a Monday to Saturday our route takes in Johnston Terrace, Jeffrey Street, Holyrood Road and The Grassmarket. We still maintain the close connection we have with St. Cuthbert's on a Sunday when our cooks are able to access the Church kitchen to prepare a much needed 3 course meal, along with hot drinks from the van. These are then served outside in the most beautiful setting just below Edinburgh Castle. We are extremely grateful to the Revd. Peter Sutton who has given us much needed assistance with our work and for his help in setting up the shelter and installing showers for our friends to use. We have had lots of obstacles to overcome along the way. We have volunteers dedicated to ensuring that social-distancing rules are observed at all times in what can be a very confusing time for many who attend the van. Since lockdown, all mutual aid groups and recovery meetings have had to close their doors. Their meetings are now conducted via the internet on Zoom. We have provided Smartphones to enable



Since lockdown, all mutual aid groups and recovery meetings have had to close their doors. Their meetings are now conducted via the internet on Zoom. We have provided Smartphones to enable

our friends in recovery to engage with these meetings and also to keep the momentum going with support from others in recovery. As a result, we have seen lots of new friends showing an interest in engaging with us and asking for help with their addictions. We issue bus passes and provide accommodation on a nightly basis, where they can be together with their peers and have some semblance of stability in their otherwise often chaotic lives. We are getting good results and seeing lots of positivity in the work that we do. We are hopeful, when the lockdown rules are eased, that we will be able to get back into our soup kitchens and have all our friends once again sitting together, talking, laughing, making new acquaintances and reconnecting with the old ones.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

The terrible murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked global protests calling for an end to racial discrimination and injustice. Here, a peaceful protest was held in Holyrood Park outside the Parliament. The City of Edinburgh Council has announced that a plaque will be attached to the plinth of Henry Dundas' statue in St Andrew's Square, describing the links he had to slavery. Iain Stewart, Director of Edinburgh Inter Faith Association, of which ECT is a member, took the unusual step of issuing a very personal video statement the text of which is reproduced here:



Iain Stewart and daughter Iona

Hello. I am Iain Stewart, the Executive Director of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association. I don't normally do video blogs but the tragic killing of George Floyd in America has shaken me personally and, I know, members of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association. As a father of a mixed-race child and a person of faith I identify strongly with the cause of Black Lives Matter.

Racism is antithetical to the main Faith traditions, sacred texts and historic teachings. Many of the main world religions talk about how the human race is a special creation. For some there is the notion that all life is interconnected and that there is no separation between us. There is no faith that teaches the superiority of one race over another. Most of the world's religions arose in geographies where skin colours of those indigenous peoples were not white. That is not to say that people have not wrongly manipulated religious texts for their own agenda which has included justifying racism. It's something all people must stand against. Across all traditions there is

a strong emphasis on welcoming, showing hospitality to the stranger, to the other, recognising that we ourselves were once strangers.

Many of the great Civil Rights leaders including my hero Martin Luther King, were inspired by their faith and teachings such as the oneness of the human race. Martin Luther King had a dream that he would one day live in a nation where people were not judged by the colour of their skin but the content of their character. That all people of every race would be able to join together and say we are, 'Free at last' free from racism. My fear for my daughter growing up is that no matter how smart she might be, she will not be judged for her talent or character as Martin Luther King said, but for her skin colour.

I fear that, like many black people, she might forever feel that knee on her neck. That it might start with name calling and racism in schools to her adult life when she feels her skin colour is holding her back from attaining the job her hard work and talent deserve. I was struck by the words of the Association for the Right of Catholics in the Church in America which I think applies to us all, “we are called to constantly examine our own hearts and consciences for how we might contribute to or break down racial divisions, intolerance, and discrimination” [Department of Justice..., 1].

I would add to that if we are not examining our hearts and consciences and how we might contribute to or break down racial divisions, intolerance and discrimination then our silence makes us complicit. Don't be silent if you believe children like my daughter Iona deserve a better future. Her life matters. All Black Lives Matter. To conclude with the words of Desmond Tutu, 'If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.'

A publication by the Church of Scotland nearly ten years ago, *One Scotland, Many Cultures*, investigates some of these issues and is still very relevant today and can be found at <http://edinburghchurchestogether.org.uk/resources/>

SUPPORT SERVICE FOR BAME WOMEN



Aditi is a trauma-informed wellbeing service for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women in Edinburgh, dedicated to supporting women who have or are experiencing abusive relationships, honour-based violence and other harmful traditional practices.

We provide a range of support services including: counselling, complementary therapies, group work, advocacy/signposting, and one-to-one support.

We offer a safe, non-judgemental, women-led space where you can talk about anything that is worrying you.

Our services are free and confidential.

To ensure you have someone to talk to throughout the Covid-19 crisis, the Aditi team are available to offer phone and online support until such time that we can safely return to face-to-face contact.

If you or someone you know would like more information on Aditi services or would like to speak to someone confidentially, please get in touch.

Aditi Wellbeing Support Service
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A well-being support service for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Women

AND FINALLY

For a not-so-serious glimpse of what church services might look like once lockdown is eased, take a look at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fflftkvCVfA>

Please email material for the Autumn edition of ECT's newsletter by August 15th 2020 to imogen.gibson.ect@gmail.com

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