

The Parish Church of St Mary, Lancaster

A welcoming, inclusive Christian community serving God's people in Lancaster

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EASTER IN A TIME OF SELF-ISOLATION

I always look forward to Easter with a sense of trepidation!

I love the Holy Week services, and the special celebration on Holy Saturday in the evening, in anticipation of the joyful celebration of Easter morning. My only worry is that there is so much to organise and plan, to make sure that everything will happen according to plan, and that our services will really help our congregation to walk with Christ the way of the cross, so that we may joyously celebrate His Resurrection with him on that glorious Easter morning. And yet despite (or maybe because of) all my worrying, it all turns out as a wonderful celebration in words and music and liturgy, worthy of the long history of Easter celebrations that have taken place here at Lancaster Priory for over a thousand years.

But this year, 2020, will be very different indeed. It will be an Easter celebration we will all remember for many years to come, I am sure of that.

Our beautiful church, which we all love, will not open its door to welcome Christians to keep Holy Week together. We will not strip its altars, nor wash the feet of his disciples today; we will not keep watch in the Regimental Chapel at the Altar of Repose, and we will not light the Easter fire to celebrate the Resurrection. But despite that - God's Easter people will indeed keep the feast!

We are indeed, finding new ways to connect with each other, care for each other, and keep in touch with each other. And we are finding new ways to worship together.

Every morning for the last ten years, I have come to the Priory at 9.30 to say Morning Prayer. I've been joined by Anna or by former clergy colleagues, and on Mondays the churchwardens join me and we pray together, and that is a beautifully reflective way to start the day and week together. But most mornings now, I pray alone.

But for the past week or so, we have had to change our pattern of worship. To begin with we continued in the church - but then had to stop that when advised to keep our churches closed - even for private prayer by the Vicar! And that was hard to accept. But we did so, in the knowledge that we were protecting both ourselves, our families and friends, and the wider community too.



And then a miracle occurred!

I decided to live-stream morning prayer. First from the chapel, and more recently from the Vicarage garden via the Lancaster Priory page on Facebook. And I have not been alone! Hundreds of people have joined me - and Morning Prayer from the Vicarage garden, said by me (with Lily wandering round in the background) reached over 700 people on one occasion. We streamed the Communion service from the Priory Vicarage on Passion Sunday, and that has now been seen by 2,400 people! These are extraordinary numbers indeed! We don't know how many people are with us all the way, but we know from the comments received that many are with us, and praying with us.

The readings have been challenging, as we have been reflecting together in this Passiontide season, dealing with the difficult issues of life and death - a very present reality for us all now, as fear grips the nation in the light of this pandemic. But as we heard these

words from the Bible readings, the psalms, and the Gospels, although this is a very new experience for all of us - in the history of the Priory this is nothing new, and in God's Providence we know that we will come through this period, terrible though it may be - and after the darkness and sorrow of suffering and death, comes a joyful celebration of life - richer and more abundant than it ever was.

This is the story of Easter - darkness and sorrow transformed by God into light and joy!

Yes, it is profoundly sad that the Priory church will not be the place where we gather to celebrate this Eastertide. But perhaps we need to be reminded that "The Church of God" is the people of God, and though our buildings enhance and frame our worship, they are not ultimately necessary for us to worship and praise God as we ought. We can do that in our own homes, we



can do it on our daily walk in green spaces. And, as we have discovered, we can do it via the Internet and Facebook! (Who'd have thought it!)

But when we do gather once again in the Priory - what joy there will be as we re-open its doors to public worship once again. We will have occasion to thank God with music and songs of praise for bringing us together once again in our beloved Priory Church. Until then, let us gather from wherever we are; dispersed but united, isolated but not alone, anxious but not without hope, for our trust is in God, who is faithful and will hold us gently in the palm of his hand until this storm is past.

With love to you all,

Chris

The Revd Canon Chris Newlands

Vicar of Lancaster

COVID-19 AND OUR RESPONSE AT THE PRIORY

It was late in December 2019 that we first heard of the menace of coronavirus. Since then, from its first appearance in Wuhan, China, it has spread relentlessly across the world as a global pandemic. In the early days we had little conception of the numbers who would be affected or even lose their lives. We had no notion either of how radically it would change our lives; self-isolation and social-distancing were ideas we were yet to encounter.

Covid-19 made its first impact upon our life together at the Priory on the second Sunday of Lent (March 8th). To minimise the risk of spreading any infection, Chris decided that at both 8 o'clock and 10 Priory Eucharist, communion would be taken in one kind – in bread only. For those who wanted to receive wine at the Eucharist, provision was made for a shared chalice in the Regimental Chapel. By the following Sunday (Lent 3, March 15th), the bishops had decided that all communion should be, whilst the pandemic lasted, in one kind only; that the celebrating priest alone should take wine on behalf of all the people.

Later that Sunday, with clear evidence of the crisis escalating nationally, we felt obliged to place an immediate halt on all the Lenten House Groups. We did not want to put either our hosts or those who might attend at any risk. In this we were one step ahead of the Government; on the following day the prime minister (in the first of his regular early evening briefings) called upon the whole country to practise 'social distancing' – avoiding any unnecessary gatherings and staying at least 2 metres apart. This of course meant that from that point onwards there could also be no further services in church.

On the Monday afterwards (March 16th) we formed a 'Crisis Management Group' (Vicar, Wardens, Head Verger). We have met every weekday morning since then, to begin with in the refectory and then, since Tuesday March 24th (following the government's call for a 'lockdown'), we have continued our meetings online via the conferencing app 'Zoom'. The purpose of our meetings has been to keep in constant review how best we can continue to be a church, during the time when we no longer have the use of the building, and serve the spiritual, emotional and practical needs of our people.

On Wednesday, March 18th, Chris streamed Morning Prayer online via Facebook from the St Thomas Chapel. Over 100 people across the country and some from overseas joined in. Since then he has streamed Morning Prayer every day, initially from inside the building and latterly from Tuesday, March 24th (following an instruction from the Archbishops that all churches should be closed even to the clergy) from the vicarage garden. He, and we, have been blessed with a succession of beautiful mornings, and these services have certainly been embellished by the sounding of the church bells, birdsong, and the perambulations of Lily, the vicarage dog! The number of those joining in has steadily grown.

On Mothering Sunday, March 22nd (the day prior to the Archbishops' instruction), a service of Holy Communion was broadcast at 10 via Facebook from the Sanctuary. This service was greatly enriched by a small ensemble of choral scholars under Don Gillthorpe's direction, with Ian Pattinson on the organ. The mood of the day was perfectly captured by Ian's playing of 'Rhosymedre' at the end of the service. In place of evensong, there was a streamed service of choral compline sung by the choral scholars in the beautiful and fitting setting of the mediaeval choir stalls. On Passion Sunday, March 29th, Holy Communion was broadcast from the vicarage and Chris was assisted by David (reading) and Jacob (cantor). As members of the same household they were able to work together on presenting this service.

As long as he is able (and we pray that this will be throughout the full term of the current crisis) Chris intends to continue to present daily Morning Prayer and Holy Communion on Sunday.

We are very grateful to him for doing this. We know it is greatly appreciated not only by our own Priory People but also by people across the country and in many places across the world.

We are aware that many of our Priory family might be classed as 'vulnerable' - that is they are over 70 and/or live on their own. Our Crisis Management Group has drawn up a list of these people and a small team of volunteers – each allocated particular names - has volunteered to take responsibility for calling them at regular intervals for a chat and to make sure they are all right. We have also established a phone helpline – 07713 981372 – which anyone can ring if they need help in any way, eg. shopping, collecting prescriptions , etc. We've tried to publicise that number as widely as we can across the parish. We've also bought a stock of essential groceries for anyone who may be facing financial hardship. Please let us know on the above number.

We're making full use of all the technology available to us. Facebook is being used for our streamed services and the Priory Website (www.lancasterpriory.org) carries important information in the present crisis. The order of service for Sunday Holy Communion is available on the Website and there are prayers available on the website for personal use. Daily Thoughts for the Day continue to be sent via email to all those on our Priory People mailing list and last week we embarked on a new venture – asking people to let us know about unusual activity they've taken up during this period of isolation so as to inspire us or make us laugh. We've been thrilled by the response and the contributions we have received, and we are sending them out each day via the Thought for the Day mailing list. In these and in many other areas our Parish secretary, Jo Arber, is providing us with amazing support, working from home.

In other news Viv McCracken, our Schools and Family Learning Officer, is supporting our younger people and their families by providing activities and information via Facebook 'Lancaster Priory Children and Families' to support the themes and readings of Sunday worship during this period. Katie Schad, our Marsh Outreach Worker, continues to provide support for people facing challenging circumstances on the Marsh.

So, as you can see, though sadly we are no longer able for the time being to meet together for worship, there is a lot going on behind the scenes. We are doing what we can to support our Priory family. Do though please get in touch if you think there is more we can or should do.

With thoughts, prayers and best wishes at this challenging and worrying time,

Andrew Nicholson



CREATION CARE AT THE PRIORY



In these peculiar times, Creation Care at the Priory takes second place to caring for ourselves, one another and our wider communities. Unless we humankind are fighting fit, we cannot fulfil our responsibilities in caring for God's other creatures and his earth.

What we can do is see where we stand at the moment and prepare ourselves for those times when we have freedom and capacity to continue our commitment to environmental concerns. In Blackburn diocese, we are among the leaders in our commitment to EcoChurch in which we already have a Bronze award. I'm readying to resubmit our self-assessment, asking whether we care for the whole of God's creation through imaginative worship and teaching; through managing our buildings, land and finances in an environmentally

sensitive fashion; through engaging with our community and the wider world to share and celebrate the gifts of Creation; and in thoughtfully organising our own lives, what we eat, how we travel, how we sustain our homes. The changes we have made recently might mean we can muster a Silver award.

More widely, the Church of England recently passed a motion at the General Synod committing ourselves to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. 'Ourselves' means every parish, every cathedral, all diocesan offices, all church schools, graveyards and other properties. 'Carbon neutral' means that what emissions of damaging greenhouse gases we are responsible for should be reduced to as near zero as possible; or offset by greener energy consumption and carbon capture, in crops and trees. It is a formidable target, especially given our own current beleaguered position. But we can pledge to make progress together with our sisters and brothers in Christ across the country when we are able.

I have now been appointed the Diocesan Environmental Officer for Blackburn and I have proposed to Bishop Julian that we should have a task force dedicated to responding to this challenge when we are able. That will bring together the archdeacons, the Diocesan Advisory Committee, the Diocesan Surveyor, Finance Officer, Board of Education, Communications and the Rural Focus Group to work together to achieve the best we can.

For us as a worshipping congregation, this commitment will mean looking first at our energy consumption in heating and lighting of the church and vicarage. A cunning Energy Footprint Tool will enable us to make a calculation of how good we are at present and what work needs doing.

We had to interrupt our Lent study groups because of the coronavirus pandemic, but the 'Thoughts for the Day' continue to keep us alive to the wonders of Creation. And by saying yes to our own lives, taking care to safeguard those we love and live among, we can be stronger to say yes to all the life that God has made.

The image is 'Consider the Lilies' from the Christ in the Wilderness series of Stanley Spencer, 1939.

John Rodwell



Priory Lenten Thought for the Day 2020

SPAAWS: Friday 13th March - Thornton in Lonsdale

Three escapees and two dogs (Lily is almost never in the shot!) before the lockdown of the Corvid-9 menace.

But splendid weather and interesting features made this walk a good last SPAAWS day out.

Thank you Mary, here's hoping to see everyone on the other side one day.

Best wishes to you all. **John Harvey**



TUESDAY GROUP

At our meeting on 3rd March Mr Duncan Hamlett spoke to us about 'Mary & Meals', a charity that we support.

He used film to show how that charity works. It was founded in 2002 - and the Mary in question is Mother of Our Lord.

The charity supplies a good meal in the place of education for children who otherwise might be at the risk of starvation.

The food used is different in each country where the meal is supplied and there are a great number of countries where this is so.

The films showed that the food was reaching the people for whom it was intended.

Barbara Bland

THE PRIORY: REMEMBERING A PREVIOUS SPRINGTIME AND PALM SUNDAY



I hope you have enjoyed looking at this online Newslink. While the COVID-19 crisis continues it is hoped that online versions of PRIORY NEWSLINK will continue to be issued on a monthly basis. I thank those who have contributed items for this edition.

If you have any contributions for the MAY 2020 issue please send them to me at priorynewslink@gmail.com or via any of the church officials. Thank you.

John Heighway

CHRISTIAN AID NEWS

With everyday that passes, it becomes more obvious that business as usual is not an option if we are to avoid a catastrophe that will weigh most heavily on the poorest and the most marginalised members of our human family.



No, this quotation is not about coronavirus, although it could equally apply, it is from Dr. Rowan Williams' article in the Christian Aid magazine 2020, focusing on the disaster of climate change, and this year's Christian Aid appeal through the house-to-house collection to raise money to help women like Rose in Kenya, which is suffering terrible drought. Rose fights thirst every day. That is her climate crisis. Aged 67, Rose walks for six hours every day to collect water for her grandchildren. No matter how hard she battles against it, drought leaves her hungry and thirsty.

If only Christian Aid could raise enough money, Rose and her community could build a water dam and survive the drought . . . in her community and elsewhere across the drought-stricken land.

This year should have been the 75th Christian Aid House to house collection, raising money to help people like Rose in Kenya, but alas, because of the coronavirus, the house-to-house collection during Christian Aid Week 10 - 16 May has been cancelled.

But you can still give, you can still help families survive the drought by donating at :

caweek.org or call 08080 006 006

Thank you from Rose - and Rosemary Brockbank, Priory CA representative.

MOTHERS' UNION

Our Branch began 2020 with the AGM; our Branch Leader, Christine Mullineaux, reported on a busy year, which included the Branch celebrating its 150th anniversary at the Branch Festival Eucharist, the Vicar presiding. Other services were the Wave of Prayer celebration in October, and a short service to mark the '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence'.

Barbara Gardner, as Treasurer, reported that £750 had been donated to MU charities during the year, and £170 collected for 'Make a mother's day'.

A long-time member (lately an indoor Member), Mildred Walker, died during the year and we remember her fondly. Norah Scott, also a member of many years, has decided to become an Indoor Member.

Kath Ralph has retired from her role as Indoor members' Rep, and Mary Davis has kindly agreed to take it on, otherwise the Committee remains the same and was re-elected *en masse*.

At our February meeting, our speaker was Peter Hopwood. He told us that his first job after university was a perfume salesman, but his later, thirty-year career as a probation officer provided him with plenty of reminiscences. He took particular pride in the successful trial of a 'weekend prison' arrangement, but this was scrapped for purely political reasons. Peter regretted that the aims of the Probation Service have altered, and no longer included 'befriending' clients, but was frequently reduced to form-filling rather than gaining understanding of the people they served.

Lois Kirtley

LOTS OF TEA AND CAKE: THE ROLE OF THE PRIORY'S COMMUNITY WORKER

Since last September I have had the privilege of working part-time for Priory as their Community and Outreach Worker. It has been great to be able to continue with activities that I have been doing for a number of years and have time to support families and plan new initiatives. Currently I, Viv McCracken, the Priory's Schools and Families Worker and Chris Walker lead Mini Marshmallows, a Parent and Toddler group that meets every week at St Thomas More Community Room off Willow Lane. This thriving, friendly group meets every Friday morning and in the School holidays turns into Messy Church, so that activities can be provided for the older siblings.

I also volunteer at the Marsh Community Centre where on Thursday afternoons I help lead the Marsh Community Choir. Fortunately, I just make tea and bring cake, while Richard and Matt expertly lead the singing. I also help lead the wonderful Coffee and Cake Club, for women who just want to get out of the house and make friends. Sally's home-made cake is great and so is the company as we support each other and laugh a lot.

All three groups welcome new members so please just turn up (when this crisis is all over), or contact me for more information - katie.schad@lancasterpriory.org

Katie Schad – Lancaster Priory Community Worker

OLIVE BRANCH

I am writing to inform you that, starting tomorrow, we will be running a delivery-only foodbank service from The Olive Branch. This is to protect both guests and volunteers and I am sure you can appreciate it is a necessary decision.

In order to deliver we will require a phone number and address of recipients. We will, as far as possible, try to deliver in the afternoon when referrals come in before midday. We will make contact with the recipient before we come to let them know. Please bear with us when demand is high as we may not be able to deliver food the same day.

Many thanks for your patience and understanding.

Kerry Stephens. Assistant Project Manager, Olive Branch

And to end.....

**A POEM BY JOHN O'DONOHUE
(1956 - 2008)**

Until the Bitter Weather Passes

Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.

