

At the moment, the New Year seems depressingly like the old one – here we are in national lock-down mode again. The government is allowing places of worship to stay open and physical services to happen, as long as they adhere to strict COVID regulations. *Together with the wardens and the PCC, I am happy that we are following those regulations and we can carry-on meeting physically.*

Nobody should feel under any compulsion whatsoever to attend and I know many simply do not feel safe or comfortable worshipping together, and I fully respect that.



I am also aware, speaking to my fellow clergy colleagues, that pretty much every church has in it those who strongly advocate continuing meeting together no matter what, out of the principle that the public worship of the Christian Church is of primary importance. Every church will also have in it those who equally strongly advocate not meeting together out of love for neighbour and in solidarity with those who have to self-isolate. It is vital we listen to the opinions of others,

respect differences and agree that Christians may differ on responses to this pandemic.

It will take a long time to gather all of the church family of St. Lawrence back together again, and I think that some things will have changed for ever. We will never simply go back to the way things were done before. The importance of digital technology and online content is something we need to seriously consider – already more people will watch a service online than they will in person. Our financial giving will have to be less and less dependent on what goes into the physical offering plate and more and more on planned, regular giving through direct debits, standing orders etc. We are more and more a gathered church with people coming from a variety of different places- we are not confined by geographical or parochial boundaries!

### 2020/ 2021 – ‘Believe in Lechlade’



Because of the recent lock-down we have made the decision to postpone the proposed parish mission/ festival of faith until 2022. This year instead will be a year of prayer, of spiritual preparation, a time of re-grouping and building ourselves up for the ongoing task of mission. We will pray for unity and a passion for the Gospel. We will pray that God would continue to build His Kingdom, here, amongst us and He would open people’s eyes to the truth.

Please continue to pray for our mission, which has been named ‘Believe in Lechlade’, which has the dual meaning of both trusting in our local community, but also Christian faith in our town. Even though timescales have been pushed back, planning and praying for this focussed week of outreach carries on.

We still plan to have some events to help us in putting down deep roots of prayer as a church:

*3pm, Saturday 23 Jan* – the prayer triplets network invite you to afternoon tea! Bring a slice of cake and a beverage to our Zoom meeting as we pray for mission, outreach and how to impact our world with the Gospel. Zoom details have been sent to all prayer triplets, but anyone from the church family is most welcome- get in touch!



*Sat 27/ Sun 28 Feb* – a weekend of prayer events with John Woolmer, a retired vicar. An opportunity for a prayer workshop on the Saturday and some teaching on the Sunday. More details to follow soon, but please put the dates in your diary.

## Practical care- Food Bank & CAP (Christians Against Poverty)

David Turtle writes:



*Thank you to all those who are continuing to donate food for the Swindon Collective. The need is still strong although thankfully the Government and Local Authorities are also doing a lot to prevent people from going without essentials. The wonderful team of volunteers at Swindon has been working 5 days a week to keep the flow of food to the distribution centres around the Swindon area going. They are always so grateful for our contributions.*

*Please keep on donating at the Lynwoods Cafe in the market square: don't be surprised if the box is empty as we regularly transfer food to the cottage and then transport to the Swindon Warehouse weekly. The community in Lechlade, and its associated villages of Eastleach and Southrop, have shown such generosity and it really makes a difference.*

*Whilst supplying the Foodbank is directly helping the most needy in our local society, we are also looking at becoming involved with a wonderful organisation called Christians Against Poverty (CAP). Its prime aim is to help those in crushing debt to manage their way out of it, relieving their anxieties, and supporting them through an otherwise unending crisis. We will try to form a small team in Lechlade, maybe partnered with the already active group in Highworth, to provide the CAP service and would encourage prayer for the venture and some thought as to whether you might be able to offer your talents to play a part in the team. More later, as we establish exactly what needs to be done to get this up and running. The timing seems so right, as many people/families have been pushed into financial crisis by the events of the last year, and the practical and caring support that CAP provides can make that crucial difference.*



## Church finances

Our PCC Treasurer, David Williams writes:



*As we move into 2021 and a new lock-down we inevitably look back at 2020 and the challenges we all faced last year. As a church we encountered unprecedented times with restrictions in place to close the building for many months, also individuals and businesses faced enormous financial pressure, uncertainty and in many cases fear. However, we have a gracious God who has blessed us mightily during 2020 and as we start to prepare figures for The Annual Report, we have become*

*aware of the extent of those blessings in so far as the figures show that we have a small surplus achieved by your unstinting and generous giving.*

*We can look forward to 2021 knowing that our God will not only provide for our needs but will do so over abundantly.*

*(Ed. - We also gave £8,500 to our world mission partners at the end of 2020. Each year we pledge to give 10% of our income to these partners. Each year God graciously allows us to be able to do this!)*

## Lent 2021

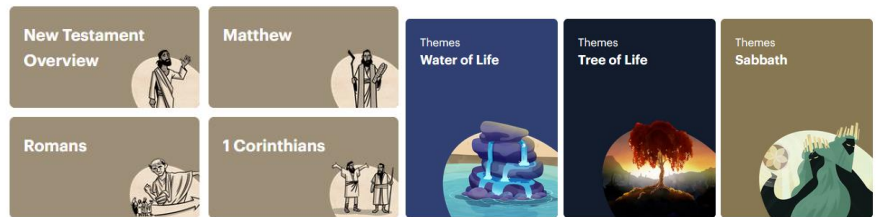
We will still be having Lent Groups this year, but they will be online via Zoom. Mary Bainbridge is stepping down from co-ordinating our Lent groups after so many years. We are so grateful for all her faithful labours in this area. These are ecumenical groups and it is wonderful to have Christians from other churches joining us during this time in the Church Year. Please keep a look out for information on our studies this year- coming soon!



## Useful resources

i. There are some great video resources out there. Try the BibleProject, a library full of wonderful 5-10min videos on each Bible book and key themes in both Old and New Testaments. Useful for individuals, as well as small groups and families- have fun exploring...

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/>



ii. Why not commit yourself in 2021 to reading the whole Bible? Not as daunting as it sounds... a tried and tested way is by using a Bible reading scheme, which allocates a couple of chapters to read each day.

The plan devised by the Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne has always been very popular.

You can get the scheme online here: <http://www.edginet.org/mcheyne/printables.html> or

here: [https://media.thegospelcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/09151141/RtB\\_Reading-Plan\\_2020.pdf](https://media.thegospelcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/09151141/RtB_Reading-Plan_2020.pdf)

Or, I can drop off a free paper leaflet version to you. Just let me know.



There is also a great series of devotionals available (daily newsletter and podcasts) based upon this reading plan. Explore the options here - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/read-bible-tgc-2020/>

## And finally...

We do need to hold on to the promises of God in these challenging and uncertain times. These words from Isaiah 54: 10 remind us of the faithfulness of the Lord Almighty that we worship:

*Though the mountains be shaken  
and the hills be removed,  
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken  
nor my covenant of peace be removed,"  
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*



May you know the grace and peace of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Andrew Cinnamond