

## **Coronavirus: lockdown, giving, generosity and our thanks**

*Working from home for a diocesan Mission & Stewardship Advisor who already works from home should not come as too big a surprise, or does it? In fact, for Ramsbury's John Kilbee there have been plenty of surprises.*

Meetings, visits and workshops are out, for the time being anyway. Instead, communication is now all virtual and more often than not on the telephone. Contact is being made with deaneries and parishes to listen, to clarify, to advise or just to have a chat - taking 20 to 30 minutes but occasionally for over an hour. No driving to or from parishes. No enjoyment of Wiltshire's countryside. No early arrivals to admire a picture postcard town or village with time to snoop around the church. Instead, conversation is king, on a one to one basis as well and like the best conversations with lots of listening. There are, in fact, some interesting stories to tell.

Despite all the horrible things this pandemic has done to us at so many levels, the result has definitely not been to drive us into a state of doom and gloom. Seen more smiles than usual? Made new friends and acquaintances even at the requisite social distance? Had more time to spend on important things? Explored something different or seen things in a different light?

For this correspondent, the list goes on.

In some ways, this has become perhaps a time to be inspired. A time when, to use modern sportsmen and women's favourite phrase, "to take the positives from the situation has definitely helped, people have made generous one off gifts and we still plan to go ahead with our fabric improvement plan".

Another large town parish felt the virus should not be seen as an excuse "we might face a deficit but that is not due to the virus, in fact, the virus has helped as it has stopped us thinking about the building all the time". Another common theme is the sense of thanksgiving for people's support and generosity "PGS is a God send" and "envelopes are left outside the treasurer's front door" and more are giving by Standing Order.

There are still sensible concerns of course, usually around the 3 key income areas of collections at services, seasonal wedding fees and (disappointingly after the glorious spring) the cancellation of summer fundraisers. Some are finding alternatives, one village is talking about holding a virtual garden festival, although most are finding a focus on one off donations and gifts, really pays off. This involves not only a reminder to members, supporters and community ("don't forget the church needs your support" or "thank you so much for your generosity and help – we need your support more than ever now").

People have found 2 practical tasks at this moment are really worth doing. The first is to review parish/benefice online websites. Many are out of date and send irrelevant messages. Remember even the older amongst us are now becoming quite adept in this virtual world – "silver surfers" to "silver worshippers"! So edit, upgrade and improve now. Use talent where you can find it particularly amongst younger members of the community. The second will flow from the first in that every parish needs a simple online method for accepting gifts and donations. The best way to get started on this is to visit the CofE's own website which through Parish Buying can set you up with a simple to use online Donate button. One parish I spoke to about this recently had it installed and working later that afternoon. Visit now: [www.parishbuying.org.uk/categories/giving-and-payments/online-giving](http://www.parishbuying.org.uk/categories/giving-and-payments/online-giving)

*Remember our diocesan Mission & Stewardship Advisor (John Kilbee – 07801 471900) is available for a chat at any time. Also watch out for Webinars planned for the near future, on Online Giving, Contactless Giving and The Parish Giving Scheme.*

*Thank you for all you do.*