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Staying alert to keep us all safe
online issue 5



Hope and safety - Schools back page 4

Welcome to online NEWT 5.

With our schools partly back and local shops reopening, how shall we balance needed caution with courage, and anxiety with hope?

Is *your* glass half empty or half full at this tricky time? ...



Hope and evil - Pandora myth page 7

Holding on to Hope

JUNE 2020

St John & St Stephen's, Newtown Community Magazine

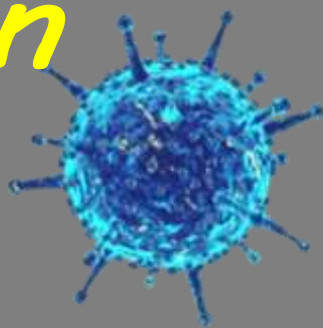
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BLACK
LIVES
MATTER



Actions and hopes - See page 3

Hello again



Rev Christine, writes:

'I can cope with the despair, it's the hope I can't bear!'

12 WEEKS IN LOCKDOWN and counting

Thus groaned John Cleese. He was acting the part of a busy public speaker who was on his way to an event. Faced with innumerable obstacles, each time it's looking as though he might win through, he is destabilised by yet something else.

We might feel the same in our current situation. Rather like the Israelites wandering in the desert, surviving hunger, thirst and sickness whilst holding on to hope of entering the Promised Land; only, when they finally reached its borders, to discover from the scouts sent on ahead that it was inhabited by 'giants'. What had been the point of wandering in the desert hopefully for all those years? It would have been better to give up, they complained.

We too might wonder if we will ever emerge fully from our present circumstances, and if we do, what even bigger problems we might face. Dare we hold on to hope? What strengthens hope?

To hope at all is to picture something brighter ahead. Unless this is based purely on fantasy it holds out the possibility of working for a better future. In this month's NEWT, we can read about some people trying to do just that.

Human beings, of course, also look back. Memory can strengthen hope. Later in their history when they were exiled in Babylon the Israelites remembered their wanderings in the desert, but this time from a different angle. Yes, they had been hungry, but food (manna and quails) had arrived just in time. Yes, they had been thirsty, but Moses had found a spring of water.

Remembering this gave them hope as they lived in exile. If God had helped them before he would help them again.

Hope is infectious. May we catch more of it as we read our NEWT!

With blessings, Christine.

CITIZENS UK

Thames Valley Citizens (TVC) started on Thursday 11 June by holding an 'inaugural assembly' using Zoom.

Part of Citizens UK, TVC is a growing alliance of community groups – churches, mosques, schools, unions and community associations – working together for a fairer society. Using the methods of community organising, they are training people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds to take action together for change.

Among those taking part on Thursday were Communicare, the bishops of Reading and Oxford, Muslim associations, the police commissioner for Thames Valley, and members of St John's and St Stephen's church.

TVC is focusing its efforts for change on the following areas –

- Death Registration (of particular concern to Muslims)
- Police Relationships with Schools
- Action on Misogyny
- A Real Living Wage for Social Care Workers
- Action on Climate Change

To get involved or to find out more, contact Jess Maddocks:

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Church Contacts



Vicar
Rev Claire Alcock



Assoc. Priest
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Manager
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Churchwardens
Rosie Croft & Ian Maynard

We've been ZOOM-ing **says Rosemary Croft**



Even those of us who are definitely not techy have learned to click on our computers and 'chat' and even 'share screens'! Zoom is the easy-to-use video-conferencing platform we've been using to meet up on our smart phones, tablets and PCs.

I have loved to see so many friends. After the first few weeks of lockdown, when I had not seen anyone, to suddenly see a computer screen full of members of our congregation who were all still there and 'OK', was a real joy. And to my surprise it *is* possible to be 'lifted Godwards' by a virtual service – to come away feeling my horizons lifted and broadened – to have enjoyed hearing news and sharing concerns for prayer.

What's more, we have been joined by members of our church community we've not seen for some time, including some who now live in France and in Switzerland. Then, last week, we were able to 'meet' for the first time face-to-face a couple linked to our church who are in Jordan.

Fiona and Joel Kelling work with the Church Mission Society and back in February (when we had not even heard of the virus called corona!) at one of our mid-week meetings, the church decided that we would link with the Kellings, and support them in prayer and financially.

Joel works with churches in the Middle east – covering Iran, Jerusalem, Cyprus, Egypt and North Africa, especially facilitating youth development and the relationships between churches. Fiona works with the many refugees in Jordan from Syria, Iraq and Palestine. They have a 2 year-old son, Aidan, but their big news was that this month their second child was due to be born any day. Nora Ruth arrived safely, and you can see her above, cradled by her big brother.



You are most welcome to join us on any Sunday morning at 11.15 for 11.30am. E-mail Tanya who will give you the log-in details; office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk

All three schools in the Berkshire Schools Trust - St John's, New Town, and New Christchurch - reopened successfully last week. Children of key workers and from vulnerable families were able to go to their own school again (previously they had all been at the St John's 'Hub'), and each school also welcomed back some of their year 1 and year 6 children. From this week they will also be welcoming back Nursery and Reception children.

CEO of the Trust, Angharad Brackstone, described how many children have been delighted to see their friends, and parents have shared their thanks for the preparations and adaptations that have been made to our school sites to ensure safety measures are in place .

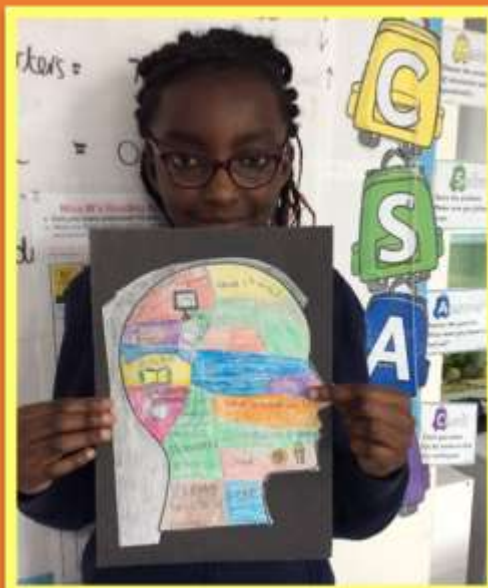
This seems a very positive start. If transmission rates continue to fall, perhaps we may be able to feel our anxieties reducing and see even more children benefitting.

IN BUBBLES & GROUPS AT St John's CE Primary School



Yr 6 have been working in three groups: Diamond, Opal and Pearl. As one of their creative tasks last week, they created some 'What's in my Head' portraits.

We thought about our feelings and experiences over the last few weeks along with positive thoughts about what we are looking forward to in the coming future. We sketched our inner feelings and then chose to illustrate the feelings in our head or our hearts.



Reception children, in Garnet bubble, had a great time this week enjoying the fresh air and seeing their friends. See front cover pics. This brother and 2 sisters (right) enjoyed making some music for the others to enjoy.



For reading skills, Diamond, Y6, group began to read and discuss the book *Journey to Jo'Burg*

Blue & Gold Macaw

Through the forest it will drift,
Flying free, flying swift.

By the trees it will flutter,
Yellow feathers,
smooth as butter.

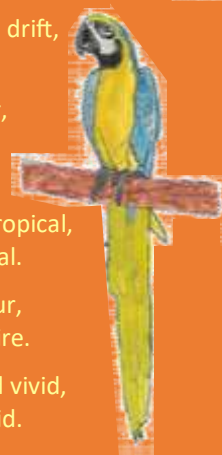
Colours bright, colours tropical,
Clear in sight, very natural.

Yellow for metallic sulphur,
Bright blue, a soft sapphire.

All its beauty radiant and vivid,
Flying free but flying timid.

Gliding like a shooting star,
Soaring fast, soaring far.

Cautious with extreme intelligence,
Colours shining, colours elegant.



One of our Upper School bubbles watched exciting videos from Longleat Safari Park, including live feed and virtual tours of the enclosures. The children then researched a few of the animals found at the park and one wrote a beautiful poem about the blue and gold macaw. We discussed what vocabulary and literary features would best capture the colours of the bird.



Year 6 children have enjoyed time in the fresh air last week.



Faith has been practising her football skills outside while Preet has been enjoying playing Lacrosse.



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK AT *New Town* Primary School

For Mental Health Awareness week we set pupils a range of kindness challenges. They responded in a variety of ways, showing us how considerate they are to those around them, a trait particularly important during these times.

Making a friendship bracelet.



Helping a family member.



Saying thank you.



Writing a card or letter for an elderly person.

School Contacts



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What does **GEORGE FLOYD** mean to me ?

I start this with a quote from his daughter "George Floyd will change the world". I hope that she will be proved right but initially I don't see this. It has bought out a number of different reactions – "All Lives Matter", has been trending on social media, but so has "The UK is a white country and this should be remembered". It has seen people falling out across and within separate communities, the saying "Silence is Compliance" is a popular opinion which I could not disagree with more.

I find it difficult because I could be talking about this from anytime from the 70s onwards. I also find it difficult because the circumstances which lead to his death are fairly unlikely to happen to me, but I do wonder occasionally if I may get beaten up or verbally abused because of what I am.

This is obviously nowhere near the same as George Floyd's death and I don't have any sensible answers to race and all the problems that relate to this issue. I do know that my talking about this will upset people a) for talking about this and b) not going far enough.

The problem I have was echoed by Benjamin Zephaniah and George the Poet and may be felt by NWA and Public Enemy. It gets tiring to talk about it year after year, decade after decade and I am not anywhere near the sharp end. The weekend George Floyd's name became part of regular conversation, I was sat in the sunshine, listening to the repeat of England winning the cricket World Cup in 2019.

But it has stirred me, and I have found myself being intolerant - intolerant of black people supporting Donald Trump's action and rhetoric over George Floyd's death and the actions that followed on the streets of America. As a 'woolly liberal', this is not a good place to be as I have done the equivalent of no-platforming these speakers on the news. It is easier to listen to those that agree with you, but on most occasions I like to debate with those who have a different viewpoint.

If a way is not found to improve where we are, George Floyd's addition as another unwelcome statistic and the shortening of a worthwhile life, will not be the last.

I have to look for a brighter future, I don't know how it will be done but I need to hold to that view, "There is more that unites us than divides us." I will gladly raise a pint of a decent beer to that.

Ian Maynard



Daniel, Elsie and I joined in at the Forbury Gardens part of Reading's BLM protest on Friday 5th June. When I first found out about the march and gathering at Forbury I thought it was too risky. But as the week went by I felt it was deeply important to be there in solidarity with my black neighbours and with victims of racism in the wider world. I saw several former colleagues there, and one was so happy to see me, her joy (and illegal hug) was well worth it!

We managed to keep a very good distance from others taking part as Elsie was climbing trees and playing near the fountain. Daniel listened intently to the speeches.

There is no doubt racism is still a foul factor in our society and we need to continually strive for justice and peace.

As an 8 year old I learnt about the slave trade at my Methodist Sunday school and it had such an impact on me that being antiracist - proactively against racism - continued throughout my life and a principle I want to raise Daniel and Elsie with.

The consequences of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and resulting intergenerational trauma are still with us. Someone encouraged me to think about white privilege as 'no matter how hard your life has been, it would have been harder if you were black' and that seemed to summarise white privilege.

Abi Reilly



Hope by Chris Gothard

*Seemingly so small, infinitesimal, hope hid
in the farthest corner of Pandora's box.
She, all curious to see inside, opened the lid
wide on chaos, every evil. Disaster*

*flooded the world. Avarice. Greed.
Disease. Loneliness. One nation after
another succumbed. Death, freed
from the pseudo-controlled prison of our*

*scientific smugness, made to stalk
the globe, strode through us, unchecked.*

*And yet - small, struggling hope walked
among us, too. Hope, the last antidote,*

*our only immunisation against the dark,
unfurled her wings, trod tentatively
then flew, arose, grew. Heed the marks
of hope all around us. It will astound*

*you. Salvation's tentative trope
is gilding our cages with hope.*



The story of Pandora's box is an ancient Greek myth. For a philosophical discussion of it's possible meanings, [click here](#).

The words superimposed on this image (left) are taken from a poem by Emily Dickinson.

Like everyone else, Christians can often feel anxious or down, but nevertheless they are always wanting to talk about hope. Why?

The apostle Peter, writing to dispersed anxious people at the start of the first really serious persecution of Christian believers, reminded them they had been given 'new birth into a living hope'. You can read more in the Bible - 1st letter of Peter ... or you could ask yourself, or ask any Christian, 'What is it that gives **you** a deep down sense of hope?'.