



Newsletter May 2020

As the Bexley Interfaith Forum (BIF) has not been able to meet, we asked different faith groups across the Borough to write articles, news stories or other information about what is going on for them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below you can find contributions that were sent to us from different faith groups that are part BIF and we would like to share them with you all.

What comes across is that faith communities have found new and innovative ways through the Internet and other means to support each another, gather together in worship and in prayer, and do some good helping the more vulnerable and others in society.

Due to the lock down we have not been able arrange any meetings of the Bexley Interfaith Forum, but we hope to do so as soon as it is safe to gather together.

Our love and prayers for you all.

***Rev Trevor Wyatt
Chair***

***Sabrina Gbemisola
Adminstrator***

“The biggest positive we have seen during the crisis amongst the Muslim community and from volunteers and members of NWKMA is the coming together of people to help each other and help vulnerable people of all backgrounds and faith traditions in the local community.”

North West Kent Muslim Association

“The current situation feels like a journey: Trying to talk and comfort one another as we persevere toward a far-off destination.”

St John The Evangelist, Bexley

“Only Allah knows what will be next.”

*Mr and Mrs Rashid
North West Kent Muslim Association*

“From the outset we found that the spiritual uplifting that occurs in normal devotional meetings is also present when we are all in different places. The power of the Spirit is universal. We know this in theory, of course, but it was good to be reminded of it by the new technology.”

The Baha'is of the London Borough of Bexley

“In facing the possibility of contracting the virus and even facing the possibility of suffering the severe effects, very serious questions get asked about one's relationship with God. I can only say that when those questions did get asked the Lord was there to answer them.”

St. John Fisher Roman Catholic Church, Bexley



Acts of solidarity

Like all other faiths, the NWKMA and Masjid Abu Bakar have been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the Muslim faith, people attend mosques to pray together in congregation, standing shoulder to shoulder and toe to toe, however, due to the crisis this has not

been possible, as Mosques just like all other places of worship were closed.

Ramadan started on the 24th of April and the mosque is normally very busy during this period, therefore, this year it has been a very different Ramadan in our lifetime, but we hope we can take the positives such as being able to spend more time with family and having more time to worship and connect with our creator. It will be Eid either tomorrow or on Sunday and again it will be a very strange and different Eid.

During the lockdown and closure of the mosque the Muslim community have been praying from home and praying in congregation with members of the same family at home where this has been possible.

The biggest positive we have seen during the crisis amongst the Muslim community and from volunteers and members of NWKMA is the coming together of people to help each other and help vulnerable people of all backgrounds and faith traditions in the local community.

NWKMA setup a 24 hour helpline to support anyone who is need by reaching out to people in the community and providing information and advice and offering help with food delivery (Food Packs & Hot Food), assisting with shopping, assisting with delivering medication, cooking/preparing meals or food packs, providing a friendly phone call service to help people that may be isolated or lonely, posting mail/parcels and online tutoring.

In addition to opening of a 24 hour helpline, NWKMA also setup a Covid-19 page on our website. The page was setup for the community members to register as volunteers, request support and for NWKMA to update the community with news and announcements on how NWKMA was supporting the community. You can visit our website to learn more: <https://nwkma.org/covid-19/>

We are pleased that NWKMA volunteers have responded to the calls for assistance and on all occasions donated shopping and food to those who contacted our helpline.

We are also very proud that our volunteers provided Iftar food packs to the NHS.

Author
Mizan Rahman
North West Kent Muslim Association

Service of words



I have been quite overwhelmed by the sheer amount of words over the last few weeks: whether phone calls, social media, email or the documents we have been sending out to assist our congregation in their devotions. It's as if in the absence of being physically present with each other, we've compensated through the verbal levels of our interactions.

The form of the Communion service which is the principal act of worship in the Church of England (as it is in other Christian denominations) divides into two parts: The Liturgy of the Word, which consists of readings and a sermon, and the Liturgy of the Sacrament when bread and wine are consecrated and shared.

The lockdown restrictions seem to place us in a prolonged service of words, with plenty of verbal devotions and worship, but we for the most part unable to share the bread and wine together.

The liturgical structure is taken from a Biblical passage set shortly after the events of the first Easter in which two disciples are joined by the Risen Jesus on the road to a town called Emmaus. Unrecognised by them He talks about and interprets the scriptures. When they reach Emmaus He breaks bread with them and then they recognise Him.

The current situation feels like a journey: Trying to talk and comfort one another as we persevere toward a far-off destination.

"Are we nearly there yet?" we ask! We're apprehensive and uncertain as to what sort of place we are going and when we will get there, we may be frustrated and impatient. Can we perhaps learn something from our Buddhist friends in the sense of being present in the moment, rather than defined by a future that is yet to happen?

Like those disciples we plod along: One foot at a time along the road – and similarly we may only be aware in hindsight of the times when God has been present with us on the journey.

Author
Reverend Edward Barlow
St John The Evangelist, Bexley

Calling from Bangladesh

In early March we came to Bangladesh to visit our relatives and friends.

Then the Covid19 Pandemic started, and we got stuck here.

Around third week of March a plane load of Bangladeshis was sent back from the worst affected area of Italy. Government put them in quarantine in the 'Pilgrims camp' but these people managed to flee to their homes in villages and spread Covid19 infection.

On the 26th March we celebrated the Independence Day of Bangladesh during a long weekend. Most of the people went to their village homes leaving Government Offices empty. The Government declared two weeks General Holiday but with the rules of Lockdown. Since then this Holiday have been increased by two weeks until 30th of May. According to Bangladesh Government's statistics, so far less than 30 thousand people have been infected and less than 400 people have died. These figures seem to be low, and there are few reasons behind it.

Firstly, if Police suspects Corona patient in a home, they will literally lock the house without checking whether they have food for the next 14 days.

Secondly, few orthodox Muslim clerics declared that the Covid19 will not affect true Muslims and this put a stigma on people, as 90% of the population are muslims.

In addition to that if someone dies of Covid19 that person most likely will not buried. As such Corona patients have fled from the hospitals and people try to deny Covid19 infection.

British High Commission organised a chaotic repatriation of British citizens and managed to repatriate about 1900 people out of an application of about 6000.

As we will have to stay inside our home after returning, we decided to stay here till commercial flights starts again.

On the evening of 20th May, a Cyclone Amphan hit the border areas of Bangladesh and India. As there were ample warning vulnerable people were all assembled in cyclone shelters where they were packed like sardines and there were no spaces to lie down.

As a result, casualties were low, but damages were severe; at least 100 million pounds and about 176 thousand hectares of land polluted by saline water due to 10 feet high tidal wave.

Only Allah knows what will be next.

Author

Mr and Mrs Rashid

North West Kent Muslim Association



Like Baha'is across the world, the Baha'is of Bexley normally hold their meetings in member's homes, or halls hired for particular occasions, or public spaces such as parks or cafes.

This is because at the present time the Faith is growing, and the [Universal House of Justice](#), which is the elected supreme body tasked with the global governance of the Faith, tells us that as soon as there are more than nine members in one location, we should prayerfully consider if we are called to move to another area, where there are less than nine members in order to strengthen the smaller community.

Communities are defined by each country's local government boundaries, so in the case of London there is one community in each London Borough.

The Baha'is of the London Borough of Bexley, to give us our full official title, usually hold our public meetings in the Scouts' Hall in Mayplace Rd West, or Pincott Hall behind Christs Church in Bexleyheath Broadway. We also hold regular prayer meetings in Hall Place Gardens and cafe, and sometimes Danson Park. Of course, when lockdown came none of these were available to us. Like everyone else, we suddenly had to learn how to use electronic means to come together.

Fortunately, one of us was already familiar with Zoom, and so we tried it to see what would happen. Not everyone in the community has a computer, and of those who did not, not everyone had a smartphone. However, they did have landlines, and we discovered that Zoom permits audio only access from normal telephones.

Baha'i devotional gatherings can take any form the community wishes, provided they use the Baha'i writings at the core of the activity.

So in Africa communities will include a lot of dance and drumming in their worship, in the Middle East there are long and exquisite chants of the writings in the style of intoning of the Quran, in Asia there is community singing, in America passionate delivery of uplifting talks and in Europe groups in which every person contributes by reading a Baha'i prayer or passage from the writings.

Of course, all these styles of worship and more get mixed together, depending on who is in which community, and what the community wants to do.

In our case we decided that the simplest which took advantage of Zoom's capabilities would be for everyone attending to read one passage or prayer, and if possible, to play music between each person.

The music immediately proved to be a problem, as although the host could hear it, the other attendees could not.

It took us a while to find that there is a check box which has to be clicked to share sound among all participants. Once that was mastered, it also needed a lot of experimentation to make sure the levels were set so everyone could hear and others were not deafened by it.

It was agreed that for simplicity one person would take on the task of collecting a group of suitable prayers and readings, so that they could be displayed on the screen for everyone to see. It worked, but we discovered that we did not know who was reading and in which order, so it was necessary for the host to ask a particular person to read the next passage, which rather disrupted the flow of the event.

As we gained experience, a system developed whereby the name of the person to read is shown on the screen, so that the prayers, music and readings can run effortlessly into each other.

From the outset we found that the spiritual uplifting that occurs in normal devotional meetings is also present when we are all in different places. The power of the Spirit is universal. We know this in theory, of course, but it was good to be reminded of it by the new technology.

As we are all forced by social distancing to 'fast' from human contact, what is happening is that we are finding that a deeper truth is being made evident: that we are all one, we are all interconnected, and that Power and Love of God unites us always.

Author

Brian

The Baha'is of the London Borough of Bexley



When Lockdown occurred, I was, like many others taken aback. Cut off from everyone, I felt bereaved in many ways. One of the good things about our parish is that we do much in collaboration. The downside of that is that there are many tasks regularly undertaken that I do not have the first clue about how to manage – or I did not have! I felt like the bereaved husband or wife saying in exasperation: “But he or she always looked after that side of things.” There

was a very steep learning curve for me especially when the parish secretary was furloughed.

Without meeting regularly, communication was going to be at the heart of all our efforts to celebrate our relationship with God and with each other. We would need to join people together even if it would only be in a virtual way. We would need to offer help wherever necessary, to celebrate community with each other and communion with the Lord.

I quickly discovered that our internet was not going to be strong enough to do live streaming. We opted instead therefore to record the Sunday mass and upload it to YouTube so that anyone can access it via the link on our website (listed above). This has proved to be very popular, not just within the parish, but beyond with nearly 200 viewings.

At first, I think we all found it a very strange experience. The Easter Services were particularly difficult but were much appreciated. People felt as involved in the liturgy as they could be and felt as much in their own church as they could.

There were many comments about the flowers, some new vestments and banners that we have acquired and about the overall look of the sanctuary.

Anyway, we have added recordings of hymns to the weekly mass and parish readers send in recordings so that they now exercise their ministry and add dignity and interest to the liturgy. The Sunday Mass remains at the centre of our Parish, thank God, and thanks to our website!

Communication with parishioners beyond the Sunday Mass has been a huge challenge. Putting together an up to date database was one of the priorities for the year ahead but alas yet, it has not been undertaken. I did have access though to many telephone numbers and many email addresses.

During the first week I was able to cobble together a long list of parishioners who agreed to receive mailings from me, and I undertook to mail everyone twice a week. Everyone on the list receives a newsletter at the weekend and a reflection that I called ‘Fr Doug’s Ramblings’ in the middle of the week. Beyond that, the news and views reach everyone else via doorstep deliveries and the telephone. We maintain our parish community.

I celebrate mass privately each day on behalf of the parishioners and engage in prayer between 5.30 and 6.30. These times are published so that many joins in a spiritual communion with the Lord, with me and with each other at these times.

Sadly, there have been more funerals than normal. These are very difficult events. Without the usual number of meetings to talk about death and to plan the funeral service, it feels to me like my hands are tied behind my back.

At the crematorium, there cannot be more than ten people present and the usual

consolation of people's physical support is absent. The family's grief is not matched by the outpouring of love that is usually there. I hope that as soon as we can, we return to church and at least celebrate a memorial mass with the level of dignity that we have been previously used to.

Two weddings and several baptisms, First Holy Communion and Confirmation are all on hold. When and how all these will be celebrated are matters for conjecture.

As for me, while the parish activities I have mentioned together with my wider ministry, have been a welcome distraction, the main thing has been to allow the Lord to speak to me and to offer Him the chance to speak through me.

In facing the possibility of contracting the virus and even facing the possibility of suffering the severe effects, very serious questions get asked about one's relationship with God. I can only say that when those questions did get asked the Lord was there to answer them. (The temptation is of course to imagine that it is we who must answer them. That is when it would get really scary!)

In the midst of all of this, we stand and salute the brave NHS workers, others working on the frontline and many others besides undertaking key roles in society to make sure we are all safe, fed and watered.

I do hope that after this is all over, we will remember and cherish more closely all those who at this time are considered 'essential workers'. We will remain in their debt.

Author

Parish Priest: Father Douglas Bull

St. John Fisher Roman Catholic Church, Bexley



“Are you OK?”

Over the past few months, Yog Foundation has explored new ways to support the wider community during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Seva (the Hindu term for selfless service) is a key pillar of Hinduism, so serving the community at this time of need came naturally.

During these unprecedented times, the Yog community has been working with Bexley and Dartford Foodbank to gather much needed supplies.

We have been able to collect and donate over 700kg of food and contribute over £2,000 to our foodbank fund.

Additionally, we launched our “Are you OK?” scheme. This initiative allows anyone from the public to get assistance from our dedicated volunteers.

We help pick up essential foods and medicines and provide those feeling lonely, anxious or disturbed with someone to talk to.

We also encourage others who may be doing well to reach out to neighbours and the elderly in the community who are more vulnerable and may feel isolated due to these circumstances.

These efforts have been positively received.

Despite the fact that weekly meet ups are a fundamental part of the Yog community, we have been able to celebrate festivals and hold quiz nights regularly through the use of Zoom, as well as continuing our weekly classes online such as Children’s Moral Values classes, Hindi and Gujarati language classes and Bhagavad Gita classes.

We are also offering Meditation and Mindfulness classes and Yoga classes via Zoom twice a week to help encourage the community to remain fit physically and mentally.

The classes are free and open to all. Find out more at:

<https://www.yog.foundation/activities>.

Author

Pritesh Bhudia

Delivering for the people in need nor matter cast, creed, religion or colour.

Sikh community from Bexley borough and Greenwich borough have got together at the Sikh temple in Woolwich and made meals for the NHS Workers at Lewisham Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital every day in the evening.

The Sikh temple from ERITH & Belvedere have collaborated with the two Sikh temples from Greenwich.

During these difficult times the local people came together to reach out, to help cook, pack, clean and deliver packed Langar (blessed cooked hot Vegetarian meals).

We are averaging around 250 - 300 hot meals daily!

Not just for the NHS workers also home delivery for the people in need nor matter cast, creed, religion or colour.

Also in Gravesend the Sikh temple has been doing the same as well to Darent Valley Hospital and home delivery for elderly based in Graversham Council (nor matter what cast, creed, race they are). They were averaging over 500 meals a day.

The Graysend Sikh temple have also donated £10,000 to Darent Valley Hospital with MP Adam Holloway in attendance as well with the Sikh temple.

Author
Kul Singh





Prayer has been the main focus for sustaining us as a church and as people of faith

As lockdown has meant the closing of our church (St Michael's East Wickham) building for worship and other gatherings, we have been live-streaming the usual Sunday and mid-week communion services. The daily offices of Morning, Evening and Night Prayers are audio recorded Monday to Friday and placed on the website, along with sermons and our teaching series on Prayer. We have also been recording songs and I am blessed with children who are able to play instruments to help with this! Here is a sample of the music if you'd like to listen:

<https://youtu.be/F6hMeZvVY7Q>



We are learning to adapt to the increased use of technology, editing and preparing videos, setting up equipment for live-streaming and of course, Zoom meetings!

Prayer has been the main focus for sustaining us as a church and as people of faith. In April, Revd Peter Organ joined with other faith leaders from the UK in a unifying moment of prayer for humanity amid the COV-19 pandemic. This was hosted by the Dialogue Society and can be viewed on the following link :

<https://youtu.be/fTdAkg5hiDo>

On hearing of the increased homelessness of women and children leaving their abusers but having nowhere safe to go, Revd Carol Bates donated her daily exercise to help those trapped in lockdown with their domestic abuser. Gathering outside St Michael's Church East Wickham, for a photograph with protest signs. 'Some Women Need to Walk' and 'Fund Emergency Refuges'.



This was to participate in a campaign founded by Martha Jephcott and Charlotte Fischer. (Those who want to join up and support can take action by going to loveandpower.co.uk). The photo was tweeted with a message calling on our local MP and government for support.

More recently, Revd Peter Organ was commissioned via Zoom, as Area Dean of Plumstead Deanery. We know he will be a blessing to the deanery and wish him well as he takes on this role.

Author

Revd Carol Bates

Assistant Curate at St Michael's East Wickham in the Diocese of Southwark.