

NEWS & CHAT Thursday 14 January 2021

Welcome to the joint weekly newsletter of Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church.

There will be no activities in either church building now that we are in a national lockdown (as was previously agreed for Tier 4), **including Sunday Worship which will continue online, live-streamed on the CC Facebook page, and text circulated with the weekly News & Chat.**

Sunday 17 January, 10am Worship with Communion on the CC Facebook page with the Minister

NEWS

The current situation is much worse than at any time previously in the pandemic. Although slightly more things are allowed in this lockdown than were in the Spring 2020 one, I would encourage you (as Chris Whitty advises) to follow this lockdown strictly and 'act as if you have Coronavirus'. Attached with this mailing, for information, is a letter from Essex County Council urging all churches to close. We have of course already done so since the introduction of Tier 4 in Essex.

House Groups:

We have agreed that the existing Monday night Zoom house group will meet 3 times prior to Lent on **Monday 18th Jan (next Monday)**, 1 Feb., 15 Feb. – all at 7pm

Here is the link for next Monday: <https://zoom.us/j/93008800955?pwd=VXVYQnF0aDVzUHZlWGNHQM85ZHpjZz09>

Passcode: ZUN3Cf Details of the material at the end of this News & Chat.

There will be Lenten Course, as usual, although it will almost certainly need to be online. More details to follow.

(Before I added the bit above!!) there didn't seem to be any 'news' for this week, as all church groups are suspended (from meeting physically) due to the lockdown, and Christmas is over (no Christmas Appeal, no Advent Calendar). So, I had a quick look on the internet, to see if there were any international 'days' or 'weeks' and I found there is loads happening in January!

January as a month is:

DRY JANUARY – A month without drinking alcohol, which I'm doing (don't forget to show your support!!)

VEGANUARY – which encourages people to try being Vegan for the month for personal health benefits and 'saving the planet' by eating less animal products.

Apparently, January is **INTERNATIONAL WALK YOUR DOG MONTH** – of course every month and day should be walk your dog day, but this month is designed "to help dust off the January blues, get out and about, meet other dog walkers [at a distance!] and improve your own and your dog's well-being."

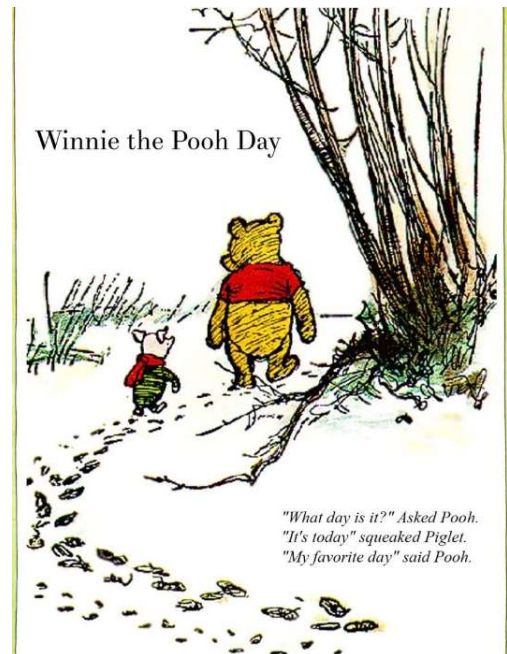
This week is **HOUSEPLANT WEEK** – "Indoor gardening is great. Not only does it make our homes look great, but houseplants also have health benefits that you might not even know about. From improving the air we breathe to help lift our moods during the darker nights of winter."

16th JAN is **WORLD RELIGION DAY** – "The aim of World Religion Day is to promote inter-faith understanding and harmony."

And next Monday, the 18th is **WINNIE THE POOH DAY!!** celebrated on the birthday of A. A. Milne. Apparently, it's a big deal for fans, with lots of teddy bears' picnics (bit cold in January!)

And Monday is **Brew Monday**, a campaign by the Samaritans to counteract Blue Monday – supposedly the day of the year most people feel depressed. Maybe some of you would like to do this – it doesn't have to be on a Monday, or online, just reach out to a friend or family member for 'a cuppa and a chat'

<https://www.samaritans.org/support-us/campaign/brew-monday/>



Remember Helen Dart's January Challenge:

I am walking 31 miles in 31 days for HARP. If you wish to donate, please use the link. <https://homelessactionresource.enthuse.com/pf/helen-dart> My target is to raise £100.

"I have raised £65 so far. For people not on the internet but wish to donate please contact me. Many thanks in advance, Helen"

DEVOTION

In last week's devotion, I wrote a bit about 'how to be happier', which seems to have been an obsession in society for many years, and seems to be even more in vogue this January (no surprise after the year we had in 2020). The magazine with the weekend paper had '21 ways to be happy in 2021' – some were repeats of the previous article, some were a bit silly and many were (to my mind) simple common-sense, but the final point, #21 was surprising. It said, 'learn how to be sad better'. People who cry, "typically experience fewer negative aggressive feelings" and "reported higher levels of self-esteem". Apparently, sadness and crying serve a purpose – obviously, or why would we have been created to feel sadness! (in a similar way to pain serving a purpose, and not being able to feel physical pain is extremely dangerous). "Expressing sadness soothes us" and trying to avoid feeling sadness can backfire. "...sometimes, we need to be sad. Sadness is what we're supposed to feel after a loss, and sorrow is the sane response when sad things happen. After a year in which all of our lives have been rocked by a global pandemic, for instance, it's OK to feel sad" even if you haven't known anyone who has died or been very ill with the virus.

Here is where the psalms come in. The psalms of lament in particular, allow us to feel the pain and sadness of whatever we are experiencing; complain to God, have a good old moan about how terrible our lot is. But, they always move through complaint and reflection to acknowledging that God is there in our time of need. God listens to our troubles. The knowledge of the love and grace of God is a balm to our sadness, without seeking to wipe it away. There are many lament psalms to choose from, both individual and communal, but you might like to read Psalm 6, or Psalm 13, which was much used at the start of the pandemic.

And happiness – the kind that faith in God brings, rather than the kind touted in magazine articles and sold in 'well-being' practices, and happiness courses, is rather more like contentment or acceptance of the fact that life naturally includes highs and lows, joy and pain, and our God is with us through all of life. A God that lived as a human knows what human pain and sadness feels like and does not seek to wipe it away or ignore it, but holds our hand while we cry.

Here are a couple of things that I didn't know before reading the article, which interested me:

Christ Church, Rayleigh (CC) and the Bridgwater Drive Church (BDC)

- Accepting and allowing sadness when its appropriate can help “improve attention to detail, increase perseverance, promote generosity and make us grateful” for all we do have.
- And, “to be sad better, we need to get active outdoors, daily – if only for a 20-minute walk.”

So, if you can, take your daily allowed exercise, and if you feel sad about the situation we are in and likely will be for at least a few months more – accept and allow yourself to feel that sadness, while remembering that through it all God is with us.

TIPS & IDEAS

Two years ago, I signed up for the [#64MillionArtists January Challenge](#), in which you are sent an artistic challenge every day for a month. I didn't sign up this year, but because I am on their mailing list, they are sending me the challenges anyway! Here are a couple people might like to try:

Mapping Memories - Choose an area that you know and love and create a map that shows all of your favourite routes. You could doodle your map or write out the route! How do you get around your chosen area, and what are the spaces and places that make it somewhere special to you?

A Story Retold - Take a favourite childhood book, and reimagine the story from a different character's perspective. Try and choose a lesser-known character, or one that you wish you knew more about. How does their perspective change the story? If they are an evil character, do you see a good side? If they are a quiet character, do we learn more about them?

You could capture your reimagined story in writing, a cartoon doodle or by telling somebody. It can be as serious or silly as you like. Don't take too long! Think what immediately comes to your mind.

RESOURCES

A New Year reflection from St Paul's Cathedral by Gillian Straine:

<https://mailchi.mp/8773366c3fad/coming-up-from-st-pauls-cathedral-1382012?e=e30a1f608a>

Sunday's (10 Jan.) Radio 4 'Sunday Worship' focussing on faith and creation (as our service did to a certain extent): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000r30w> Martin Palmer explores how faith can partner with conservation movements.

PRAYER CORNER

I invite all of you to set aside time daily to pray for our churches and members but also for the whole nation and world. I am praying 'live' with a short devotion every day, Monday – Friday, on the Rev Naomi Facebook Page, then shared with both church FB pages. Especially this week we prayer for staff at Southend Hospital and all NHS staff and key-workers.

This week's (CC) prayer theme (prepared by Gwyneth): **Presentation**. Jesus' parents presented their most precious gift to God. If we are to be the people of God, He has planned for us to be, we must do likewise, presenting ourselves as individuals and our gathered church in servanthood before God. Prayers for us all please.

Particular prayer requests this week:

Bill & Beth

Sheila S

Lee, Gill H's relative

Cindy and Les - Sandy's parents

Della and family

Ernie Lane's family

Bar N Bus and Hopeworx

We prayer for our partner church in Budiriro as COVID 19 cases are again rising there and there is another lockdown in force which includes closing the church building.

We give thanks for:

- Congratulations to William Poyntz who became engaged to Maria on Christmas Day.

- Sophie had her baby on 6th January at Southend hospital. Baby Remy was born at 9.07pm weighing 8lb 14oz and Nanny Michelle was present at the birth. Congratulations to Nanny Michelle and family.





XL Mentoring

Sandy will start training new mentors this month.

If anyone would like to join the online mentor training please contact Sandy.

It will be over four consecutive Wednesday evenings starting at 7pm on Wednesday 20th January 2021.

HOUSE GROUP, Monday 18th January:

This ties in with the idea of lament from the Devotion. We have decided for the next three House Group sessions to use material from Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries. **It was designed for Advent, but focuses less on the birth of Christ and more on the pandemic and our responses to it, moving from Lament, through Reflection to Gratitude. It is designed to be used by individuals, so anyone can use it, even if you don't want to attend the House Group sessions** – we will meet to chat informally about what we thought and found helpful.

Unfortunately, although I downloaded the material, I'm not able to share it, so you will need to go to the website and 'subscribe' (its FREE) to access the material:

<https://www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org/subscription/finding-light-in-the-deepest-dark/>

Here is the main part of section one. I suggest that if you do this, you do the other two sessions also, so you don't get stuck in lament! It is a progressive journey of reflection to arrive at a place of gratitude.

Session 1, Lament - Lament is a biblical practice, involving an expression of grief that offers us a way of navigating difficult experiences. Reading through the Psalms, we see God's people calling on him, reminding God of his character and promises. Lament occurs in the context of an ongoing relationship. Even when there is despair, there is the expectation that God is present.

Take a moment to reflect on the last six months/year. Become aware, if you can, of God's loving presence towards you. If this feels hard to connect with, remind yourself you are not alone, as Jesus' words tell us: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Offer yourself plenty of time. If you would like, make a note of your response to these questions:

- What has changed for you in this time?
- What has challenged you?
- What do you miss from your life as it was?