

**A Digest of the Response by the Church in Hertfordshire to the Coronavirus Pandemic**

**A Report of the Zoom meeting of Churches Together in Herts, 11 May 2020**

***Introduction***

On the 11th May 2020 Churches Together in Hertfordshire convened the first countywide meeting on zoom to hear from across the churches how they were responding to the Coronavirus Pandemic and the changes to church and community life during lockdown. Approximately thirty people attended, some representing an individual church and others a Churches Together Group or Local Ecumenical Project. The meeting was Chaired by Doral Hayes, Ecumenical Facilitator for Churches Together in Hertfordshire (CTH) and a number of Trustees and Committee members were also present including the current Chair of Trustees Rev. Dr David Chapman.

This report contains a brief summary of what was reported at the meeting by the different geographical areas of the county that attended as well as some final thoughts and questions for future consideration. As to be expected there is some repetition about what the churches were able to offer during lockdown, there is however a richness in the depth of response and also in the breadth of response from the church in Hertfordshire.

Churches Together in Hertfordshire are grateful to all who attended and helped develop this picture of activity across the county at this time.

For more information about any of the activities in this report please do contact the Churches Together Group in the specific area and they can provide more information or sign post to a specific church. Contact details can be found on our website at <http://www.ctherts.org.uk/churches-together-members>

***Summary of Church and Community Responses by Geographical Area.***

**Baldock:**

Sunday service on Zoom, with recorded organ music. Virtual coffee morning at the end. Zoom Messy Church, with crafts being sent out beforehand. Zoom Palm Sunday and Easter Day. Common Worship Evening Prayer every day. Youth Group meets on Zoom. Daily reflection by email with a prayer and a hymn. Pew sheet emailed out, with readings and the Collect and prayers. Hard copies go out to those who can’t use the internet.

**Bishop’s Stortford:**

Email daily prayer from the different churches. Facebook service to accompany the email. Zoom service on Maundy Thursdays. Sunday service pre-recorded video, so not interactive. Zoom House Groups. Food bank with new volunteers getting involved.

Daily prayer, Psalm and Sunday services on Facebook and YouTube channel. Weekly notice sheet. Emailing the congregation with daily payer.

Sharing of what is going on nationally.

Online and paper copies of services connect the congregation.

Zoom coffee morning for Christian Aid.

Go To Meeting for Sunday service. Weekly notice sheet. Coffee morning, Home Groups and Bible Study online.

Holiday Bible Week, a summer holiday week for children cannot happen as usual but will provide worksheets to give children something to do.

**Croxley Green:**

Zoom meetings. Foodbank. Strong community spirit, with YouTube channel. Use of database and Mother’s Union to keep tabs on the community.

**Hatfield:**

No CT as such. Foodbank. Anglican Team broadcasting in various ways: Facebook and YouTube every morning. Family Services going out on Facebook or YouTube.

Concern was expressed for clergy working on their own, without support, especially if there is antagonism to online broadcasting.

**Hemel Hempstead:**

Sunday Facebook services. Keeping in touch via Facetime, Messenger and Skype. Daily readings of the Bible for children.

RC live streaming of services on Facebook. Weekly phone calls to those who requested them.

Links sent to those who do not have Facebook but are on the internet. Daily ten-minute talk based on the Mister Men/Little Miss series. Newssheet goes out, people are visited and phoned; people are encouraged to use a Church of England freephone number to access services.

Zoom services and Bible Study. Singalong (with muted microphones) and cookalong to keep up the sense of community.

Televised Walk of Witness on Good Friday. Virtual tea party.

**Hertford:**

Zoom and YouTube services. Zoom coffee mornings. Website updated daily with news, prayers, and a blog. National links to websites provided. Messy Church and Family Service by Zoom. Members of the congregation asked if they would like a regular telephone call, and a large number get that daily.

Messages sent out daily, with a thought for the day.

Churches Together in Hertford have weekly prayer session on a Sunday night.

Young Life uses Facebook and Instagram.

Parenting course online.

Foodbank operating and able to deliver food with an Asda-donated van.

**Hitchin:**

The various 17 churches are each doing their own thing. Money saved from cancelled events is being given to charity. One church has split the congregation into Fellowship groups and there is support for youth work. 24/7 prayer run by the Pentecostal churches. Good children’ material produced by Children and Youth Worker group. Foodbank. Feed Up Warm Up, for the homeless in Hitchin.

**Stevenage:**

Sunday morning streamed service on YouTube and Facebook. Pre-recorded with interactive section for prayer. 24/7 prayer line. Email to allow people to get in touch. Zoom prayers every morning. Weekday services on YouTube and Facebook. Cell groups of the congregation in touch with each other.

Zoom services. Night prayer once a week on Zoom. Quiz nights and games evenings, open to friends and family from around the country.

Telephone calls to support those at the Lister Hospital, professionals and patients.

**St Albans:**

Various responses from the churches. Zoom and Facebook being used. Use of national services.

An Easter Garden was created outside and it proved popular.

**Watford:**

Zoom meetings, services, studies and children’s activities. Hospital chaplaincy: set up an appeal for MP3 players for Covid patients to have Christian music, readings and messages from loved ones.

Virtual cheese and wine party. Zoom coffee mornings.

YouTube services on a Sunday and other Zoom meetings.

**Welwyn**

Zoom worship on a Sunday morning. Young people’s Home Group on Zoom. Monthly Newsletter. Home Groups on Zoom. Widening of Pastoral Team and keeping in touch with those who go to church groups but who are not regular attenders.

**Wheathampstead:**

Rector did a Walk of Witness, going round the village, getting people to do readings which were recorded and transmitted on Good Friday.

Anglican church services going out by Zoom and videos going out to families. Monthly mailings.

YouTube services, with services going out on a sheet for those not online.

Facebook group, with Sunday reflection, also sent out by email or print version.

Use of streamed Masses from around the country.

***Update on Countywide Projects***

Two county wide projects were mentioned that Churches Together in Hertfordshire were involved in.

1. *Thy Kingdom Come 21st -31st May 2020.*

This year the encouragement to pray Thy Kingdom Come went online as Churches were all closed for worship. Churches across Herts and Beds worked together to produce a range of online resources that were shred across the different church networks and social media including:

* An ecumenical video launch event
* Daily prayers led by families from across the churches
* Daily prayers from church leaders across the region
* Daily evening reflections from across the churches and ecumenical groups
* An online ecumenical Beacon event
* A prayer and care resource pack prepared by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church and Church of England in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.
1. *Pastoral response to COVID 19 support the healthcare chaplaincy by the churches.*

In the light of the rise in Covid-19 related deaths, St Albans Anglican Diocese was asked to support the NHS through offering pastoral support to people whose loved ones are seriously ill or who have died due to Covid-19. St Albans Diocese asked Churches Together in Hertfordshire to assist in the setting up of this scheme. The aim was that through the Church of England’s parish system it has links in all parts of the county and therefore other churches in each locality. Working together with its ecumenical and interfaith partners, the aim was that family and friends of those who are affected by COVID 19 could, if they wish, be put in contact with a local faith leader of their choice. This may be a priest or minster of the Church of England, or of a different Christian denomination or faith.

***Thoughts for Future Consideration that arose from the discussions.***

1. *Pastoral Support in the medium and longer term*

A question was posed at the beginning of the meeting is about where we think people are hurting right now and where we think the need might be? Several people expressed that there was a need for additional pastoral support for all, within and outside the church in the medium and long term and several specific concerns were shared including:

* Burn out of lay and clergy leaders within the church.
* Psychological and an emotional fear of what the future will be like.
* People experiencing trauma from being in hospital alone and those anxious about loved ones being ill, with COVID and other forms of illness.

**Question**: How can this kind of support be best achieved ecumenically?

1. *Increase in Poverty*

Moving forward financial hardship is going to be a big issue for a lot of people. Several churches and Churches Together groups across the county provide money advice and support. Contributors to the meeting talked of services providing financial support in Bishops Stortford, Harpenden and Hitchin and there are many more. Social restrictions mean that these services are also less available when they are needed the most.

**Question**: What is being done to sustain these services and is this something that the churches can do together? For example offering online support over larger geographical areas if resources are stretched.

1. *Fear of Death*

It was recognised that there are people who are facing death for the first time. Many people have avoided this subject and so are ill equipped for the challenges it poses.

**Question:** As a church are we preparing people for the questions of life and death as even in the church this can be a subject we don’t talk about. What can we do together to provide support in these conversations?

1. *Theological Reflection*

Churches Together in Hertfordshire and CTE in England are interested in hearing people’s theological reflections on this time of lockdown. A reflection has since been written by Peter Berners-Lee of Churches Together in St Albans. This can be found on the Churches Together in Hertfordshire website.

**Question**: Are there any further reflections that people would like to share. Please do send them in to Churches Together in Hertfordshire.

***Conclusion***

Many felt the meeting had been both enjoyable and useful in both meeting others and learning more about the work of the churches across the county. They were also open to future county wide meetings on issues of church unity and also specific subjects. It was agreed that these would be offered no more frequently than quarterly. Churches Together in Hertfordshire are happy to facilitate such meetings if they are helpful.

**Question:** Are there specific subjects that it would be useful to bring Christians, lay and clergy, from across the churches in Hertfordshire together to discuss? Please email Doral at facilitator@ctherts.org,uk and let her know what you think those might be.

***Post meeting note****: the next meeting is on the 14th September at 7.30pm. The focus will be on*

***Focus****: What is the Church is beginning to look like after lockdown and we how can continue to work together and promote Christian unity in this new situation. It will also include a discussion as to what the ecumenical priorities might be.*