

22/07/2020

UpDate for Nottingham

Greetings from Nottingham! I am speaking the obvious when I say that we've been living in strange times and circumstances this past four and a half months. The events during the two and a half months at the start of this year before this pandemic hit are relatively close, and yet that world back then seems ages ago. All of our lives have been affected by this "thing" that none of us could see coming.

Things are starting to improve, and while we're all expecting there to be a second wave of the virus, we're hoping and praying that it won't be as severe as the first. Maybe – just maybe – things may return to some sort of normality. If not, we may find ourselves having to adjust to a new "normal."

How It Has Affected Us

Let me begin by saying a bit about how it has affected Jean and me. Because of her ongoing health problems (specifically to do with her breathing, etc.), Jean was put under orders from her doctor to more or less go under self-quarantine. This meant that she (we) weren't allowed to go out of the house, and no one from outside was allowed into our house. This was our state until about 2-3 weeks ago (well, for me about a month ago). All of our shopping has been done online with deliveries left at our front door with the instructions that we weren't to open the front door until the person making the delivery was some 20 feet away at our front gate.

We understand from the news that the cases of domestic abuse rose during this time of lockdown. We can only report that Jean and I were fine! There have been no homicides at Number 8 – yet!!! Yes, things would get stressed at times, but on the whole, I think we both made the best of it and really enjoyed having each other to ourselves only each day. We got jobs done around the house, finished decorating our front room, did a jigsaw puzzle, and sorted through all sorts of things.

Like so many others, we have missed the company of others, especially family. The last time I saw our two grandkids south of London was last year at Christmas. Normally, we would have been down to see them for a couple of days at least twice during the first half of this year, and they would have been up to spend some time with us, as well. We are just thankful that modern technology has kept us in touch with them and with our Australian family. But not seeing them in person and not being with them has been difficult. Thankfully, both of our families in Kent and "Down Under" are fine. We held some concerns for our daughter Sam in London as (because she is a speech pathologist) she was working directly with Covid-19 patients in the hospital. She assured us every precaution was taken.

One Member in Hospital

As I'm sure you know, we had one of our members (Sam Nyakudya) taken into hospital in the early days of the lockdown. To be honest, I truly thought that we were going to lose him! He was in the hospital for around two months under sedation and on a ventilator. We really felt for his wife and son and daughter. It looked as if the last that Susan would see of Sam was when he was taken from their house in an ambulance. No one was allowed into the hospital to see him. Susan's only contact was a daily phone call from the hospital to relate how Sam had been that day. It is no exaggeration that thousands of prayers went up on Sam's behalf, and we were all thrilled in early June to receive the news that he was coming home! He is doing fine and has started back to work on a part-time basis. We also had two members who tested positive and had to self-isolate for 14 days. Thankfully, they proved to be fine.

Lockdown

Our last Sunday meeting was on the 15th March. We tried as best we could on that day to make the seating further apart than usual, but it also turned out that we had one of our largest gatherings on that Sunday – even though you could feel the unease within the congregation. We came home from that meeting and a phone call with the elders of the church confirmed that we would not be having a meeting the following Sunday. We had taken a chance that day, and we could have lost big time. It was the Monday after the following Sunday that we had the report that Sam had been taken into hospital! As it turned out, we had truly “dodged a bullet” that day.

Thanks to Derek Adams and his two sons Jake and Joel, we had organised an online service for the following Sunday – something we had never done before (had any of us?!). Considering we were all amateurs, it went well. We really believed that this would be just a temporary thing for somewhere between two to four weeks, and then we'd be back. It quickly became obvious that we were wrong.

When lockdown came, it meant that the only contact that we had with each other in the church was via telephones and social media. Thank God that we had access to that. Every phone call, every email, and every text came to mean so much more. Through those methods, I was able to keep in touch with the members and check on their welfare. By the same token, everyone was phoning and texting everyone else in the church almost daily.

What's Happened Since?

Our online service (“**East Mids Church of Christ**”) has proven to be a huge success. Once Derek had it up and ready, we contacted other churches in the area to see if they would like to be included. The churches at Loughborough and Ilkeston have joined us, and over the months, Christians from many other parts of the UK (as well as America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, and Australia) have been tuning in. Many of our old members who moved away to other parts of the world (including ex-AIMers) have been back with us – online! As well as Sunday services, we also have been having Bible studies led by me on Monday nights and Ken Mullan (Loughborough) on Wednesday nights. In both cases, this has proven to be terrific, with most of our members being able to tune into the studies.

Coming Out of Lockdown

As I'm sure you're aware, we've been in the process of coming out of lockdown this past month. While shops, offices, and stores have been opening, we've been waiting for news as to when churches would be allowed to meet in their buildings. This came back at the beginning of July.

Our plans: We will be starting meetings in our building on the first Sunday of August (2nd). We felt that we needed the time to get our building ready and as safe as possible for all who wish to start meeting and to get our members used to the idea of doing this. We've contacted every member and spoken with them, assuring them that we understand that some may not be able to start again just yet and some may be very apprehensive about coming out and meeting with other people. No one should feel that they are under any compulsion to do this. (Besides, we currently have government restrictions that would permit no more than 30 to meet at one time in a building the size of ours. If all were to come straight away, this would mean having to hold two services.) As you can imagine, some have reservations (including Jean).

The meetings will still be streamed online (live) every Sunday from the building so that those who can't come or are not ready to come won't be missing anything. (In fact, as I write this I'm waiting at the building for the broadband engineer to arrive to install the line so that this will be possible.) Streaming live means that even members of the other congregations will be able to tune in if they, too, will not be going back to their Sunday meetings straight away. We will make sure that members who can't be present will have the necessities for communion.

We plan to have a "dry run" this Sunday (26th) streaming the meeting live from the building. We're restricting it to around 6-8 members who will basically be there to get some idea of how this will work. We also feel it has the advantage of letting the rest of the members who will be watching as usual see how the building will be set up and how things will work. We hope this might ease some of the concerns that some members have.

We will continue streaming our Monday night and Wednesday night Bible studies online for the time being. We are considering once this gets going and we get used to doing things from the building, we might look into using Zoom for these studies to allow interaction (something that I've certainly missed).

Good Out of Bad

All of this has been totally unprecedented. In some ways – in many ways – it has been terrible, especially for those who have lost loved ones whom they wouldn't have otherwise have lost. But, there is much that is good.

Obviously, the use of online services has been a bonus. All of us (especially yours truly) have had to learn new skills: how to video lessons and download them, how to do my class and sermons "live", and how to take part in "Zoom" sessions, to name a few. Some of these will be a real blessing even when this whole pandemic comes to a complete close.

The use of online for our Bible studies has been a real blessing. We got a steady number at our Monday night studies before the pandemic, with many saying that, because of work, children, etc., they couldn't come, although they wanted to. Now, they are there every week, which means they're getting studies they normally wouldn't be getting.

We have all come to appreciate things that we had been simply taking for granted - the fellowship of one another being the big one. Every member that I've spoken to has said how much they miss seeing and speaking to and hugging one another. (The hugging will still be out for some time!) I know that's going to be hard to get used to, but it will return one day! I'm glad to see that we miss each other and are longing to be with one another again. Everyone has said that, while the online services have been good, they miss the singing. I'm sure this has been the case in every church. Again, I'm not sure when we will be able to do this again, but I can imagine how amazing that singing will sound on that first Sunday that we're permitted to do it.

I think this whole "bad" thing has had its blessings. We just need to look for them and thank God for them.

Closing

Sorry this has been long. Thank you for your patience in reading through this. Jean and I are both well under the circumstances. The church is also fine and probably stronger than it has ever been. God has taught us much through it all, and we certainly thank Him for His loving care over us during these times. We have kept all of our friends everywhere in our prayers. Daily, we have thanked God for you and have prayed that He will also keep you safe through all of this. We continue to ask Him these things.

I couldn't ask God for a better congregation to work with, and I couldn't ask Him for a better group of Christians than you to be behind us. May He continue to bless and be with each one of you.

Our love,

Bob and Jean