

AMERSHAM FREE CHURCH

(A Baptist Union and United Reformed Church)

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Dear Friends,

It is good to write this letter at a time when we are beginning to detect the first tentative signs of the easing of our social isolation. It is true that, here at AFC we have made great efforts to keep in touch with one another and we are very grateful to all those who facilitated this with such grace. It is also true that our spiritual needs continued to be attended to by the uplifting audio services and the richness and depth of the daily new entries on our website. The appreciative letters, messages and viewing statistics are a testimony of just how much we value the dedicated work of Ian, Michael and Matthew and the many other individuals, who are contributing to this vital service.

And yet, we still badly miss the intimacy of face to face contact with each other. We feel this especially at significant events: when we cannot attend the funerals of long-standing friends, or even family members. When we cannot sing Happy Birthday to, or share a piece of cake with Peggy Babbington, who is celebrating her 100th Birthday today. When we can't tell her in person how much we love her and wish God's abiding presence to surround her today and all her days to come. When we can't put our arms around those who find the isolation most trying. When we cannot share our faith experiences one to one, or in our small groups. When we cannot rejoice together that our church car park holes have been mended (!) or that the church premises are kept beautifully clean.

It is at these times that we are learning more and more about the meaning of the Biblical insight that we were created for each other and that, both God's love for us and our love for God is expressed through human agency. It is not a coincidence that in Scripture the upholding closeness of God is referred to by the use of the metaphor 'seeing God face to face'. Jacob and Moses are among the privileged few whom the Hebrew Bible credits with this kind of extraordinary experience. And in the New Testament the witness of Jesus' first disciples was that in him they have come face to face with the divine.

As we are discovering, now that we can't have it, being face to face with each other is something special. It brings us out of ourselves, it helps us to turn toward another instead of contemplating our own vulnerability, it completes us. But, according to the Biblical insight, it does not simply keep us there. It is energising, it transforms us, it moves us on, whether we are aware of it or not.

So, my hope and prayer is that as we are gradually allowed more and more opportunity to see each other 'face to face' we will be given the ability to see together the new tasks, the new needs more clearly, and in time the bigger picture beyond our front door, beyond our church walls, beyond our national frontiers as Willy Reid so eloquently reminded us in his Thought for the Week.

That we will not be a worn-out, fearful group of people, but in the Spirit of Christ a refreshed, renewed, and energised community ready for all the challenges the 'new normal' may bring in our way. It is in that hope I would like to draw your attention to the booklet the URC have produced to help us plan church life as the virus recedes and a 'new normal' begins. It can be found at:

<https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3452-urc-produces-plan-for-new-normal-post-covid-19>

Ian joins me in sending you our love and best wishes.

The Reverend Erna Stevenson
Associate Minister