

# TRIO



June 2020

Contributions welcomed



Church life in lockdown



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vicar@stmaryswestmall.org.uk / rector@stmichaelsoffham.org.uk

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## From David and Mark



It's month three of our online only *Trio*. Who knew when the year started that a quarter of the parish magazines for the year would never be printed, but delivered online only?

As we write, lockdown is being eased with some school year groups going back, we have both noticed that traffic is increasing, people are gathering (*mostly* socially distanced) and other more vulnerable people are coming out of shielding.

But there are still a lot of questions, worries and concerns about life going forward.

When will we be finally able to hug our wider family? Will we be able to go aboard on holiday? Will we be able to go on holiday in this country? Particularly given various holiday communities are saying "please don't come here". Will there be a second spike? Are the government really handling this whole thing sensibly and wisely? Or is it all a bit too soon? Perhaps best not to mention a certain trip to Barnard Castle and Durham.

The other key question for many of us reading this magazine, is when will our churches open, and when will we be able to share in worship again in a way where we can be together in one place?

The answer to that question is complex for many reasons. On pages 9 and 10 of this month's magazine, we have tried to address some of the questions, as we weigh up the current guidance from the House of Bishops, and take our own crystal ball to what church may look like when our buildings can open again.

What is certain, is that we are moving into a completely new world. The world has changed and, short of a vaccine for Covid-19, the way we live our lives and the way we worship together and express our Christian faith will also be changed.

On page 10, for example, Mark mentions that for St Gabriel's he can't now see a time without an online offering each week (in tandem with and alongside our public acts of worship offline).

Having just celebrated Pentecost, many theologians have raised the question "is the church stumbling upon a new movement of the Holy Spirit?"

With many more people praying and accessing online worship than previously attended our church services, it seems that amidst the darkness and difficulty, God is doing something good and new too.

But one question not to forget concerns our own lives. As things start to get back to some sort of normal, what practices have you started during lockdown that you want to continue? Family Meals? Family Walks? Daily Bible study and prayer? Exercise?

Similarly, what has lockdown stopped you doing that you don't want to see come back? Not rushing around so much? Endlessly shopping for "non-essential" items? Commuting by car, when you could work from home, or other things that pollute the environment?

Let's not lose this chance to re-assess our lives and make positive changes.

David and Mark

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## Our buildings are closed but the church is open

Even if the ways and manner in which our Christian faith is being expressed has necessarily had to change these days, the Body of Christ, the people of God, remain active in service and prayer. Here's a rundown of what's been happening at St Gabriel's, St Mary's and St Michael's in the last couple of months.

### Online worship

Worship and prayer is taking place via our websites and on a dedicated phone line. You can find out more on page 8.

In the last couple of months, not only has there been material posted each Sunday to mirror our usual times to gather on the Sabbath Day, but we've also posted material for special occasions including Holy Week and Easter, VE Day and then, most recently, Ascension Day.

### The Volunteer Networks

All three of our churches are helping to co-ordinate and enable joint community efforts to support the elderly, the vulnerable, the sick, those who are shielding and those in self-isolation.

Around 300 people across the three communities have volunteered to help and we've dealt with some 250 requests. Some were one-off tasks and some need regular help.

One of the really pleasing things is to see the church and community working as one, with our experience in pastoral care and visiting proving crucial to collective efforts.

### Morning and Evening Prayer

Rev David is in church in Offham at 09:05 and West Malling at 17:05 to say the offices. Listen out for the bell!

### Volunteer Networks

If you need help or can offer help

#### Kings Hill

Contact Naomi (07984 913091) or Be (07801 278475 or email [be@khp.me](mailto:be@khp.me)).

#### Offham

Contact 07799 870632 or email [offhamcommunitynetwork@gmail.com](mailto:offhamcommunitynetwork@gmail.com) or visit the website [bit.ly/OCN-Cov19](http://bit.ly/OCN-Cov19).

#### West Malling

Contact 07561 111676 or email [wmvolunteers@westmallingspc.org](mailto:wmvolunteers@westmallingspc.org) or visit the website [bit.ly/WMCN-Cov19](http://bit.ly/WMCN-Cov19)

### St Gabriel's

Alongside meeting weekly online for worship and coffee, but lots more as well. Sunday school is also available, but what's great about doing things online is that it is not just for the children. Instead it offers and opportunity for all ages to engage differently with the Bible text of the week.

St G's also have been running story time for toddlers every fortnight over Zoom - if you have toddler, pre-schoolers or reception age children at home and want to join in please, call, email or message to get the link (we have to make sure there is a toddler joining for safeguarding reasons).

We have also run an Easter Garden and Bonnet Competition, and also the great St Gabriel's Bake Off.

### Ladies Group on Zoom

In recent months and years, our Benefice has run both a Men's Meal and a Ladies'

Meal for socialising and fellowship across the churches. The Ladies Group, based at St Mary's, have started meeting on Zoom each Friday for a drink and a chat to help break the boredom and support one another. If you would like to take part, please contact Gemma Coupland on 07548 262509 or email [gemmalouhunter@gmail.com](mailto:gemmalouhunter@gmail.com)

### **Sunday School Quiz & Scavenger Hunt**

In mid-May, Bethya Green organised a special online quiz for the Sunday School children at St Mary's and St Michael's which included a scavenger hunt for household items. 10 households and 25 children took part and another one is planned to take place in the coming days.

### **PCC and MLT meetings**

All three communities have managed to host PCC and leadership meetings using teleconferencing software and, despite some initial tutorial sessions for those who were less familiar with the technology, we managed to get almost 100% turnout.

The meetings provided a good opportunity to cover some important bases for safeguarding while working online, we took an early look at church finances during lockdown, and were able to discuss what church might look like when we can return (see p9 for more on that subject).

We are now confident that we can keep the machinery of church life running even if we're unable to meet in person.

### **And of course... funerals**

Sadly, there have been people losing their lives because of Covid-19 in West Malling, Offham and Kings Hill.

Please pray for their families in their grief and mourning and pray for David and Mark as they support the families and lead funeral services in difficult circumstances.



### **Tom Tugendhat MP writes for Trio**

I hope everyone is staying safe and well in these difficult days. I know how many in our parishes are supporting each other and the strength of the community is showing. The measures that we have all been through in the past months have brought down the infection rate and given us the ability to look for ways out. That's what we've all got to think about now - taking reasonable steps to get back to normal, but staying alert throughout.



The new restrictions give us greater freedom and flexibility about the steps we can take to protect ourselves and others. The message to Stay Alert is being used in France, and elsewhere to ensure we all remain aware of the dangers but start to help people get back to work. We know the cost of the lockdown to individuals across our country. We need it to end, to re-open our economy as quickly as possible, and to do it in a way that doesn't risk the infection rising too high.

Over the past few weeks many people have gone to great lengths to help protect our communities. I'd like to thank everyone, and especially our key workers of all kinds. Thank you.

The best way to get hold of me is to email [tom.tugendhat.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:tom.tugendhat.mp@parliament.uk) or write to me at 130 Vale Road, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1SP or you can phone 01732 441563.

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## Join us for worship at home

Although the church buildings are closed, it doesn't mean that we have stopped praying and worshipping.

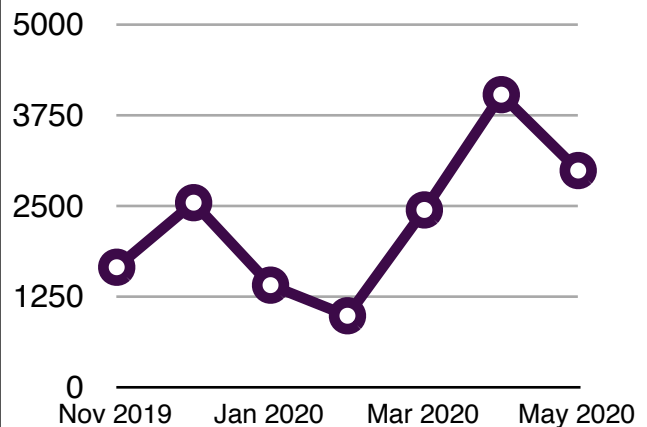
If you've not yet tuned in or taken part, why not join us online each Sunday via the church website or use the new phone line if the technology feels daunting?

You will be in good company if you join us. Each week, the Online Worship page for West Malling and Offham is visited about 200 times; far more than we normally see in church on a Sunday. While some of that number is down to 'repeat' visits, it's also worth remembering that some people and families have four or five pairs of eyeballs watching one screen... so what counts as 'one' in the stats might sometimes be more. We're also seeing a number of new faces joining us in worship for the first time. Please do pray for them.

### St Gabriel's, Kings Hill

Rev Mark is doing Worship at home on Youtube and Facebook at 10 a.m. each Sunday - with "after-church coffee" via Zoom from 10.30 a.m. Sunday School at home is also now available weekly. Visit [kingshillchurch.org.uk](http://kingshillchurch.org.uk) for more.

West Malling & Offham website stats



### St Mary's and St Michael's

Rev David is providing a web page each Sunday which you can access in your own time, any time from 07:30 a.m. onwards.

A version of the same material is also posted on the Dial-a-Sermon phone line for those who are not so keen to go online.

We're also very aware of cathedral, diocesan and national church efforts including regular acts of worship on the BBC. However you decide to engage, our prayer is that you are blessed and able to draw closer to God in these strange days and while we're apart from each other.

**West Malling & Offham**

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THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND



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## The new normal?



A question on many Christian people's lips at the moment is "when will we be able to return to our church buildings?"

The answer is not straightforward but we thought it might be helpful to give you a sense of what has been said, what might happen and what we need to be thinking about now in order to make a return possible in due course.

In a detailed document published in mid-May, the Government put Places of Worship in 'step three' of their roadmap to see life returning to normal, alongside pubs, cinemas and hairdressers.

Marking the 5th of July 2020 as a possible date, assuming that infection rates have not risen again, the document states: "The ambition at this step is to open at least some of the remaining businesses and premises that have been required to close, including ... public places (such as places of worship).

On the 3rd of June, the Prime Minister said he "very much understands the urgency" on re-opening places of worship and while a taskforce is being led on this matter, he said "it's a tough one" since opening places like churches would push up the risk of infection. He said "we are getting there" but "we are not there yet".

But if, in July, we are told we can re-open, it doesn't necessarily mean we will do so. Furthermore, when we do re-open, it might not be church as we would normally experience it.

In terms of our services, there is some evidence worldwide that singing is a high-

risk activity and spreads the virus like coughing. So sung worship is likely to face a more cautious return. The reciting of the Psalms may have a resurgence as a replacement way to praise.

Likewise, we won't be able to share prayer books, Bibles or re-usable service sheets. We won't be able to shake hands at the Peace and the return to Holy Communion is again likely to be cautious and phased (i.e. we may be able to receive only the wafer for a while) and the Priest may be the only one allowed in the Sanctuary (i.e. no Servers).

We will need to sit and stand at least 2m away from each other. While households can sit together on a pew, groups from multiple households could not. We are most likely going to have to mark out certain pews or chairs for use, while others are cordoned off. That's not so much of a problem in a building like St Mary's, but it's a major issue in a tiny church like St Michael's.

Of course, for St Gabriel's, the question of when we can meet together for worship is out of our hands, as the schools in which the church meets will decide.

Our buildings will need to be cleaned thoroughly before re-opening, and cleaned regularly each time the church is used, including each seat where someone sits for that particular service.

While some Bishops are advocating being able to open churches for daily private prayer first, as a precursor to public worship, such individual visits introduce their own issues. Any surfaces any person touches will need cleaning immediately



after they have left, and that means daily supervision of the building with someone on site at all times to handle cleaning duties.

Although we have been grouped with lots of other businesses in 'Step Three', churches are unique in that grouping by generally not having paid staff. We don't have armies of people we can pay to clean or wipe down surfaces or sterilise the shopping basket equivalents as they do at Tesco or Asda. So whether we can muster enough volunteer help will also be crucial.

With Churchwardens, PCC and other key leaders, our Clergy will have to ponder a variety of questions including:

- ❖ how we greet and welcome people;
- ❖ how we manage expectations if the church is 'full' to socially-distanced capacity;
- ❖ how we take-up offerings (since passing a plate or bag can't happen);
- ❖ how we offer children or youth work and how do we manage any risk to older people through mixing with younger generations (some of whom are now back in school regularly);
- ❖ can Baptisms take place in Sunday services, or are they done separately (and how are they done) and how do we clean after?
- ❖ handwashing and sanitation facilities will need to be available;
- ❖ we will need a log-book or register to record everyone who has entered the building, just in case there's an outbreak, so we can track and trace people who were also present.

So, at least for a while, getting back to 'normal church' is going to be a very different kind and new form of normal.

In coming days, we will have to weigh up the risks, our ability to deliver public worship safely, and how we go about that. But however that works out, everyone involved is going to need to recognise that it won't be church as they might like it. Sacrifices and a gracious, generous spirit will be needed.

It might be that we have to combine our services and meet in one larger venue. It might be that our better bet is to try and worship in the open air for a while (at least over the Summer while the weather is good). Alternatively, we may have to 'ticket' worship to manage numbers or operate a rota so that only certain people can come each week in an equitable rotation.

Of course, while all this is happening, there will be other people who can't take part in public worship in our church buildings.

Those who are shielding or self-isolating, as well as those new people who have joined us online in the last few months, may not be able to attend public worship on a Sunday.

So the high likelihood is that, for a while, we have to run both online and offline church simultaneously. That may mean we have cameras or audio devices set-up in church services to record what's happening. It may also mean a major drain on our Clergy's time if pre-recording material for the website is required.

Rev Mark has said he can't see St Gabriel's not offering an online service in the future, and this type of window to our worshipping community will not only continue but need to develop. We will also have to explore what things like Sunday School and Messy Church look like moving forward. But whatever happens, we are certainly entering a new phase for church life as we move forward.

# TRIO

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## Civic news

### **Waste Services return**

The Borough Council garden waste collection service re-started on Monday 11th May. Please leave bins out before 7am as usual. No extra bags will be collected. The garden waste contract will be extended to compensate for the three weeks of non-delivery.

Check your collection dates online if you are not sure of when to put out your brown bin via the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council website ([www.tmbc.gov.uk](http://www.tmbc.gov.uk)).

The paid for Bulky Waste collection service has restarted with a limit of six items per household for the payment of £55. The Bulky Waste Booking form to arrange collection and payment is also on the TMBC Website.

KCC Household Waste Tips at Tovil and Cuxton re-opened on Friday 15th May, seven days a week from 9 am to 3pm. Everyone will need to book online in advance. Car registration numbers will be taken, as residents can only pay one visit every four weeks.

### **Dogs and cats**

The RSPCA say animal fur can carry Covid-19 from one person to another. They advise keeping your pets away from other people's animals, and two metres apart from their owners. Avoid pet 'kisses' yourself, and stop your pet from licking others. They advise minimising outdoor time for both dogs and cats, and washing hands after handling pets. House cats should be kept indoors all the time. If you are sick yourself, avoid contact with your pet.

### **Post office temporary closure**

The West Malling Post Office has reopened after closing temporarily for family reasons.

### **Support our High Street and local businesses as they re-open**

Help our local farms and businesses survive by buying local products. Think of the small, independent retailers and if they are trying to sell goods or takeaways at the moment, please do support them.

On Kings Hill, it has been good to see the local businesses in Liberty Square start to open up. Alongside Humphries Fish and Chip Shop, the Guffa Indian restaurant, and Kings Hill Dry Cleaners, recently Sino and Postage and Packing, have all reopened to bring back some local amenities.

In addition, check out the local meat and veg products at Spadework and Spar at Parkfoot garage on London Road, who both stock local farm produce. They also provide click and collect services online and by phone. Many online and delivery services have also been set up by producers at West Malling's Farmers Market. Visit [www.myfarmersmarket.co.uk/west-malling](http://www.myfarmersmarket.co.uk/west-malling).

### **A silent call for help**

Anyone who suffers from Domestic abuse can find it hard to ring for Police help without alerting their abuser. A new Service makes this possible without speaking. If you call 999, and cough when you are asked which service you require and then dial 55, the call will immediately be put through to the Police. Please pass this information on to anyone you think might need it.



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## From the Parish Registers



### St Mary's, West Malling

#### Funerals

5th May Joyce (Joy) Cruttenden

6th May Jean Shepherd

### St Michael's, Offham

#### Funerals

28th May Margaret Brooker

### St Gabriel's, Kings Hill

None

#### Funeral dates yet to confirm

Arthur (Tony) Cook, Offham

William (Bill) Bruce, West Malling

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Advertisement from the Farm House, West Malling



We're working towards re-opening! Our team is currently working diligently in preparation to re-open our pub garden, pizza shack and terrace area in early July, making sure we are 'Covid secure' for our customers and staff alike to enjoy once again.

We want you to feel at ease with your family and friends, with safe distancing, secure systems and easy to follow guidelines. This will allow you to enjoy your meal and time with us feeling safe and relaxed. We're very excited to see you all and welcome you back once again to celebrate our re-opening with us.

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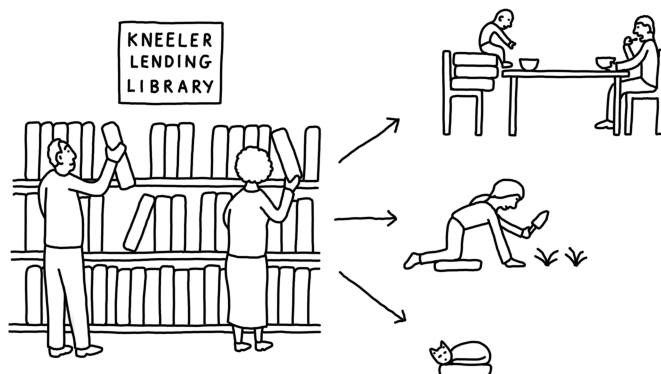
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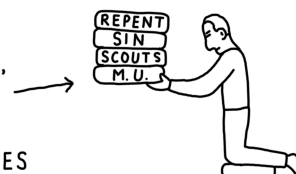
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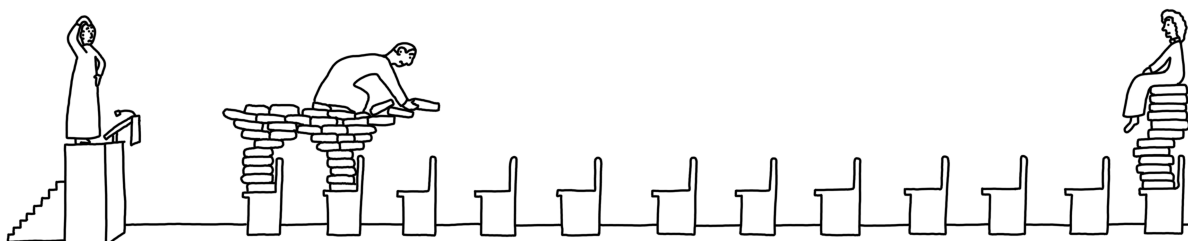
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## Real church notices

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~

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the  
congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the  
pancake breakfast next Sunday.

~

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday  
at 7 PM. Please use the back door.



## In the Garden with Adam's Gardens

*This article first appeared in the June 2014 edition of Trio. It is republished here (with adjustments for the Summer Solstice 2020) while Adam takes a sabbatical from writing in Trio.*

Summer officially starts now that June has arrived with its seemingly never ending days. At the summer solstice, 20th June 2020, the sun rises at 4.42 a.m. and sets at 9.18 p.m. but dusk carries the light well past 10 o'clock. This really is a wonderful time to be outdoors. Samantha, my wife, and I love to fire up the barbeque when we get home and enjoy al fresco dining.

The health benefits of being outside are plenty, from breathing in the fresh air (unlike that stuffy office), the vitamin D that the sun provides (just make sure you are protected with sunscreen) or the fact that we all tend to exercise a bit more when the weather is warmer, be it a stroll to the shops or a game of cricket with kids. Summer really does give us the feel good factor!

Does your garden? Is this a time you dread going out into it? Does it feel like you need to mow the grass every other day? Or weeds multiply hourly?

Well, I have a saying: "You don't notice weeds when blooms are a plenty." In other words if your borders are full of flowers the odd weed is insignificant, in fact the more you have in the border the less space there is for weeds to colonise!

The best way to cover your soil is with ground cover plants. There are plenty to choose from but, my favourites are Cranes bill (*Geranium*), Elephants' ears (*Begonia*),

Cat mint (*Nepeta*), & Lungwort (*Pulmonaria*). These are cheap and will quickly cover clear soil.

When it comes to the lawn at this time of year you may well have to cut it twice a week. Don't just cut it lower to save getting out the mower a second time as it will stress it out and encourage weeds into it. Rain at this time of year means strong growth, especially grass; mowing little and often is best.

If you haven't got your bedding plants in the ground, hanging baskets or containers because you've been too busy or the weather has been indifferent (as I write this it's pouring down), don't worry as you will still get a good display even if you do this at the end of the month. There'll be limited choice but you should get a bargain. Remember to use good compost, water retaining crystals and deadhead the lot when you plant.

If you have any topiary, this is the month to re-shape it. Try to trim it on a dull day (it's England so, there might be quite a few to choose from)! This will stop the freshly cut leaves from scorching in the strong sunshine.

This really is a time when we do spend more time outside and if you have done the work in the spring then you will reap the rewards now by enjoying your garden to the fullest. And if you haven't? Well, you have until 10 p.m. to do what you can!

Adam McKay

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