

Chair's Report 24th February 2022

This last year has been tough. We have lived a roller-coaster of emotions, starting with the huge promise of health through the vaccines (which have worked exceedingly well at preventing severe illness, though not as well in preventing infections); there is a background of fake news which has paralysed parts of our society; our government is a mess; our more vulnerable citizens are unsupported; and today we woke up to the reality of war in Europe.

Here in Barnet, we have seen our churches reopen, with the joy of worshipping together – but with the sadness of knowing the huge price we have paid in deaths and long-term illness, and the continued absence of many of those who are most vulnerable to the virus. We have, also, to cope with the fear in our churches and amongst our neighbours – fear of the vaccines, fear of getting (or passing on) the virus, fear of climate change and fear of war. Our economic prosperity is threatened, too – as we contemplate massive inflation and shrinking incomes, which will leave some of our neighbours unable to afford rent, food, or heat.

What can we, as churches, do in the midst of this crisis? Firstly, we can PRAISE – we have an amazing God, who can do far more than we could ever ask or imagine. Secondly, we can PRAY – asking Him to move in HIS power to heal us, strengthen us, and go before us into whatever the future holds. Thirdly, we can PROCLAIM Him to those around us, by our LOVE, our EMPATHY, our CARE, our ACTIONS and, when the time is right, our WORDS.

This place we are in, is a refuge to many who are lonely, confused, impoverished, bewildered, and just unfit to cope with life. Let's pray for all those that work here, staff and volunteers alike, that they will have HIS eyes to see, HIS love to comfort, HIS vision and HIS patience to find solutions for the real needs that can so easily overwhelm people. Let's pray, too, for the organisations that work with us, or use Hope Corner and our churches: pray for the "tech for seniors", the friendship groups, the nurseries and playgroups, uniformed organisations, and many other initiatives that have their homes in our midst, and the food banks, winter shelters, debt counsellors and other church initiatives that support those in greatest need.

Within Churches Together, it has been another scaled-down year in terms of events. We have prioritised prayer, and enabled joint worship in August and in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We also managed a presence in the December Street Fair, though smaller than other years. We were unable to hold any joint events during Lent or Easter – partly due to lockdown restrictions, and to the difficulties of preparing anything worthwhile online. It was very difficult to plan anything in advance, because we just didn't know what would be permitted, and our ministers had enough to do understanding and implementing the regulations governing our churches re-opening! We did manage to get 6 people together to review the constitution, and I believe the document we have presented to you will give us a robust and resilient structure which will last us for many years.

However, we do need more people to share the load of what we are trying to do in your name. We have three nominations for what should be a planning committee of 6 people. If we are to hold our usual Easter events, we need help: I am not prepared to organise the Walk of Witness on my own, and we will need to do a risk assessment of the route, as the High Street is a different shape. If we want a breakfast after the Easter sunrise service, we need people to prepare it, and if we want to re-establish the in-person breakfast prayer meetings, we need a Prayer Secretary – and we also need a Secretary to look after the paperwork of meetings and GDPR records. If we agree with Sam Rossiter-Peters that Christians are commanded by Jesus to live in Unity, we need to encourage our church members to lift their heads above their own congregations, and work for our common good.