

## EVEN IN THE DARK TIMES

Dear Friends,

I am aware in writing this letter this month that I am writing to people in very different situations. Those in the UK and the States and parts of Europe who are experiencing the pandemic at its worst are having a very different time of things to those of us who are living in Greece. And even within Greece, the difference between Athens and Corfu is marked. We are many months into this time of isolation and restrictions, and I hear that we are beginning to feel very tired and frustrated with the situation. We simply want this time to end so we can get back to enjoying the freedoms we hardly thought about before they were no longer there.

### SIGNS OF STRAIN

Many of us have been praying and hoping that this time of shared emergency across the planet would lead to a change in the way we share what we have across and between nations and communities and yet there are signs of the strains being experienced by those in power to maintain a just distribution of the vaccine across the world.



We have seen report after report equating the impact of the virus with wealth and means... those who have fared so much better than those without. Rather than encouraging us all to face the inequalities in our world, it appears that analysis after analysis has shone light on the continued and growing inequalities we are handing down, generation after generation yet struggle to eradicate.

And what's more, it feels that we are only waiting for an end to this crisis so that we can attempt to face the next crisis, the effect of the warming planet. We are already seeing that it will be the poorest and unrepresented billions on our planet that will pay a greater price in this too.



During the last few weeks, in Morning Prayer we have been reading the Minor Prophets... at the moment we're hearing the voice of Hosea speak through the centuries. Before that, it was Amos. The prophets are hard to listen to. They speak of a response by God to Israel and Judah, for their lack of faithfulness towards God and their lack of

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compassion for each other. They speak in desperate tones about the consequences of leaving behind the ways of God. The people in power had abused their position of service and leadership and had become wealthy and proud as their neighbours had become poorer and more desperate. They had taken their eyes off the call for justice, inherent to God's election of them. The prophets saw that this would end in disaster with new powers coming to play that would remove them from their land and riches. It happened.

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## RETURN TO THE LORD

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Yet even in those dark times, there was a call to change and a hope that the people would learn to live in a different way. This "return to the Lord" would go hand in hand with a return to their land and a spiritual renewal among the people themselves. Justice and love - love of God and neighbour - are inseparable.

These events unfolded as these prophetic voices had foreseen. Lessons were learned. And as nearly always seems to happen... forgotten again.

But the history of the events and their consequences, uniquely captured in the Bible, although they don't make easy reading, do provide a bird's eye view of the connections between our inner spiritual lives and the real political situations we find ourselves in. It is over simplistic and wrong to see every catastrophe that we face as a punishment from God; God, revealed in Jesus, is the God of compassion and grace. It does, however, point to the reality that our actions have consequences. Inequality and the greed that is such a major factor in that

inequality makes the problems we face so much worse.

Jesus taught us the simplest of truths - unavoidable truths that require real focus to accept and grow into. Loving our neighbours as ourselves because we are all of equal value in the sight of our Creator is the simplest of truths... and yet how hard is it to let our lives, our systems, our politics, our priorities... be shaped by it. Even when we know from thousands of years of experience just what the alternative is, it seems we lack the confidence in each other to allow ourselves to trust that we can do this.

It makes our mission as the church so vital in the face of the global problems we are increasingly facing. Jesus' message that we can grow spirituality through the work of God's Holy Spirit within us is the key that enables the human race to open itself to a new way of grace. At the heart of Jesus' message is His glorious sacrifice of Himself for those who would not hear that message. He lived the trust He has in us by giving of Himself completely to those who would not listen... showing them in His own body the power of forgiveness and the undefeated power of love.

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## THE BRIGHTER THE LIGHT

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The darker the situation, the brighter the light shines. Faced with the darkest situation, He prayed for the neighbours who were destroying Him on a cross, offering them a visible hope of a different way. Ultimately, defeating even death to show that the hope He had in His heart for them, that they could change, was stronger than ever.

His light, His hope in us remains bright and faithful. He still calls every person to em-

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brace this light - to keep hold of the overarching truth that we can become the people that we were created to be, reflecting the image of our Creator and filled with Jesus' hope for each other.

We can grow through these times, and the times to come, because He is for us and not against us. We can learn to love, forgive and share our lives as He has shown us because His power is at work in us... and knows no limits.

Our role is just to keep taking that next step with Him. To hold onto His ways, whatever voices clamour around us spinning fear and doubt. To stay in His Presence in prayer and worship and to let what we find there shape our lives and dreams.

So... be bold, be strong... for the Lord your God is with you!

With peace and blessings,

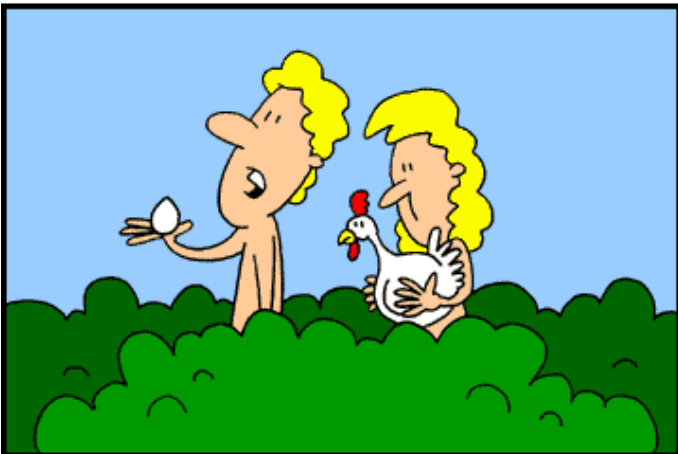
*Jules.*

## 'TOGETHER and APART'

We will continue to provide online 'Together and Apart' services, as well as the live Sunday service. There are also prayer meetings on Wednesday and Friday mornings. Please contact us, if you would like details of how to join us.

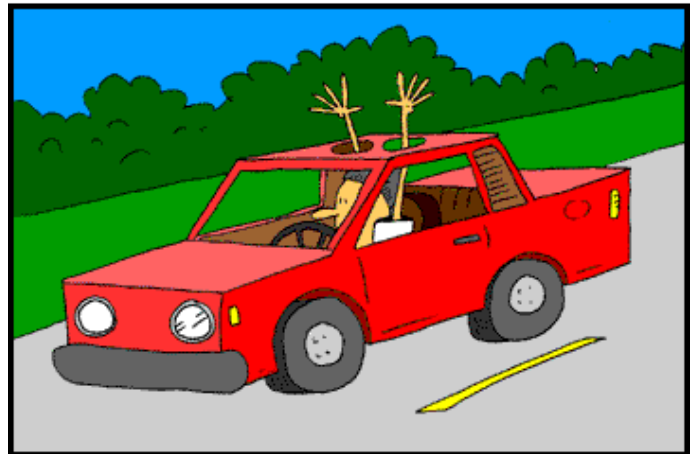
<https://sites.google.com/view/holytrinitycorfuonline/home>

## Cartoons (with thanks to Reverendfun.com)



HEY GOD ... WHICH CAME FIRST?

01-07-1999



AFTER A FEW MISHAPS, BARRY FINALLY TOOK HIS 'PRAISE THE LORD' CAR OFF THE ROAD

01-15-1999

# Sabina...

## Getting to know you better.



For some time **HTC** has been supporting a **food kitchen** in **Yemen**. The project was brought to the attention of HTC by our member **Pavla** as it is run by her friend, **Sabina Addailamy**

Pavla Smetanová, is a writer, journalist and ambassador of Pomůžu jak můžu [Google Translate – “*I’ll help as much as I can*”] she had a chat with Sabina about her life in Yemen.

The interview was posted on her blog, [ostrovanka.cz](http://ostrovanka.cz) in a section called ‘**Czechs in Foreign Lands**’. Thank you Pavla for sharing the interview with **PULSE** and hope our readers enjoy hearing more about Sabina and her experiences.



*“It takes some time, but people are able to get used to everything, including war. You can get used to bombing of your surroundings, waking you up every now and then. The downtown of our beautiful capital is severely damaged; however, we are not sentimental about it as we used to be. The prices of goods are changing day by day and we never can be sure whether there would be enough of anything...”*

**Hi, Sabina, Yemen is surely one of the most peculiar countries to live for a Czech person, and it is also quite difficult to get here, which is connected with the fact there is not many Czech people. Can you describe to us how you got to live in Yemen?**

My father was born in Yemen and relocated to the Czech Republic to study medicine, and later on, he met my mother. With my family, we travelled to Yemen when I was about three years old, but I do not remember much about it.

My mother described the country fondly though, usually stressing what great people she met there. Back then, she arrived in Yemen wearing a mini-skirt and smoking a cigarette, while the society was very conservative in those years. It was a very poor country and people did not tend to have TV. They were very kind, but my mother returned because she could not stand the conditions. My father kept visiting us back at home, but he established a new family in Yemen without divorcing my mother, which my parents agreed on. I have always wanted to return to the birthplace of my father and I travelled there when I was nineteen.

**And then you encountered your husband for the first time?**

Yes, I spent a summer in Yemen and I met Khalid here. There was a rather short war between the North and the South going on, so in the end, I extended my stay here for a whole year. When I returned home for Christmas, I announced to my mother I was going to get married.

**How did you meet Khalid?**

Together with my father, we were invited to Khalid’s family for lunch. I ate something really bad before and got food poisoning for two days. That is something every single foreigner undergoes in Yemen. I was very ill and Khalid tended to me attentively, bragging a bit about the number of languages he knew to make an impression on me. It took me some time to figure out he meant he knew a few words in several languages, but back then, his charm worked.



## Was it difficult to integrate into the local society?

Despite the initial shock, I managed to integrate among the locals quite smoothly. When I arrived, I was wearing jeans and a t-shirt, but nobody was making a big deal of it. I had no idea how people in Yemen were dressing and because I look a lot like a Yemeni woman, they were giving me odd looks. I was constantly in a centre of their attention, which I did not like, however, neither my father nor my husband were telling me what to wear. They are not strong believers and they did not care about what I wore, so I started dressing like locals because it was convenient. We also have a drink at home, especially if we are having a party.



## What do you like about Yemen?

What I like the most about Yemen are the relationships among the people here, especially among family members. Families are rather large here and people are generous and kind, inviting you over for lunch, and they would share the last loaf of bread with you even though they have almost nothing themselves. They are brave, patient, and they love their children dearly. They keep helping each other. Young people are taking care of their parents when they grow old. It is their duty, but also honour to do so.

Despite being in the middle of a war, Yemeni people are capable of enjoying their lives. They do not complain often.

I also like the local culture. I like their traditions they keep following and the local houses that look like they are ornamented with ginger-breads. The capital city is located 3,500 meters above the water level, so the journey in and out is always an adventure. I am also fond of the climate as it is sunny every day, but when it gets rainy, it is pouring cats and dogs. It lasts only about half an hour though.



## What do you do for a living?

Khalid used to work for the British embassy and Group4, and then he founded his own Security Office, and because he was earning good money, I was able to stay at home. Once our three children were older, I started to earn money thanks to my long-term hobby – making jewellery and various decorations and I also taught English at private school.

There has been an ongoing war in Yemen for five years, causing the locals facing the worst famine in the world, and because the situation is getting worse, we have decided to establish a kitchen for poor people. Thanks to my friends in the Czech Republic who are behind the organization Pomůžu jak můžu and also thanks to generous donations sent by people from the Czech and Slovak Republic, we are able to cook one hot meal a day for 166 people in my surroundings. Usually, we cook for mothers, children, & elderly people who live in poverty that is hard to imagine for a person from Europe.

**You have three children. What do they do and what languages do they speak?**

We have two boys and a girl. Fahid is 24-years-old, Sami is 22-years-old, and Linda is 14-years-old. Fahid is quite an easy-going and calm young man and I think he will stay in Yemen unlike his brother, Sami, who would like to leave, however, if the situation does not get better, I am afraid we all will be forced to leave.

We speak English and Arabic at home and usually it is a combination of both. Unfortunately, I did not teach my children Czech, which I do regret now. As a girl, I faced racism a lot in the Czech Republic, so I felt some disdain towards our beautiful country and did not want to speak Czech language at all for some time. Lately, I have been trying to speak Czech with my children and it seems they understand, but do not speak on their own. It might change in the future, who knows.



**Why did you not run away when the war began? Your husband has a family in England and your children have English citizenships, while you have your Czech one.**

It was not that easy. At first, you just do not think of what is going on, admitting the war might last for a few weeks at most, so you do not want to leave your home. And later on, you couldn't leave at all because the airports are not operational and the same goes for the mail and other quite basic things. Moreover, Ministry of Defence owes Khalid lots of money for a commission he had done for them before the war. They were supposed to pay him on 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, however, once he turned up at the bank to collect the cheque, he was told to come the next day. Unfortunately, the next day was the day the war started. Therefore, we are still waiting to get the money because without it we cannot start anew.

**Do you celebrate Christmas?**

Yes, we celebrate it in the Czech way, which means that we have the Christmas tree and unwrap presents on Christmas Eve. I always prepare fish or chicken steak and potato salad, and I bake some typical Czech sweets. We also celebrate Ramadan and we follow its tradition, which I welcome as it is a great opportunity to lose the weight I gained during Christmas. Otherwise, I would not have forced myself to fast.



**How long did it take for you to learn Arabic?**

It took me half a year to learn enough to be able to communicate. Gradually, I became able to speak and understand, but I have not mastered the language. I got stuck on a certain level from which I am not able to advance to a higher one as when I make a mistake; nobody corrects me because people simply estimate what I want to say. Getting better is beyond me, and moreover, my accent is terrible. Some people like it though. I can read well, but I am not good at writing, and after all these years, I am not really eager to get better.



## What is the weirdest and the most typical meal in Yemen?

Helba, cooked in a stone pot called maglah, fits both criteria. You roast some tomatoes, then you add chopped eggs, and in the end, you add minced beef meat, chopped potatoes, sometimes some rice, and meat and vegetable broth. You let it cook and in the meantime, you whip some fenugreek into a slick mass, add parsley, coriander, karath (green sprout similar to parsley), garlic, salt, and chilli. Then you quench the fire under the pot, but its content is going to boil for some time on. You add the fenugreek mass on the top, and once it's finished, you eat it right from the pot, picking it with bread pancakes. Everybody has a different recipe, but every single time the meal is delicious.

## How does your typical day in Yemen look like?

My usual day does not differ much from yours. In the morning, my children attend school and I and my husband go to work. School starts at 8 o'clock here and because students do not have the opportunity to have lunch at school, we gather at home about 1 or 2 o'clock and have lunch at half past 3 o'clock. During the afternoon, children are doing their homework; I am working on the jewellery and creating new designs, but only commissioned ones, as I have no time left for other. Here in Yemen, everybody is chewing khat which is a leaf of tea. Actually, you can overdo it, so you need to pay attention to it. People usually gather in the afternoon, chewing khat of different degree of bitterness. Quite often the locals drink sweet beverages when chewing. It is prohibited in some countries because they perceive it as a drug, but I do chew khat often, however, when I do not chew, I do not miss it. Some foreigners describe their experience with khat in a way that people are not able to sit and talk for five hours without khat. It stimulates and helps with focus, so students use it when learning for exams. The prices differs according to quality, and basically, chewing is a thing you do to kill some time. Still, it deteriorates your teeth and gums, especially when you realize you are chewing something for five hours. I do not really know what I would compare it to because in Yemen, most people chew khat regardless of age, sex, and social status. Of course, children do not chew. Sometimes I spend the afternoon walking around the old part of the city, I cross the market place or I just stroll around. In the past two years, I have been devoting most of my time ensuring our kitchen is working.



## How has your daily routine changed since you opened the canteen together with Pomůžu jak můžu?

In the morning, my husband brings food, usually rice and anything he can get, by our car. If it is possible, we buy stuff in advance, for example oil, salt, spices, and puree which we have enough for the whole month. In terms of vegetables, we tend to buy some each two or three days. Then we cook lunch for people who start coming to our canteen at about 11 o'clock. We put their meals into the boxes we had distributed among them in the past, and we also distribute some clothes and toys for kids (basically anything others donate to us) at that time. Currently, it is prohibited to gather, and moreover, I bring masks, gloves, and sanitizer to canteen.

## What do you have in common with Khalid and what divides you?

There is one main thing we have in common – we know both worlds. We have similar opinions; we get along very well, and have something to talk about all the time. Thanks to our experience, we do not disapprove of any nationality or culture. In Yemen, it is nothing unusual to complain about America, so we try to explain to the locals that the goods we have here were brought from the West and the doctors were educated in America. I think we are able to look at the world from different perspectives.

And on top of that, we like the same meals. The only thing we have different opinions on is the upbringing of our children. I am a strict mother, while my husband would do anything for our children, and it's not always good for them. He cannot see when he is spoiling them. But that is the only thing, really, because after all these years together, we still love each other.

**Thank you very much and I wish the whole Yemen these terrible times to end as soon as possible.**



## WORST JOKE OF THE MONTH AWARD



Why do we say “Amen” in church and not “Awomen”?

Because we sing Hymns not Hers!

The award goes to Mrs Mop!

You think that's bad? Can you do better?

Let me have YOUR joke for next month -  
Keep it family friendly!





# PULSE PRAYERS



Lord, we tend to ask for favours and often forget to thank you.

Thank you for our lives, health, for our daily bread, a roof over our head, work, family and friends.

Please help those who don't have this; the homeless, sick, hungry, refugees, unemployed and lonely.

Thank you for the church community all around the world. We are so many people with so many different attitudes and thoughts and yet, we can all rely on you and know that we are loved by you.

Please help those who don't know you to find you.

Thank you for modern medicine and all the medical staff combating the virus. Thank you for all people risking their lives to help others.

Please support them and give them strength.

Thank you for all of those who recovered from their illness and please help those, who are still fighting.

Give joy to people who lost their loved ones.

We thank you for our children and the whole young generation. Please show them your way in life. They often don't see any future ahead of them. Lead them into your peace.

We pray for little children who cannot play with others during lockdown. Students who cannot see their friends and as they struggle with online education.

For all countries which face war, totalitarian regime, where there is no freedom of speech and religion.

Especially for Yemen and its people. For Sabina and her kitchen which provides food daily for 166 people in need.

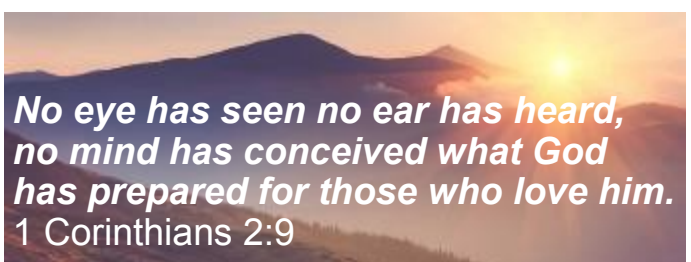
For our friends and acquaintances who are ill: Olivier, Andrea, Makis, Piper, Vince & Tony. We pray for those who mourn, especially, Janine and the loss of her father John. We remember his love and passion for Jesus.

We pray for an end to this disaster called Covid. Lord, how much we would love to meet and hug and do things together again! Please, help us to start working again.

We pray for our HTC church, for Jules and Trish and all the members. Give us wisdom and courage and love to develop our community of Christians. Help us with our projects, the Logos café and the HTC flat, which helps us raise funds for our work.

We also ask for forgiveness. How many times have we done and said something we regretted? How many times have we hurt somebody without even noticing? Help us forgive those, who hurt us and not let hatred rule our lives.

Lord, hear our prayers and give us your blessing. Amen.



# corona conversations

*I've had a suggestion at PULSE that you might like to follow up.*

*Readers' contributions under the heading of 'Corona Conversations' where you can communicate what you're going through and how it's affecting your life. Poetry, prose, photography, art, whatever.*

*Here are a couple of contributions from Violetta and later on page 17, one from Trish, thoughts that they have had recently. Now, over to you, our readers, to let us know about your experiences.*

## teach us to number our days

**Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

***Psalm 90: 12***

It was during a swim in the sea moving about in water, unstable, with no firm foundation and nothing to grab hold of, the day after I had seen the alignment of Jupiter and Saturn aka 'The Great Conjunction', that I came to the realisation of what it means to be uncertain, to welcome unsureness, to embrace the future with all its unknowns.

The three wise men, astrologers who followed a star in the hope of finding a great phenomenon, were guided by uncertainty. They had no real facts on which to base their decision to travel on camels to a foreign land, far away from all that meant home to them. The doubt in their minds from time to time, the wish to turn back through this fog of not knowing where they were headed, must have haunted them constantly. And yet they moved on, by faith, by believing that they must be right, that there had to be a world-shattering event in which they absolutely had to participate. Swirling within their incertitude, this was going to be an occasion to celebrate; a person to whom one would bring laud and honour and hence, the very expensive gifts that would foretell this same person's death. What a mighty act of bravery and courage it was and a reminder of the faith it requires to journey on, to be resilient in our path without being sure or convinced of what lies ahead, what tomorrow may bring, and be at peace with it.

Stay calm; carry on with only hope, wisdom and wonder to guide us. (Credit: 'hope, wisdom and wonder' - Ingrid Hoffman, 'True Heart Work')

*Violetta Teetor*



# a state of impermanence



If we can't change what we did yesterday and we don't know what the future may throw at us, we can only cling to what we know and everything we know is happening now, it is the present that is our anchor and if the present is our anchor, and we unpack it and break it down to its most basic form, it all comes down to the breath. That is one thing we have that is our continual teacher. It races when we're in danger, it speeds up when we're nervous, it falls into a relaxed rhythm when we're neutral, it deepens when we sleep. This tutors us and guides us to accept what is here and now, to alter our perception of pain and discomfort, it revels in our joy and laughter and helps us to take a different approach when the one we're programmed to take, is inappropriate.

An example would be, your friend says, 'you'll never believe what she said!' In stead of gasping with your friend and immediately demanding more information, you stop, you take a breath and you say calmly, 'Tell me more' (Brené Brown). Your breath has guided you out of the mire of gossip and reaction, into the wisdom of understanding and empathy.



Impermanence is settled in the breath. It is accepting the state of not knowing, not controlling and yet knowing and controlling your breathing pattern. The teaching goes (Jason Gray, The Rabbit Room) that the name of YHWH, or Yahweh, 'is comprised of aspirated consonants that when spoken, are the sound of breathing.'

So while some might think that meditation is an Eastern practice best left alone, this beautiful revelation means that each and every one of us say the name of God all the time and when we concentrate on it, it becomes even more beautiful and beneficial to our minds, bodies and souls. Let us rest in impermanence, with the knowledge that He is with us every second of every minute of every hour of every day.

*Violetta Teetor*





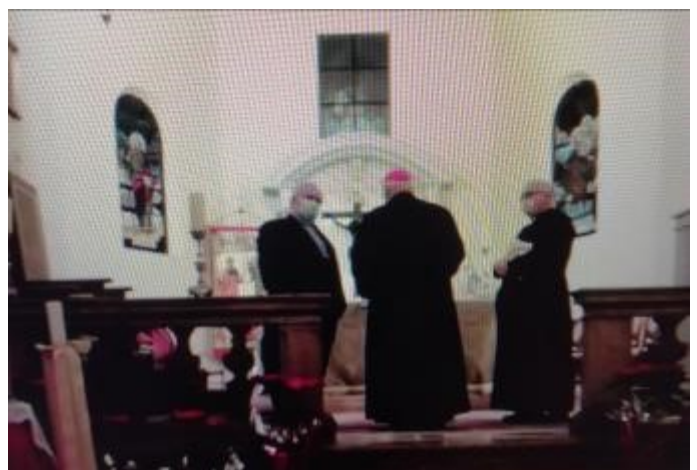
After some encouragement the Service of Christian Unity took place on Saturday 23rd January at 1800.

The service was hosted by the Archbishop Ioannis Spitis at the Catholic Cathedral (Domo) and Fr. Marios Rigos who is Dean of the Cathedral. In attendance was a representative of the Orthodox Church sent by The Archbishop of Corfu Nectorios, Rev. Jules Wilson & Pastor Miltiades Pantelios from The Greek Evangelical Church. Two Catholic Lay assistants led the prayers.

This service is unique to Corfu as the invited priests are invited to give a short sermon on their thoughts about this years' theme which was from John 15: 1-17, the text "Abide In My Love...You Shall Bear Fruit". In other Catholic Churches in Greece this does not happen. This year there was no congregation due to the Corona virus but the service was placed on social media by Fr. Marios Rigos and Jules Zoomed from his mobile.

Archbishop Ioannis has not been able to retire as the Induction for his replacement was due to take place last November but was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Thanks to Pauline for the screen shots of the Zoom stream. Jules' reflection on the text is on the next page.



# REFLECTING

## on Christian Unity

As ever it is a delight to be together to celebrate our shared calling by our Lord Jesus and to pray for His church.

Over the last year, we have felt the pain of separation. Many of us are unable to be together with our families at significant times and unable to share in times of celebration that give so much meaning to our lives.

I have smiled at a distance of a thousand miles as I have watched my little granddaughter grow so quickly in her fourth year of life.

She has developed a passion for ballet and her only wish is to dance with her friends.

We have recitals from the living room, facilitated by Mum and Dad... but it's not the same. It's not the same when we're not together.

This Christmas was the first in 35 years that Trish and I have not been able to share as she needed to be away to care for her elderly mother.

We, of course, kept in touch constantly. But it is not the same when we're not together.

Christmas Day came and went with our family spread over five different locations and two continents! We played games, laughed, enjoyed our time of feast - but it is not the same when we're not together.

It seems that this story of separation might be a parable for the separation in our Lord's church. We are His family.

He has called us to be the Father's sons and daughters. Part of the one True vine - Jesus' own body. And yet we are separated. And it's not the same.

This movement of prayer for unity grew from an experience of the pain in the heart of God - a pain that arose from His fractured family; His broken vine.

We know, in the Spirit, that we are one. There is a bond of peace and love between us; the bond that the Spirit gives.

We pray for each other. We worship together. The bond is being made more manifest over the years.

But, just as many families could not share together on that special day of our Lord's nativity, so too, as different churches, we do not yet gather to share

*(Continued on page 14)*



*(Continued from page 13)*

together in our family feast - the feast of the Eucharist - The Lord's table.

We know in our hearts that every Sunday when we gather that we desire to bless His heart with our worship and we thank Him for the blessing and source of strength this is for our lives.

Through this strange time, we have been unable to all share the bread and the wine together, with only a few of us gathered around His table in our empty churches;

We feel that we are missing something very special, very important.

Again, is this a parable for the way our Lord feels

when all His children cannot gather together around His table as one? His family fractured.

We know life is complicated. We have made our faith... complicated. And these complications have bought separation. And in our heart of hearts we know that this separation causes our Father's heart pain.

As we look forward and pray for an end to this time of restrictions and our lives can continue, so we must pray that we will know the day when all of God's family can be together, as one, around His table, abiding together as He longs us to be. Amen.



COMMIT YOUR WORK  
TO THE LORD, AND  
YOUR PLANS WILL BE  
ESTABLISHED.

PROVERBS 16:3 (ESV)







# WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

*(A WOMEN LED, GLOBAL, ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT)*

To be hosted by HTC 5th March 2021

**‘BUILD ON A STRONG FOUNDATION’**

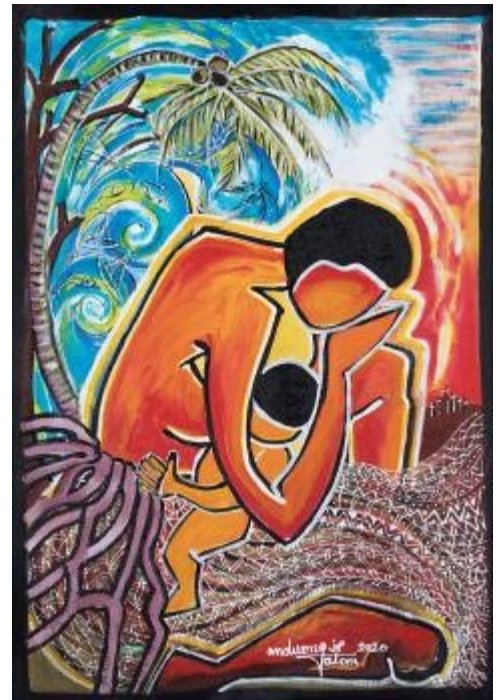
The World Day of Prayer this year has been prepared by the Christian Women of Vanuatu. On the other side of the world, nearly 2,000 miles east of northern Australia lies Vanuatu –an archipelago of 80 beautiful tropical isles. Sixty-five of which are inhabited, lies roughly in a Y - shape, extending 560 miles from north to south.

On the 6th April as the women were putting the finishing touches to the programme the island suffered a devastating tropical storm called Harold, the second category-5 Cyclone.

Through writing the 2021 service, representatives of the islands have developed an ecumenical relationship. The Vanuatu committee’s prayer is that the voice of Vanuatu women will be heard across the world and that in Vanuatu, health and educational opportunities will improve. They thank God for triumphs in key moments in their history and proudly declare their nation is built on the Rock of Ages, Christ the King.

World Day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organization which enables us to hear the thoughts of women from all parts of the world: their hopes, concerns and prayers.

The Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 120 countries. It begins in Samoa and prayer in native languages travels throughout the world – through Asia - Africa –the Middle East – Europe – the Americas before finishing in America Samoa some 38 hours later.



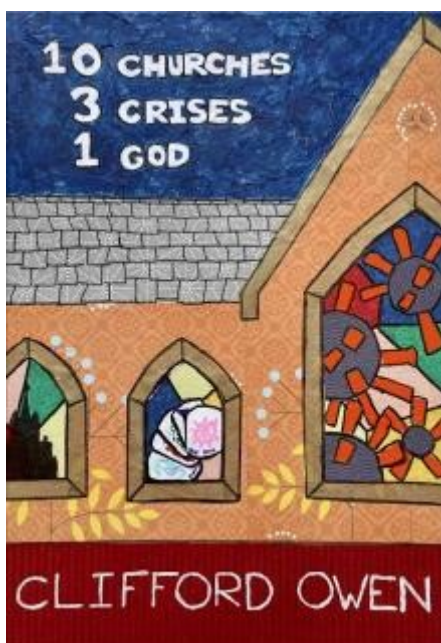
World Day of Prayer  
England, Wales, & Northern Ireland

[Click HERE for more info](#)



The Revd Dr Clifford Owen enjoys watching *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Father Ted*. He has also in the past laughed at the sketches of *The Dave Allen Show*. But how far do TV sitcoms represent the realities of life as a vicar or priest?

In *10 Churches, 3 Crises, 1 God* Clifford 'tells it for real'. This is his story of 50 years from first call through to retirement and up to the present day.



He had no blinding light revelations that called him to be a vicar. It was just a growing conviction as he got on with the business of training as an engineer in the Royal Navy. Eventually he had to test the call.

And so we have in this account a fairly full sketch of half a century behind a dog collar. The three crises were significant. The first happened when his theological college nearly closed down after a dispute. The second happened in a Worcestershire parish when he thought about resigning after a dispute which went viral. The third crisis is of interest to all of us because we're in it: Covid19.

The roots of this story lie in six happy years when he wrote a monthly Chaplain's column in *The Corfiot*, the English language magazine in Corfu. This has set the target for the present book which is 'beyond the church walls'. He hopes that many who don't regularly go to a church service will find that vicars are human beings who laugh and cry; feel fulfilled and frustrated; sense achievement and get angry; but also testify to a faith that sees them through it all. Enjoy the book!



*'Those who wonder what ministry is like would benefit from reading this beautiful and sometimes poignant story'.* **Bishop Robert Innes**

*'Those who have been in ministry for many years or just a few will also find a great deal to relate to and will find themselves surprised, instructed, encouraged and uplifted'.* **Revd Dr Michael Volland**

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## fear in the time of pandemic

When I was younger, I'm sure that I was much braver than I am now. I hitch hiked around, I walked about at night on my own and I can remember going to London from Surbiton (by train) on my own shopping when I was about 9 or 10 years old. No one batted an eyelid. I think with youth comes a certain sense of courage which as we get older can change into anxiety. Generalised chronic anxiety and stress as we know now is very bad for us it literally is a killer!

For some of us anxiety comes from the growing understanding of our finitude. That is we become more aware of our fleetingness or limitedness. The Christian Philosopher Paul Tillich is well known for his work on the interpretation of anxiety and fear. He says "to be finite and to know what it is...is to be afraid." Tillich writes about transforming anxiety into fear because fear can be overcome by courage and ultimately by love. I really like that message as it adds a practical layer that may help us when we are fearful. Hopefully this short reflection might strike a chord and

be helpful to others as I try to explain this idea.

It is generally agreed that there are four great qualities or marks of impermanence on Earth and these are time/space/causality/substance. So as a finite person, we live and exist in time. We are heading ultimately in one direction (death) and to live in time is to live with this anxiety. The pandemic has accentuated this by bringing death closer to us and by arbitrarily cutting short this journey for many people.

We are spatial beings living in a particular place. However, our space is and has always been threatened by natural disasters or crime etc. If you have ever felt an earthquake tremor in your home, you know how scary that can be. Covid has changed the way we view our space. For many it has increasingly become a place of isolation, lockdown, illness and abuse. To be spatial is to be afraid.

To be finite is also to be caused. That means we would not be here if it weren't for our parents! We rely on air to breathe, food and nutrition amongst other things in order to flourish. In fact, our contingency on so many variables makes us fragile and Covid has brought this into clearer focus. Many of us who would normally not be thinking about deteriorating health and weakness for

*(Continued on page 18)*







(Continued from page 17)

many years to come have had to shelter and have become paranoid about threats to health. Things that we are reliant on to lead a full and healthy life have been compromised and for many people have been taken away altogether without warning. Sadly, this is not just in the sphere of health. We are seeing now that the aftermath and legacy of lockdown measures to those poorer sections of society are predicted to be much more dire than Covid itself.

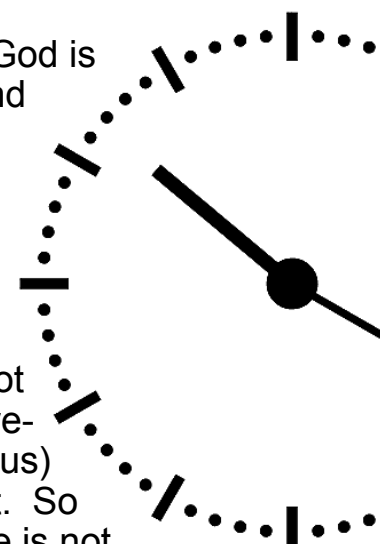
The last characteristic of our finiteness as described by the great philosophers is substance. That is, we are substance and therefore can undergo change. Any substance can be eliminated or eradicated and that applies to our bodies. At the end of the day, physically we are a “thing” a “substance” and therefore can be destroyed. Covid attacks our substance in ways that the brainiest of our world are still trying to make sense of. And those who were changed by Covid twelve months ago are still feeling the legacy of that change a year down the line. So our substance (on a level beyond the individual) has been threatened and awareness of this threat causes heightened anxiety.

An Existentialist or Atheist might say we'll get used to it. Or get over yourself and get on with it, as this existence is all that we have. For Christians that is not the answer. If we turn to the Bible, it tells us not to be afraid. In fact, it gives

us this message 365 times! According to a Bible App called 'YouVersion', the most read and bookmarked scripture reference of 2020 was Isaiah 41:10. *'Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand'*. The Bible points us beyond our mortality and impermanence-related anxiety to a place where these limitations are transcended by God.

If we remind ourselves of how we try and name or characterise God each feature corresponds to the characteristics that Tillich has linked to our inherent anxiety.

Firstly, unlike us God is not inside time and heading to death. He is outside of time and eternal and additionally He also knows what lies ahead. Secondly He is not in space but is everywhere (ubiquitous) and transcendent. So His omnipresence is not comparable to our spatial existence. Thirdly, God is not contingent on any causes outside of Himself. Fourthly, God is not substance. He is the sheer act of being itself. What Tillich does is take the classical language and highlights the spiritual power that it has.



(Continued on page 19)



**The Bible App**  
YouVersion



Why is it significant to say that God is eternal? Well if we are anxious about Covid we can identify that actually underneath is a genuine fear about the temporal nature of our being. We cannot help ourselves or help others out of this terrible situation. I cannot reach out and save you, as we are both temporal. Ego or material objects will not help here but God can. It is the same with space. Nothing in space is going to solve the anxiety related to being a creature in space. But if we identify this as a fear of being spatial then we can order ourselves to God who is beyond this space. Again, the anxiety of being a caused and vulnerable human will find no relief in the world of caused things of substance. The only solution is to turn our focus including the fear to the One that transcends all these concerns.



To summarise then, we have these legitimate fears that have been heightened, honed if you will during the pandemic. What can we do with them? Well we are told not to be afraid time and time again. How can we activate this call to be courageous?



Fortitude is actually a gift of the Spirit and we can ask for it daily. But we have another string in our bow and that is Love.

Fear comes from focusing in on our own finitude if we can take some sort of extroverted move this may help us. This move comes in the form of love and the trajectory of love is towards God. There is no fear in love because when we love we are placing our life into a wider context.

So that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. (Galatians 2:20)

This shift to placing our life from ego into a wider context is no easy task but the Bible tells us that we do not have to overcome these fears on our own. By relocating the centre so that it is outside the finite, fearful self and onto Christ we can hope to handle fear even fear of death. We can read inspirational stories of how individuals have suffered captivity and survived atrocities and even continued to love others. They surely must have displaced their life onto God as their refuge. How else could they have endured? Their courage came from outside of themselves.

During the pandemic, we are surrounded by finite fear, sorrow and even hostility. Can we rediscover again daily the new centre of courage that we receive from Christ? I certainly need to. Our hearts tell us that the only way is to stay ordered to the basics of spiritual life through prayer and worship. Here we can open up a space where we can find the peace we crave, the receiving of the gifts of faith and hope and the ultimate source of love to overcome fear.



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