



## CTe-News

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## **Editorial: General Secretary, Churches Together in England, Revd Dr Paul Goodliff**



I am glad that for most of us, and for most of our lives, we may live as time passes, but we do not live through 'history in the making.' The Chinese proverb puts it like this, "may you not live in interesting times." 'History-in-the-making' times are those epoch-changing, world-altering events that transform our world as we know it: the outbreak of World War One in 1914, or the Fall of Communism in Europe in 1989, for instance. We may well be living in one such time, but with an even greater global reach. The first great pandemic of the third millennium, and the first for over a century, the Coronavirus crisis has seen unprecedented interventions by governments throughout the world in an attempt to slow its spread. Our freedoms have been severely restricted, stock markets have collapsed in ways even more dramatic than at the height of the 2008–9 Financial Crisis, and the ability to fight this virus with medical skills and science has been astonishing, compared with the struggle with so-called 'Spanish' flu that took at least 50 million lives in 1918–9. The ability to identify who carries the virus, and who has recovered with (we dare to hope) subsequent immunity; the medical care that enables many to be cared for through the worst symptomatic stages and recover, and the search for a vaccine, are all markedly different from the 1918 pandemic. We pray that the death toll will be small by comparison — although that does not mean we lack compassion for the family and friends of the many thousands who have or will die from the disease SARS Covid-19 that the coronavirus infection produces. Every life matters and every death is a tragedy. And all bets are off in forecasting how this will change our world, its powers and cultures.

Our churches have been swift to respond, both in following government guidance and regulations, and in seeking to be part of the wider community in caring for the most vulnerable. Even before the Prime Minister's statement on Monday 23rd March that closed church buildings, many churches had already switched to on-line services. Certainly now, church buildings are closed for gatherings for worship and prayer, and even private prayer, although there is still at present the possibility of holding small funerals according to Government information. Many of us are getting used to conducting our interactions in front of a smart phone or laptop, sharing in prayer, worship and fellowship...and looking forward to the easing of restrictions when we can once again meet in person.

[Presidents of CTE initiated a call to prayer](#) for Sunday 23rd March, and [thousands lit candles and prayed](#). The response was a request to continue the practice, and so until this crisis is over, we will continue to pray at 7.00 every Sunday evening, with some member churches live streaming prayer services, and Premier Radio providing an ecumenical alternative for those who have no denominational one. A 24/7 response is to [download one of the prayer posters](#), and place it in a window where passers-by can see it. Church leaders throughout Britain and Ireland have issued a letter at the start of Holy Week, which [can be found here](#).

At the heart of the churches' response has been a determination to continue to care for one another, and for our wider communities. In this edition of CTe-News you can read

about some of these, and maybe find inspiration to do likewise. Much of the response has been ecumenical in its work, and I sense that the crisis this Spring has put some 'spring' into ecumenism also.

At a national level the churches have been regularly in touch with one another through their National Ecumenical Officers and equivalents, church leaders have 'met' and prayed on-line, and in many localities local ministers and pastors groups have found encouragement in similar ways, leading to an ecumenical response to need.

Every strand of the work of CTE has been engaged in this crisis — engaging together in mission, supporting intermediate ecumenism, building relationships and doing theology together ([see the conversations happening here](#)). All of this communicated to our members as we seek to be 'fleet of foot' in getting the messages across and fulfil our calling to be the ecumenical instrument for England.

## Reflection of the Month: Churches Together Apart

*Claire Crowley, County Ecumenical Officer for Churches Together in South London, shares our [Reflection of the Month](#) for April 2020...*



Churches Together describes Christian networks which encourage togetherness, and this has never been more vital to the church's flourishing than in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic sweeping the world. However, churches have had to delve deep into what this means. We know that church has never meant the building, and for now it does not mean that we gather together in person either. This togetherness is about being united in our faith, in our witness and love of our neighbours. It is about praying and supporting our communities as one body, just not in one place.

In recent weeks in practical terms, we have seen church communities connect through WhatsApp groups to help the sick and self-isolating, and seen services move to online streaming via Facebook and to interactive platforms such as Zoom. Some churches are struggling with the technology so this is one area where churches together groups have an opportunity to get involved – either through providing telephone assistance to enable other churches to get online, or through simply opening up the online services of one church to others. Our church services can now be more ecumenical than ever before as the physical walls are no longer between us.

Let's continue to strengthen unity in Christ by offering to support one another through extending hearts, prayers, messages of love and, when necessary, errands on others' behalf. Thanks to technology for remote interactions, we have this means to help connect and protect our communities, the most vulnerable, and ourselves from the virus' threat.

Kindness is key: there have been some fantastic community initiatives to connect people via WhatsApp and leafleting - with those delivering them being urged to regularly sanitise their hands. London boroughs are organising Covid-19 support WhatsApp groups by Ward, contact your local councillors for details of your network. I

saw a primetime news reader do a section on the role of kindness on the weekend evening news - never before! People are sharing stories on social media of #coronakindness and #covidkindness, about how we can think of our neighbours and ourselves in order to slow the spread. Many have connected with residents nearby for the first time to build virtual links and enable all to be supported when most in need. Our collective response for our neighbours depends very much on unity: working together as the body of Christ to manage this pandemic.

It has been a privilege to join millions of others around the country and further afield for prayer at the same time, and for timed moments of applause to thank our key workers on the front lines. Despite living the reality of physical isolation to save lives, let's seize this moment to promote unity and find ways to be together, apart.

*Claire is County Ecumenical Officer for Churches Together in South London and parent to a lively 7 year old. Before working overseas in Namibia and France, Claire was Deputy Director at Dance UK, and Executive Director for Springs Dance Company, an interdenominational Christian organisation and one of the UK's longest established professional contemporary dance companies. Claire has taught Dance, Maths and Religious Studies, manages community, education and arts partnerships, and maintains a research interest in doing theology through the arts.*

## **British & Irish Church Leaders united in response to Covid-19 pandemic**

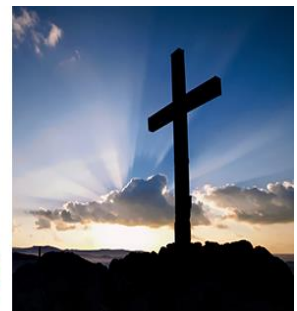
*At the start of Holy Week, as Christians follow in the footsteps of Jesus as the events that lead to Good Friday unfold, followed by the hope of Easter Day, leaders of churches throughout the British Isles have issued the following statement and call to continued prayer as we face the Covid-19 pandemic.*

*They write...*

God's world is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. In the nations that make up Britain and Ireland the Covid-19 virus continues to affect people at an alarming rate, health services along with many of our institutions and organisations, both local and national, are under extreme pressure and people are getting used to living in a very different way, many in extreme isolation. As with all such crises, there is a danger that the most vulnerable in society will be most badly affected.

Christians the world over are entering an important time in the church year as we look to the events of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. At the centre of our common faith are both the depths of despair and the heights of joy. In the Bible and in the songs and liturgies of the Church, we see Jesus entering fully into human suffering. In

### **Joint statement from Church leaders in Britain and Ireland**



His rising again, that suffering is redeemed and transformed into hope and joy. After Jesus' death his disciples were afraid and all seemed lost and hopeless, but the risen Christ met them in their despair and restored hope through his victory over death. We pray that the world today might know this hope in place of despair.

In the Book of Daniel, we read about God's people being taken into exile in Babylon. Daniel could not pray in the Temple in Jerusalem, but he continued to pray in exile – opening his window to face Jerusalem. Though he was on his own he joined with the prayers of the people wherever they were. Now we too are separated from each other physically, but when we pray in our homes we join in with this ancient tradition of our home as a place of prayer. Wherever we are, whenever we pray, when we speak and think of Christ, there he is in the midst of us. We join our prayers with all those who pray in our own churches and communities and around the world.

As church leaders from across the many and varied churches of these Islands we urge all people to join us in prayer this Holy Week and Easter; to pray for those who suffer, those who face untimely death and all those who care for them; to celebrate our common faith at a difficult time; to help and support our neighbours in need; and to observe all the safeguards in place to slow the spread of disease.

### **Our Prayer**

Loving God, in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for our salvation, cast out the darkness of our anxiety, fear and mourning, enfold us in your love and give us joy and hope this Easter. Amen.

Archbishop Justin Welby  
Archbishop of Canterbury

Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster

Very Rev Dr William Henry  
Moderator General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Rt. Revd Colin Sinclair  
Moderator General Assembly  
Church of Scotland

Archbishop Eamon Martin  
Archbishop of Armagh

Commissioner Anthony Cotterill  
The Salvation Army

Revd Nigel Uden  
Moderator of General Assembly  
United Reformed Church

Archbishop-elect John McDowell  
Archbishop of Armagh

Bishop Hugh Gilbert  
Bishop of Aberdeen

Revd Dr Barbara Glasson  
President Methodist Church of Great  
Britain

His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas  
Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain

Revd Lynn Green  
General Secretary Baptist Union of Great  
Britain

Bishop Mark Strange  
Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church

His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos  
Coptic Archbishop of London

Mr Rheinallt Thomas  
President Free Church Council Wales

Revd Brian Anderson  
President Irish Council of Churches

Gavin Calver  
CEO Evangelical Alliance

Archbishop John Davies  
Archbishop of Wales

Pastor Agu Irukwu  
Redeemed Christian Church of God

Revd Hugh Osgood  
Moderator Free Church Federal Council

Revd Sam McGuffin  
President Methodist Church in Ireland

Paul Parker  
Religious Society of Friends

The full statement of the church leaders is [available on our website here](#)

## **Candle of Hope -> Prayers of Hope every Sunday at 7.00 pm**

During the Coronavirus crisis thousands of Christians across Britain are praying together at 7.00 pm every Sunday evening.

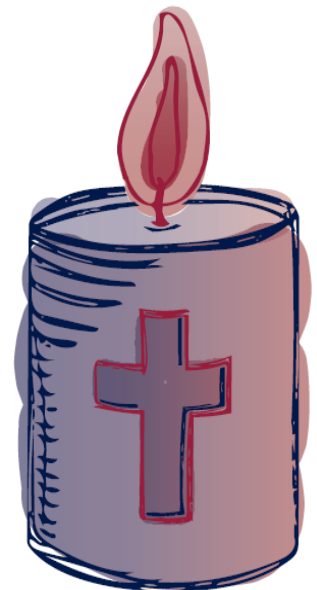
This began on Sunday 22 March after the [Presidents of Churches Together in England issued a joint call to prayer](#). The [response was phenomenal](#).

**To keep the prayer going, Churches Together in England is offering a poster to encourage #PrayersOfHope.**

St Paul tells us to pray continually. However, it helps to know that others are also praying at a specific time, so we encourage you to pray at 7.00 pm on Sunday evening. If you want to join in online prayer, there are two options of which we are aware:

- Premier radio: [Prayers of Hope service](#) at 7.00 pm on Sundays
- Baptists Together are [broadcasting](#) at 7.00 pm on Sundays (and Wednesdays)

Churches in Wales and in Scotland are also taking part in this call to prayer, with Welsh versions of the poster [available via the Cytûn website](#).



## Churches unite in the Lord's Prayer

Christians across Britain joined together to say the Lord's Prayer on Wednesday 25 March at 11.00 am, 12.00 noon Rome time, in response to the Pope's invitation to Christians everywhere to join together in this prayer.

The Pope made his invitation to "the Heads of the Churches and the leaders of every Christian community, together with all Christians of the various confessions, to invoke the Almighty, the omnipotent God, to recite at the same time the prayer that Jesus, our Lord, taught us – the Our Father."



The leaders of the Conference of European Churches, who received the invitation from the Pope, said "During these times of global uncertainty, we need signs of unity and hope. The prayer that has been taught to us by Christ unites Christianity across space and time."

Watch [the Vatican News YouTube channel](#)

## Hope in a time of COVID-19

Manoj Raithatha, minister at Pinner Baptist is a man with a vision – a vision that simply grew out of a Lenten prayer meeting and snowballed into a website with a selection of really useful resources. [Hope 15:13](#) is taken from Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."



### How does the Hope 15:13 initiative work?

Firstly, PRAY: Create space each day pray by yourself or with others, either online or in person.

Secondly, PREPARE: Consider how you can protect and support others.

Thirdly, PROCLAIM: Seek to share this hope as you connect with people every day.

The [Hope 15:13 website](#), has a whole host of information. A useful start for those wanting to think about how to reach neighbours and friends virtually is the [downloadable evangelism sheet found here](#). Manoj spoke of the new openness people have during a time of crisis. There may be new opportunities to offer prayer or to explain hope in Jesus. With a wide range of social platforms the page makes suggestions about to engage on Facebook and Twitter or how to share your testimony on YouTube or Zoom.

The website also includes [a page of lockdown ideas](#) for coping with the enforced restrictions we are all faced with now and possibly for a considerable time. That might be learning how to knit, gardening or starting a virtual book club.

[Read the full article on our website](#)

## YourNeighbour website launched

The [YourNeighbour](#) website was recently launched helping churches be good neighbours in the Covid-19 crisis.

Churches are working around the clock to demonstrate love to their neighbours through this global pandemic. With so much new information and initiatives each day it can be difficult to know where to begin. [YourNeighbour.org](#) equips church leaders with the latest updates and resources and connects people in need to churches.

The website contains a whole host of information for church leaders and for churches and communities such as;

- Tips on working with Volunteers
- Daily thought for the day
- 10 ways to keep yourself emotionally healthy
- Opportunities to bless key workers.

[Visit their website for more information.](#)

## Sing Resurrection on Easter Day

Christians across Britain are invited to go outside and join a countrywide chorus at 10.00 am on Easter Sunday by singing two popular and well-known hymns.

*Christ is Risen Today* and *Thine be the Glory* have been chosen as they are cheerful, confident and joyful acclamations of resurrection and will be uplifting for other people to hear on Easter morning.

With churches closed and gatherings outside the household banned, many of us would miss singing together this Easter. It is hoped that "Sing Resurrection" goes some way to replace this.





“Easter Sunday 2020 will be an Easter Sunday like no other before it. We cannot sing the great Easter hymns inside our churches, but we can still celebrate the resurrection and spread the powerful message of the joy of the Easter at this difficult time,” says Companion of [the Northumbria Community](#), David Pott, who came up with the idea for Sing Resurrection.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland has put together a [Sing Resurrection page on their website](#) including the words of the hymns and a flyer to help promote the event to neighbours and friends.

**Please share photos, videos and recordings of the singing on social media using the hashtag #SingResurrection**

*Art courtesy of Nicholas Markell. Copyrighted. [www.markellstudios.com](http://www.markellstudios.com)*

## Join the Choir of the Nation

St Paul’s Cathedral coordinated a hymn flash mob to enable the nation to come together in songs of praise to mark Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Individuals were invited to record themselves singing three chosen hymns at home and to send those recordings in to St Paul’s. These were to be mixed together and included in the “Choir of the Nation”.



The chosen Palm Sunday hymns were:

- Ride on, ride on in majesty (Winchester New)
- Glory be to Jesus (Caswall)
- Jesu, lover of my soul (Aberystwyth)

The Cathedral Organist, Simon Johnson, recorded backing tracks from his home, and marked up scores to help singers. They are available [on the St Paul's website alongside full instructions on how to participate](#).

The three new recordings were [released and offered as an act of worship](#) for the country with a theological reflection for Palm Sunday morning.

If you missed out on the Palm Sunday hymn flash mob, St Paul's is also planning one for Easter Sunday to mark Christ's glorious resurrection on Easter Day.

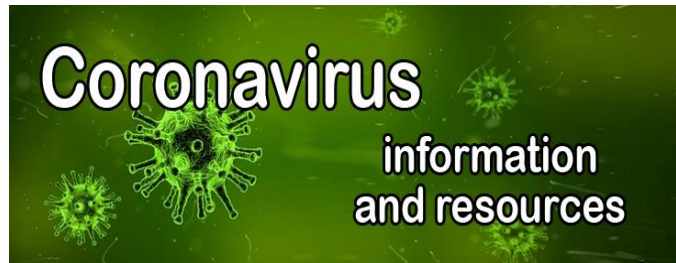
These are the three hymns you need to sing to be part of that event':

- Jesus Christ is Risen Today (Easter Hymn)

- Love's redeeming work is done (Savannah)
- Thine be the glory (Maccabaeus)

The recordings and scores for the Easter Sunday hymns will be released in Holy Week [on the St Paul's website.](#)

**And finally, visit our Coronavirus Hub page for the latest information and resources such as....**



### **Funerals, weddings, baptisms and pastoral responses**

In the current extraordinary circumstances, the normal routines of funerals, weddings and baptisms are all challenged. Many of our Member Churches have established coronavirus guidance web pages which you can [view here](#)

### **Missional & Theological reflections**

During a crisis there are both dangers and opportunities. In a national emergency we have the chance to counter fear with peace and panic with the reassurance of God's presence and love. In the last few days new blogs, prayers and reflections have been produced that might help us in an era of social distancing and isolation to start rethinking the mission of the church in these strange new times. [Read more here](#)

### **Church services stop – Prayer continues**

All churches now need to cease from meeting in person for their normal services and other gatherings. Churches will now be closed, even for private or solitary prayer, as well as for worship and liturgy.

Churches Together in England is monitoring the advice and directions being given by Member Churches and you can discover creative ways of being the Church [here](#).

## **YOUR STORIES: Ecumenism and Coronavirus**

We have begun to gather examples of inspiring local ecumenical initiatives which are springing up across the country at this unsettling time. Please continue to share your stories with us. You can email them to [sarah.ball@cte.org.uk](mailto:sarah.ball@cte.org.uk) We plan to publish a selection in our next CTe-News.

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