



2020

A YEAR IN FOCUS



Introduction

Firstly, welcome to 2021.

I'm not sure any of us could have predicted 2020 would be a year like we've just experienced. It started so well and then suddenly in February we began to hear news reports about a new virus, COVID19, in a remote part of China. It quickly became a pandemic and spread to the UK. Soon after we found ourselves in national lockdown, unsure how long this crisis was going to last, and faced with having to adapt and learn how to do church and life differently.

Well we did it! We've all managed to come up to speed with new technology such as Zoom, and we've kept the NLC flag flying by continuing to give generously where there was great need, and when possible, getting out into the community to serve practically.

Even though we are still navigating our way through the pandemic, I thank God that vaccines are now being distributed in the UK to the most vulnerable and will hopefully be available to the rest of the population soon.

As I reflect over 2020 it's certainly had its challenges. However, if I've learned anything over the years of walking with God, it is to embrace difficult times and thank God for them. As it says in James 1 from the Passion Translation:

² My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can! ³ For you know that when your faith is tested it stirs up power within you to endure all things. ⁴ And then as your endurance grows even stronger it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking.

I know that we all long for things to get back to "normal"; we long for in person meetings and live corporate worship; we miss our cakes and hugs. But let's not strive to simply go back to how things were. Let us all be seeking to learn from what we have experienced and seek God as to how he wants to shape his church as we move into the New Year.

I trust as you read this report you will be both surprised and blessed at how much we have been able to achieve despite the pandemic.

Outreach and community initiatives

You might think that we have not been able to do much in terms of outreach and community initiatives due to the coronavirus restrictions. However, there is no stopping the Kingdom of God advancing.

Bristol Churches

Winter Night Shelter (BCWNS)

This project provides food and shelter to some of the homeless people in Bristol during the winter period and we are proud to be able to support it both practically and financially.

It took place between January and April and several of us from NLC got involved in serving at different church venues across the city where guests were offered hot food, a friendly environment and a bed for the night. The project was a tremendous success, with some of the guests being able to find jobs and more permanent accommodation.

Just before we came to the end of the scheduled finish of the project, the country went into lockdown and special arrangements had to be made for the guests. We thank God that those guests who needed it were able to be accommodated in local hotels that had been specifically set up to help take people off the streets to protect them during this pandemic.

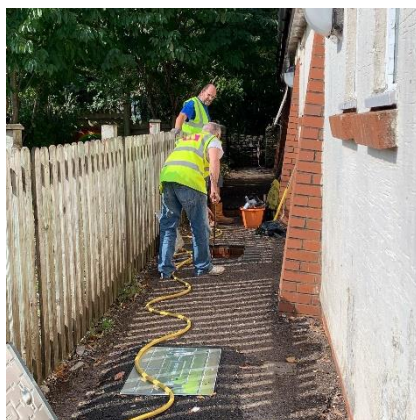
Working in the Community

By September we were feeling as a leadership team that we needed to break the pattern of Zoom meetings and create a bit of a “disrupter” and then see how God would lead us from there.

There was a concern that without our own building, NLC had gone off the map and so we wanted the communities we are in to see that we were still very much alive and active.

We arranged three Sundays where we focused on serving the community, doing maintenance work at Frenchay Village Hall, walking around the streets picking up litter and cleaning road signs, and also helping tidy gardens around the city for those who were unable to do the work themselves or just needed some extra support.

As part of this three week initiative, we also worked in Frenchay Primary School. See “The Noise 2020” below.



The Noise 2020

"The Noise" is about mobilising youth from local churches towards showing God's love in practical ways, serving urban communities across Bristol. We took part in this last year and were all geared up to serve the community again this year when everything had to be put on hold due to lockdown.

However, we were not deterred. Whilst we could not do anything practical at the time, we were able to provide financial support. Later in the year we went into Frenchay Primary School to do the work that had originally been planned for The Noise weekend.

Katherine Marks, the Headteacher, was hugely blessed by the work we had done the previous year and was keen for us to come back again. They needed a lot of work doing to the play areas around the outside of the school and also wanted a mud kitchen. So with tools in our hands we got to work.

Katherine and her staff were again blessed by the work we did and they wrote an article for the community news magazine to thank us.



Christmas Gift Bags

This is the third year that we have taken part in this initiative run by local Christian charity Sixty-One to provide Christmas gift bags to local prisoners.

Due to the Tier 3 restrictions we found ourselves in at this time, we were not able to all get together as a team to pack the bags. Instead, we distributed the work around and were still able to get 135 gift bags packed and cards written and returned within the required one day.



Kintsugi Hope

A number of us attended a meeting in the centre of Bristol where Patrick Regan was presenting Kintsugi Hope, a charity based in the UK striving to make a difference to people's mental wellbeing. 'Kintsugi' (金継ぎ) is a Japanese technique for repairing pottery with seams of gold. The word means 'golden joinery' in Japanese. This repairs the brokenness in a way that makes the object more beautiful, and even more unique than it was prior to being broken. Instead of hiding the scars it makes a feature of them. The mission of Kintsugi Hope is to see a world where mental and emotional health is understood and accepted, with safe and supportive communities for everyone to grow and flourish.

As a result of attending the presentation we decided to become a partner church of Kintsugi Hope, agreeing to regular financial support and sending a team on a training course in preparation for running a local Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Group. As with so many things, the current restrictions have made it difficult to get a group started, but several of us are now trained and ready to go. It is our hope that Helen Gossage and Helen Sheppard will start a Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Group in the New Year, starting with our own Daytime Small Group. If all goes well, we will then extend this outside of the church. Please pray for this wonderful initiative as emotional wellbeing has become a major concern during the pandemic.

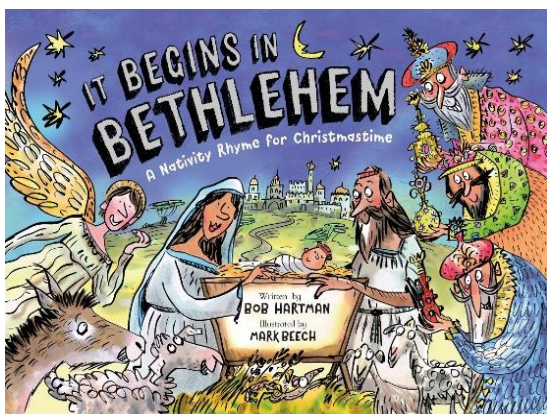
Other Activities

Where possible we continue to support our local foodbank, Messy Church, The Wild Goose Café and the Dementia Café.

Churches Together in Worship (CTiW)

CTiW is made up of New Life Church, Waterbrook, Frenchay Parish Church, Holy Trinity Stapleton and Stapleton Baptist. Whilst we have not been able to hold any in-person worship gatherings this year, the leadership team has continued to meet over Zoom in order to provide prayerful support for one another.

Our regular Easter dawn walk, and all the senior's lunches hosted by Waterbrook had to be cancelled during 2020. However, we were still able to deliver 7000 Christmas cards to homes across our church communities using the Royal Mail's delivery service. Each home in the "BS16 1" area received a Christmas card with the message "Hope has a name; his name is Jesus".



Open the Book has also been impacted this year. In 2019 we went into Frenchay Primary School every two weeks to present Bible stories. The children loved it and now recognise the Open the Book team. Easter 2020 we were due to go into the school and run some workshops with the children on how to do their own Open the Book session. Sadly, we have not been able to physically go into the school since March. We were, however, able to record the team acting out the nativity story based on a book from the Bible Society called *"It Begins in Bethlehem"*. The video was shown to the children on Monday 14th December and each child received their own copy of the story booklet.

You can view the Open the Book team performing this nativity story at: <https://youtu.be/Cyg1W5WbpRY>

Zambia

We had already planned not to travel out to Africa in 2020 and this had been communicated to Pastor Evans during 2019. So, in some ways the Coronavirus pandemic has not affected these plans. However, as you can imagine, it has been a very challenging time for those in Zambia, especially with the cost of food rising significantly. As a result, we were glad to be able to send extra financial support in order to purchase mealie meal for the families of the school and provide masks and sanitizers.



Despite the pandemic, Evans and his team have made great progress with their ongoing development of the school premises, finishing off the toilets and science block. You will see from the photographs that the work is a great testimony to our generosity and a witness for the Kingdom of God.



General Church News

As stated in the introduction, this has been an unusual year for the church as we moved all our meetings online using Zoom. However, we have managed to maintain a high degree of interaction and participation in our meetings and most people have been able to attend. Thanks to our worship team, we have also been able keep up to date with the latest worship songs.

Visiting speakers

Clearly, we have not been able to have many visiting speakers this year as we have not been meeting in person. We did manage to have Luke Goodway from Cheltenham Elim Church and Tony Martin from Glastonbury visit us before lockdown. We have also been blessed to host Rob Scott-Cook and Dave Mitchell from Woodlands Church via Zoom.

New Wine

Earlier in the year Dave, Nicky, Kim and I attended the New Wine Leader's Conference in Harrogate. This was just a few weeks before the country went into lockdown. It was an amazing and inspiring time listening to Paul Harcourt and other high-profile leaders sharing about the importance of the Holy Spirit. Much of what God had been speaking to us as a leadership was confirmed, encouraging us for the year ahead.

As we all know, United 2020 was cancelled but we were glad to be able to connect into New Wine through a series of pre-recorded broadcasts of their preaching and worship. We also hosted some *"Event Shelter"* Zoom sessions to substitute those times when we used to gather at the end of the day in the event shelter and share food and drink before going to bed. All in all, New Wine did an excellent job in some very difficult circumstances. We are hopeful that United 2021 will be able to go ahead in some form.

Prayer

Towards the end of 2019, the leadership and trustees joined together in a 40-day prayer initiative called "Draw the Circle" in response to all that God had been saying to us over the previous months. We all found this time extremely rewarding and consequently introduced it to the whole church at the beginning of 2020. It was a wonderful time as we all experienced a fresh motivation towards prayer. We know that many of the church have revisited "draw the Circle" throughout the ups and downs of the year. As a church we also took part in the National Day of Prayer in November.

Midweek Meetings

Our midweek meetings have always been an important part of church life, and we thank God that we have been able to continue them over Zoom, enjoying regular times for sharing and praying together, as well as the occasional quiz night. Towards the end of the year we used our midweek meetings to focus on mission, studying together "Mission Shaped Living", helping us all to think more about reaching out to our friends and family with the gospel.

External Giving

As a church we continue to be generous when we learn about needs. In addition to our considerable and regular giving to work in Zambia, we have made several substantial gifts to local projects such as BCWNS, Noise 2020, Bristol Churches City Fund, Sixty-One, inHope and smaller contributions to specific individuals and charities.

A Message from Pastor Richard

Like most of us, Kim and I faced many challenges in 2020 due to lockdowns and tier restrictions, but at the same time we have seen God's wonderful blessings. Even though we spent many weeks out of our own home due to building work, it also meant we were able to enjoy extended times with Esther, Nathan and Georgie, and of course Jesse. During lockdown we welcomed our latest grandson Joshua into the world, and whilst it was not possible to see him in the first few weeks after his birth, we thank God that he is healthy and happy and is already starting to crawl and get up to mischief. Nathan and Georgie moved into their new home which is perfect timing as they prepare for their new child expected in March. And I am so blessed that the church continues to be strong at this time, despite not being able to meet in person.

As time has gone on, I have found the constraints of not being able to meet physically increasingly hard. It has been wonderful meeting over Zoom and I thank God for such amazing technology. I wonder how we would have coped even 10 years ago. Nevertheless, I have sensed both in myself and probably most of us, a weariness of online meetings and a passion to meet once again in person. I thank God that there is light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccine roll out and I'm sure we'll be meeting in person this year as soon as it is safe to do so.

One clear message to us at the beginning of 2020 was for us to take church outside of the four walls of a building. In some ways this was taken out of our hands as church moved into our homes. But this passion for making a difference within our communities continues to burn strongly within me and I'm keen to make sure that we find creative ways of doing this no matter where we meet.

With this in mind, I have tried not to allow myself to sit down in my spirit during these times and have sought to find opportunities where I could serve God in different ways during this pandemic. For a short period at the start of lockdown, I was part of an Emergency Response Team for COVID-19 where I was available at the end of the phone to talk to people who had emotional struggles. I also trained to be part of the MentorMe team providing mentoring and support for those who have just come out of prison. I now meet regularly with my mentee, encouraging him in his journey to get his life back on track again. I network regularly with other leaders across the city to determine where the greatest needs are, and bring this back to our own leadership so that we can prayerfully respond. It is such a wonderful privilege to be able to serve God's purposes in this way.

As I look forward to the year ahead I feel God is stirring in my heart the importance of growth.

This is not necessarily growth in numbers, as this is not something we can necessarily control.

Rather, it is important that we can all look back at the end of the year and see how we are stronger in God than the year before; that we are not just repeating what we have always done, but that we are stretching ourselves into new opportunities. I pray that for each one of us, 2021 will be a year of personal growth and for New Life Church Bristol as a whole.

God bless you all

Richard

Pastor Richard Brown

