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THE MAGAZINE OF THE
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

idea

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JUST

COMMITTED
TO REFLECTING
GOD'S HEART FOR
JUSTICE



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WELCOME

For justice

The articles in this edition of *idea* will tell you that though these times are difficult, for Christians as much as others, God's people continue to, by His grace and power, step up to meet the needs of those in the UK and around the world who are vulnerable and suffering.

Christian healthcare workers, who the Christian Medical Association's Dr John Greenall says are pressed on every side, facing physical and mental exhaustion, push on to save and protect lives, upheld by their faith in Jesus and the prayers and support of the UK church (p 6).

Enabled by the tremendous generosity of churches of all denominations as well as schools and local businesses, Claire Grafton, an elder, shares that Tabernacle Baptist Church in Penarth has been able to provide food for those in her community who don't have enough (p 12).

Through cross-sector collaboration – which has seen the faith sector, public sector, voluntary sector, grassroots groups, businesses and local people team up – rough sleepers and those in insecure housing have been placed in safe accommodation so they don't become victims of the pandemic, writes Rev Ian Rutherford (22).

These and the other contributions show that we're rising to the challenges as we seek to reflect our Father's heart for justice. Our director of advocacy, Dr David Landrum, urges us to continue to wrestle for justice, ensuring that our strategic priority is to meet these challenges and seize the opportunities that the crisis brings (p 4).

Yours truly,

Naomi Osinnowo
Editor



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Gavin Calver: May we extend our view of what God can do



God is just and He calls His people to share His heart for justice, says **Dr Karen Fulton**, director of education and a lecturer at Belfast Bible College.

HE *is* SO WE ARE

God is just. This statement is regarded as a given in the Bible. It is asserted, not argued for. There is no attempt to prove that God is just by showing how God conforms to an external standard of justice. Rather, God is the source for any definition of justice.

We know what justice is and what it means to be just by looking at God's character and His actions. In Romans 3:26 Paul states that God is both just and the one who justifies. At face value these two concepts do not seem very closely connected. If anything, they seem contradictory. Being 'just' or 'justice' is associated with being detached, assessing simply on the evidence untouched by emotion. Whereas justifying, as explained by Paul in Romans and elsewhere, does not primarily express the idea of a detached assessment based on evidence but rather of God's commitment to providing humanity with a way out of a mess – salvation. How then can we square these two ideas?

“*God loves justice. The Psalms continually praise God for His justice. Justice is central to God's character.*”

First, it is worth noting that both 'just' and 'justify' have the same root idea or concept. This is reflected in the spelling of these terms in English: both begin with the same four letters, and in their associations, both are linked with courts and legal judgements. Similarly, in the original Greek, both words have a common root, 'dikai,' so Paul is in effect playing on words or making a pun. In a culture where letters were read aloud and heard, rather than read silently, Paul is deliberately using language in a way that will strike his hearers and stay lodged in their

minds. Throughout Romans Paul is repeatedly using words that evoke ideas of justice.

However, this heightens the conundrum rather than resolving it. How can God's justice lead Him to justify the ungodly (Romans 4:5)? Such a statement is surely a contradiction in terms, an injustice, rather than an example of justice in action. To understand Paul's point here we need to examine how words such as 'just' and 'justice' are understood in the Hebrew scriptures.

In the opening books of the Hebrew scriptures we can see God's concern for justice reflected in the laws He gives to Israel. Judges are to judge justly. Witnesses in court are not to be influenced by popular opinion but to testify with truth. Justice is for all: rich and poor, citizens and foreigners. There is to be no partiality. Leviticus 19:15 says, "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly."

God loves justice. The Psalms continually praise God for His justice. Justice

is central to God's character. His people are to rejoice that God is just and to follow His lead in practising justice. There is, however, a problem. The prophets challenge Israel because daily life is not characterised by justice (Is 10:1-2; Lam 3:34-36; Amos 5:7). Impartiality has lost out to the desire to please the powerful and maintain popularity. Judges take bribes and ignore the need for justice for all (Is 5:23; Mic 7:3).

The prophets highlight three specific groups as suffering injustice: foreigners, the fatherless and widows. In the cultural context of the time, these are groups on the edges of society. They are vulnerable and so are easily ignored and marginalised. But ignoring the marginalised is failing to deliver justice and offends God who is just. He will take action: "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against...those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice..." says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 3:5).

That God is concerned for justice is clear. That His heart for justice springs from His character as a just God is also clear. However, that God is just is not the only thing that can be said about God's character. God has other qualities too: goodness, faithfulness, kindness, love – so His justice is part of a wider dynamic of who God is, how He acts and what He values.

To understand the concept of justice in biblical terms we need to see it as part of the overall picture reflecting God's character in totality. Justice operates within the framework of God's commitment to humanity and is therefore essentially relational. It is not characterised by detachment but by concern and

We live in a world where there is massive disparity. This is true not simply across the world but within individual countries as well.

compassion. Understanding justice in the wider context of God's character helps to explain Paul's reference to God as both just and the one who justifies, the justifier.

God as justifier acts to save because of His mercy, faithfulness and compassion seen in His commitment to His creation. God's character leads Him to act in kindness and to keep His promises of salvation. Just as in the case of Israel where God looked for justice for all, regardless of ethnicity or gender or social status, so when God acts to save it is for all, regardless of ethnicity or gender or social status. Impartiality in terms of disregarding race, gender and social status is significant in terms of embodying the justice God calls for.

God is just and He calls His people to share His heart for justice. In practice, this means a concern for the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, for those not valued in the social structures in which they live. The laws in the Old Testament called Israel to treat all alike, rich and poor. While it is possible to conceive of a society in which the rich and powerful are disadvantaged, in practice it tends to work the other way around and the poor and vulnerable are disadvantaged. In sharing God's heart for justice, we need to

ensure that the disadvantaged have a voice and are not ignored or treated unfairly simply because they have less power or status.

In recent months the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the news. Stories in the news have thrown into sharp relief inequalities already present in both the UK and across the world. To give one example: in April there was much discussion in the media about the shortage of ventilators in the UK and the need for more. At that time the UK had around 12,000 ventilators with a further 1,500 ordered; South Sudan had 4; Central African Republic had 3.

We live in a world where there is massive disparity. This is true not simply across the world but within individual countries as well. In such a context 'being just' means working for structures that ensure the rights of the vulnerable are protected rather than eroded, even when that is not in our personal interest. A commitment to justice, in the biblical sense, springs from a heart of compassion, a concern that those already disadvantaged are not further disadvantaged.

Sharing God's heart for justice requires wisdom and insight. We are all influenced by the cultures we live in, both consciously and unconsciously. Our reactions and perceptions of 'being just' are at times flawed and imperfect. To past generations slavery seemed fair, Holy War appropriate, distinctions on the basis of race reasonable. All of these were in various ways justified by an appeal to the text of the Bible. We need wisdom as we seek to determine what being 'just' means in our particular context and culture, humility to recognise where we are both wrong and right in our perceptions, and a willingness to learn from others.



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All Christians are called to wrestle for justice, because from Genesis to Revelation, scripture shows us that God “hates” injustice, says **Dr David Landrum**, director of advocacy, Evangelical Alliance.

THE PURSUIT OF

justice

Today there's a lot of talk about justice. People expect it and even demand it. But what exactly is it, and why is it important? Throughout history, there have been widely different understandings of justice, with ideas of it shaped by both beliefs and events.

So, what effect will the coronavirus pandemic have on our view of human rights and human wrongs? Will we emerge from the crisis with the same concept of justice as we entered the crisis? Or will we see new ideas surface, or even old ideas of justice come to the fore?

The Bible identifies justice as a moral phenomenon, inseparable from righteousness. That's why Amos (5:24) declared: “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Justice is about fairness in the way people are dealt with, promoting what is right, resisting what is wrong, and restoring a balance – which explains why on the dome above the Royal Courts of Justice stands a gilt bronze statue of Lady Justice. Holding a sword in one hand and scales in the other, this is a symbol of the authority needed to secure justice and maintain the rule of law, which, according to philosopher Vishal

— “
*Without reference to God –
 to a higher authority
 – justice becomes relative
 to human ideas and
 human will.*
 — ”

Magalwadi, is human civilisations greatest achievement of the last 1,000 years and a distinctly Christian gift to the world.

In this sense, justice is not only a cultural reflection of spiritual values, it is also very much connected with the concept of government (the right ordering of our relational priorities to both God and to each other), which explains why the advocacy work of the Evangelical Alliance has a strong focus on it.

For God, all authority exists for the purpose of government, and all government exists for justice. Thankfully, for God, all justice involves judgement and mercy. This is because judgement and mercy define each other and can't exist in isolation. We can't judge without the capacity for mercy, and we can't be merciful without the need

for judgement. This is a balancing truth that earthly authorities neglect at their peril. When justice and mercy are disconnected, the law becomes either trivialised or tyrannical. So, in light of who God is, He calls His people to “do justice and love mercy” (Micah 6:8) in a way that expresses His love with equity. This glorifies God and demonstrates the coming kingdom of Jesus.

In our demands for justice it is important to be mindful of the facts that all injustice exists because of us, not God, which places a responsibility on us to address it, that full justice will never be done until the kingdom fully comes, and that justice is inescapable. God guarantees that it will, ultimately, be done, which removes our need or desire to take injustice personally. As Paul affirms: “The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them” (1 Timothy 5:24). So justice will, indeed must, be done. In light of this eternal assurance, Christians have a civic duty to see that justice is seen to be done, that reconciliation is encouraged, and that redemption is always a possibility.

It's worth noting that the Bible doesn't describe justice as something that comes easy, but rather as something to be pursued, chased, sought out, struggled for. It shows



that, until Christ returns, this wrestling for justice is the responsibility of all Christians, because from Genesis to Revelation, scripture shows us that God “hates” injustice. Whether its bribery, corruption or abuse of power, God calls for honesty and integrity in administering justice (Kings and Judges), and He also calls for advocacy for those affected by injustice (prophets – speaking truth to power) – all of which makes pursuing justice in and through authority structures a deeply biblical calling because, as Augustine observed, “justice being taken away then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms?”

“The Lord loves righteousness and justice” (Psalm 33:5) because justice is about realising ‘shalom’ – putting things right. So there’s also a strong connection between justice and truth – what’s right. But what happens when God is separated from justice? What happens when justice is secularised? Today, justice (and the various freedoms and rights that attend it) is changing, not least because to the secular mind there is a legal solution to every problem.

In the absence of the possibility of human regeneration (repentance and new life) legislating is all the atheist has to

deal with the vagaries of human nature. Consequently, whereas once our legal system operated by a Judaeo-Christian view that justice exists to protect the vulnerable, it now increasingly operates on the basis that what is not legal is forbidden, which requires the state to expand its authority into hitherto private spheres such as family life, relationships and even conscience, and entails what journalist Melanie Phillips describes as “the elevation of law to a doctrine of legal infallibility. The law itself has become a kind of secular religion, with lawyers acting as the new priesthood”.

Alongside this trend, in the absence of a biblical compass for what’s right and wrong, our society has become increasingly relativistic. A society in which scholar John Dominic Crossan observes: “There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there is...the sea.”

Without reference to God – to a higher authority – justice becomes relative to human ideas and human will. The combination of an ‘imperial regulatory state’ imposing secular values in a society which lacks a common point of reference is dangerous for human rights and civil

liberties, not least because the situation favours those with the wealth and the education needed to secure their own justice, and disfavours those who are poor and marginalised – those who simply lack the means to protect themselves against injustice, because as theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff put it, the poor are “not only disproportionately more vulnerable to injustice, but usually disproportionately actual victims of injustice. Injustice is not equally distributed”.

In other words, the vast bulk of injustice falls upon the largest group of people who are least able to handle it, as evidenced by the recent cuts to legal aid, the rise of what the Law Society describes as ‘legal advice deserts’ in poor communities. As a lawyer friend once remarked, “We can all have justice, the question is: how much justice can you afford?”, which is in itself a grave injustice.

The fact that “the righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern” (Proverbs 29:7) serves to emphasise the need to provide not only relief and aid, but also to address structural issues through public policy and advocacy, or to quote evangelical pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice; we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

In an age of identity politics, often when people talk about justice, they really mean ‘just-us’, and Christians are not immune to this. After all, loving our enemies has never been easy. As the seismic economic impact of the coronavirus begins to shake the sandy foundations of our secularised society, there will be great challenges regarding issues such as judicial elitism and fair access to justice. But there will also be great opportunities to renew our society. In the cultural reset that is ahead, it is vitally important that evangelical Christians provide public leadership which restores a biblical model of justice that honours God and benefits all made in His image.

Meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities that the crisis brings must become a strategic priority for the church. It will require courage and wisdom, but most of all faith in God’s abiding promise to “follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 16:20).

Our healthcare workers need us, the church, just as much as our country needs them, says **Dr John Greenall**.

HARD PRESSED

ON EVERY SIDE... **BUT NOT CRUSHED**

Another WhatsApp message pings on my phone: “Feel very close to tears a lot of the time. 5 deaths in the last 24 hrs. Feel upheld in prayer, also huge openness from colleagues. Several are praying with us at 7pm having never prayed in their life before. Please pray that the joy of the Lord is our strength.”

It’s Audrey, a consultant working in an intensive care unit (ICU). She’s living in the hospital, distancing herself from her family and working across five ICUs in her hospital, an increase from the usual one.

Adi, an ICU nurse in Bedfordshire, tells me, “As nurses you have to stay in that unit for 13 hours. You wear a tight mask around your face, a hat, a face shield, a gown, two pairs of gloves, and something to protect your shoes. It is physically draining. You can’t breathe normally. You are sweating inside. You can’t even go to the loo because your patients are terribly sick.”

“*In the hospitals there has been a huge reorganisation of care: red zones for COVID-19 patients, green for the rest.*”

The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) has more than 5,000 members around the country ranging from medical and nursing students to senior clinical decision makers in hospitals, GP surgeries and the wider healthcare system. We are hearing stories from healthcare workers with multiple challenges. There is physical and mental exhaustion, both the toll of wearing personal

protective equipment (PPE), but also the uncertainty of almost daily changes to services and protocols. Colleagues are anxious about being exposed to infection. Shift handovers are being conducted at a distance.

In the hospitals there has been a huge reorganisation of care: red zones for COVID-19 patients, green for the rest. Many staff have been redeployed; a children’s occupational therapist tells me how she is now on adult wards and has been trained how to certify death. Walking down my hospital corridors there is an almost eerie silence in the corridors punctuated by a blur of activity as a ‘COVID patient’ is whisked from one ward to another. On the ward the nurses speak on the telephones to relatives who are not allowed to visit critically ill family members. Final-year medical and nursing students have seen the last few months of their course disappear and are starting work early.

In the community video consultations are now the norm in general practice. Many unwell people seem to be holding off attending. In my role as a paediatrician I've had parents crying down the telephone begging me not to call them into hospital. "I'm not going to hospital," said one mother, "there's a plague in there." In addition, routine services have been paused to free up staff for other areas. My work with vulnerable children leads me to consider the impact of lockdown on children in care and difficult home situations.

In the midst of this staff are feeling more appreciated than ever. 'Wellbeing zones' have appeared in most hospitals offering food and drink to staff. Taxi companies have offered free rides and messages of support adorn the walls of staffrooms. One nurse told me how at 8pm one Thursday the patients on her ward broke into applause and clapped for carers. She had to leave the bay with tears in her eyes.

We are seeing doctors and nurses more connected and more intentional about integrating their faith and work than ever before. One of my local wards begin shifts with prayer for a colleague currently critically unwell with COVID-19. With most chaplaincy teams unable to operate and visits banned, a junior doctor shares how a patient had asked him to pray for her – as he shared the Easter story she echoed the words of Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," and then said, "Jesus is my hope, I know He will deliver me."

Sarah, a junior doctor, says, "As we have been faced with mortality this has been an opportunity to share my faith with colleagues...a colleague asked me to pray for their relative in ICU...that's not something I would have done before coronavirus."

Chelsea is a newly qualified children's nurse seconded to an adult ICU. "I am looking after a lot of very sick patients but when I walk through those doors, I have peace because I know Jesus is with me."

Ed, an A&E doctor in London, shares, "My faith is absolutely central to the way I interact with patients and colleagues. People are feeling vulnerable and scared, but it means they are opening up a lot more and I can share my hope with them (that)... our greatest treasure in this life is Jesus... our greatest treasure in the life to come is Jesus, and that's never truer than when we

"We are seeing doctors and nurses more connected and more intentional about integrating their faith and work than ever before."

are in the midst of a crisis and we're facing our own mortality...and it's lovely to get the chance to share that with other people as well. This is my hope. This is why I'm not panicking."

Khara, who works in the Caribbean, shares, "As a Christian healthcare professional, I love the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Christ. I identify with Esther in the book of Esther where Mordecai says to her, maybe you've been placed here for such a time as this."

How you can support healthcare workers

The crisis has galvanised prayer. From mid-March we hosted 'COVID1900prayer', praying live at 7pm across our social media channels, including praying for every region and for global needs. There has been an outpouring of fellowship in CMF's local groups with many meeting weekly online for 'Zoom Debriefs'. Our national wellbeing scheme has offered 24/7 prayer and support. Up to 900 healthcare workers attended CMF's national online gathering, hearing timely talks from Habakkuk and from futurist Patrick Dixon on 'Life Beyond COVID-19'.

"Drop healthcare workers you know a line, listen to them, and offer support where it's needed."

You might be wondering how you can support healthcare workers. Can I encourage you to get informed? For example, you can hear more than 40 stories like the above on 'voices from the frontline' through CMF's first Incision Podcast. Drop healthcare workers you know a line, listen to them, and offer support where it's needed. Perhaps most importantly, please pray. We have produced a seven-day guide to praying for Christian healthcare workers and other resources for the public on our website and blogs. You can clap and pray for your healthcare workers every Thursday evening.

Here are some prayer requests from frontline Christian healthcare workers:

- "Pray for us, that we have strength and wisdom from above to deal with these situations because it is really challenging." (Adi, intensive care nurse)
- "Please pray for the students who have had to graduate early and are now working as doctors and nurses in an unprecedented environment." (Rachael, final-year medical student)
- "I think it's quite likely that I will contract the illness at some point. Would you pray that something of that peace that I have in facing illness, and even in facing death, will be conveyed in how I behave at work? And that I would have an awareness of God being with me, that I'd know when to stop and spend a bit more time with people and where perhaps to share something of my faith with colleagues as appropriate." (David, medical registrar)

"Therefore we do not lose heart.

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Dr John Greenall is CMF's associate CEO and a paediatrician in Bedfordshire. To find out more about CMF, whose mission is to unite and equip Christian doctors and nurses to live and speak for Jesus, visit cmf.org.uk. CMF's resources can be found at cmf.li/covid19Res and its 'voices from the frontline' podcast at cmf.li/39WJGc

As we look to renew and rebuild our society in the months and years ahead, how can we reimagine the public conversation on human rights? asks **David Smyth**, head of Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland.

BRIDGING THE gap



It's easy to find the gaps, those contested spaces between ourselves and others. In many ways this is good and healthy: we're wired this way and our differences are often profoundly important.

Many times, though, we fail to see any common ground between ourselves and our neighbours, let alone our enemies. When we do, we're conditioned to believe it can only be entered by way of compromise. So, the idea of hosting on a shared space, or even setting foot there, requires the willingness to take a risk and build a relationship.

All this frames a public conversation I hosted recently with the chief commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Mr Les Allamby. Our relationship began in 2016 when the Evangelical Alliance organised a prayer walk as part of the Belfast Human Rights Festival. We planned to stop at key places throughout the city to pray for Christian, civic, legal and political leaders as they work for the marginalised and vulnerable.

Pro-choice activists turned up at our first location to protest the decision to include the Evangelical Alliance in the festival. This group deemed us to be 'anti-women' and 'anti-human rights' because of our belief that both lives have value and dignity when it comes to the abortion debate. We invited the protestors to join us in our prayer walk but they declined. The gap was clear.

Our next stop was the Human Rights Commission. We were invited inside for tea and coffee and graciously allowed to pray for and with some of the commissioners. Following the protest and calls for our exclusion, this act of generosity and hospitality humbled us. It wasn't long

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As we talked, we did not avoid the gaps or tip-toe around them.
”

after this that we partnered to develop an educational animation on the freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

To hear Mr Allamby retell this incident in our conversation from his perspective, as a common point in our story, was fascinating. He went on to share candidly about how he felt about the absence of a personal faith in his own life. This was despite reading the Bible daily as a teenager and retaining a deep respect for the teachings of Jesus around seeking justice for people.

As we talked, we did not avoid the gaps or tip-toe around them. We talked openly and honestly about our deep differences when it comes to abortion. The commission's perspective saddens me, frustrates me, angers me in so many ways. I'm sure my views are considered morally wrong and offensive by some within the commission. We fundamentally see life through very different lenses.

I appreciated that the commissioner went out of his way to say that he disagreed with people being labeled as homophobic or a misogynist because of their genuinely held convictions around issues like marriage or human life. Mr Allamby articulated how he saw faith as an important part of public life. We both agree that tone and language are vital in these sensitive debates and that spaces for conversation and understanding difference should not be shut down through

insult but maintained through relationship.

We went on to discuss shared concerns for the most vulnerable in light of COVID-19. We talked about a piece of advocacy the commission had engaged with on care homes which is very relevant right now. We shared an interest in the welfare of asylum seekers and refugees, restrictions on civil liberties, and concerns around data, surveillance and freedom of movement in the future. For me our shared heart for justice and the protection of the vulnerable is evidence that despite the scars of the fall (Genesis 3), there remains a deep desire across humanity to see wrongs put right.

We are divided by the idea that human beings are not the ultimate arbiters of human rights. We believe that humanity is endowed with value and purpose beyond ourselves, and that this purpose and justice we pursue is God-shaped and will be delivered through the merciful judgement and good reign of the Judge and King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Christians we are to be salt and light in a dark and decaying world. This requires us not to hide away or abdicate the public square, but to go out as ambassadors with the message of redemption and reconciliation with God through Christ.

So the gap between us remains clear, but common ground rose to meet us when we each stepped out in risk and relationship. We hope to explore these gaps and shared spaces further as we continue our 'Reimagining the public conversation' series. We'll be hosting a range of civic leaders and asking how we can renew and rebuild our society in the months and years ahead. This conversation is available at www.reimaginingfaith.com

As the church, we have a real opportunity to be hope and reassurance for those facing and dealing with death, says **Claire Wretham**, spiritual care coordinator at Marie Curie Hospice: Cardiff and the Vale.

HOPE

IN THE FACE OF DEATH

My experience during this pandemic has brought many challenges and difficulties to mind, but what I have been most convicted of is the real, tangible impact of the virus on our society, on our culture and on our spiritual lives.

We are only just seeing the beginning of this. I believe that we haven't recognised the heavy burdens placed on healthcare staff during this time, and there will be many challenging conversations over the coming years as we fully process this season.

My role as a spiritual care coordinator and the kind of work that we do at Marie Curie Hospice in Penarth, Wales, is by nature very much a ministry of presence, which in this current season of social distancing has been particularly difficult to adapt to. We have had to rethink how we care for those who are in the final stages of life.

I support families and patients and staff, and all have come with their own set of challenges in this season. In terms of our patients and their loved ones, I have been quite convicted by the injustice of not being able to honour the dying and their families' need for grief and mourning in the same way we normally would. Despite recognising the need for social distancing and limiting attendees at funerals or ceremonies for health reasons, it feels unjust to not give people the time and space to grieve and mourn – spiritually, emotionally and psychologically, as it is a huge part of healing.

"I have found hope and peace in knowing that as Christians we hold fast to the promise that God will bring forth good out of this season."

As it stands, only closest family may attend funerals. Thinking about how many other people might typically attend a funeral, such as friends, distant family or colleagues, it saddens me to think that these people are deprived of this opportunity and that we cannot support them when there is great need at this time. Death has become particularly confronting as a result of this virus.

If I consider our staff and other healthcare workers on the frontline, I struggle with the expectation placed on those who are caring for COVID-19 patients without the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). We have seen this first-hand in our centres. We have cared for COVID patients, and we have also lost several colleagues to this virus due to a lack of PPE. That saddens me greatly.

We send them 'into battle' without the appropriate equipment to protect them, when they are already giving back so much

to their community, and that feels unjust in some ways. I wonder how we will look back on this period and the dedication and sacrifice that many of our healthcare workers have given. The mental, emotional and physical effect due to the expectations placed on the workers is huge, and it seems like we won't see the real effects of this demand for years to come.

As difficult as it is to not be free to sit at somebody's bedside, or to hold their hand if they are questioning or in pain, I have found hope and peace in knowing that as Christians we hold fast to the promise that God will bring forth good out of this season, and that God is with our patients all the more, especially if we cannot be.

As a society and as a church, we are often poorly equipped to deal with death, with the fear, the questions and the concerns that come with it – whether people have a faith or not. As the church, we have a real opportunity here to speak into this space and to be hope and reassurance in death specifically, as it has become such a 'present' issue in our world and our lives.

It is my hope and my prayer that as people of faith we are able to point to the hope that we have in Jesus, and that we are able to prepare ourselves well for conversations around death and the fear in that, but most importantly the hope that we have in our Lord and Saviour.

Claire Wretham spoke to Christine Uhlig, research assistant, Evangelical Alliance Scotland.

Living

THE PRAYER

By **Fred Drummond**, director of prayer and Scotland, Evangelical Alliance



One of my favourite chapters in the Old Testament is Isaiah 58; this is also the chapter I find most challenging.

It starts by critiquing outward surface spirituality. The people seem to be doing all the right things. They are seeking God daily. They are eager to understand the ways of God. They want an encounter with God. They fast. It all sounds pretty good, and if we were to only look at their religious practices, I think we might be quite impressed with them.

In the famous Morecambe and Wise sketch with Andre Previn, Morecambe utters the brilliant line, "I'm playing all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order." So it is with those Isaiah challenges: they are doing a lot of the right things but not necessarily with the right motive.

Their lives don't back up their expressions of piety. They are proud, manipulative and abusive. They give the impression that they are close to God, but their lives are not being lived in a godly manner that would please Him. There is no missional expression of their faith. They are not moved by the plight of others.

God makes clear that His passion is for justice. Their fast should be to bring freedom. It should be to care for the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalised, the broken. The poor and the hungry should be lifted up.

This is the good news of the kingdom of God. God reaches out to the lowly and sets them free – lifts them up and restores them. The language of God is a language of love, hope, restoration and justice. He calls His people to share His passion.

The amazing love of God reveals itself in another way. He is not finished with the people yet. There is restoration for them. The chapter has some amazing promises for those who align themselves with the passions of God. If you demonstrate and live for the justice of God, then...

- "your light will rise in the darkness",
- "the lord will guide you always",
- "you will be called a repairer of broken walls",
- "you will find joy in the Lord and will ride in triumph".

The point is that when we are waiting upon God, seeking His face, we must allow ourselves to be transformed so that our lives are in line with the things God cares about. Justice is one of the things God clearly cares about.

As we strive to reflect our Father's heart for justice, perhaps we could take some time to examine our hearts, and ask ourselves, am I demonstrating my faith by the things I do, does my spirituality have a missional expression, are my passions the same as God's?

prayer

*Almighty Lord, thank you for your love.
Thank you for your patience.
Thank you for your faithfulness.
Thank you for your salvation.*

Help me to care for the things you are passionate about.

Use me to reach the most vulnerable in our society.

Help me to demonstrate my faith with acts of kindness.

Grant me a soft heart, an open hand and a positive word.

Save me from a life of seeking you with all the wrong motives.

Teach me your ways, o God, that I may live in your promise.

In Jesus' name

Amen

How can we serve and empower older people amid the coronavirus pandemic? asks **Carl Knightly**, chief executive, Faith in Later Life.

EQUALLY PRECIOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT

In April I attended my elderly aunt's funeral. Only I wasn't there in person; I clicked on a link to access a webcam and watch the service. This is one of the many significant changes to life since the onset of the coronavirus crisis.

My mother and another aunt were both allowed to attend the funeral but they chose not to. My aunt has underlying health conditions and my mother was understandably anxious about the risk of contracting COVID-19 in the process of leaving the house.

Herein lies a distressing consequence of coronavirus: hundreds of thousands of older people with underlying health conditions have been advised by the Government to not leave their homes; and of those older people who are 'allowed' to leave their homes, many do not want to because they're anxious. No other demographic in this moment is the subject of such attention and associated with such great risk. On top of this, the desire to revive the economy has led to suggestions that younger people should be able to return to work, but the 'elderly' (who of course are not one homogenous group) should stay quarantined until a vaccine is found.

Whilst this is a complex situation, there is a risk that we as a society are further increasing generational divides, and implying that those who are older are of less value. But

isn't it wonderful to know that older people are as precious to the Lord as anyone else? The Bible talks of the wisdom of older people – wisdom accumulated over a lifetime – and we are reminded in Psalm 92 that older believers “still bear fruit in old age”. Church is beautifully intergenerational, and older Christians who have been faithfully following Jesus for many years are a powerful witness. Oh, how we all long to hear that we have “fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4).

As the church of God, we are all called to serve and empower the vulnerable: “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause” (Isaiah 1:17). We know our God cares deeply and has a heart for justice. And we know that the elderly, often frail or widowed or both, need the church to mirror our Father's heart for justice and be a loud voice for those whose voices need amplifying.

In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, the majority of vulnerable and at-risk groups are older, and often isolated, so what can Christians do to help them? Faith in Later Life and the Evangelical Alliance recently arranged a meeting for UK Christian care home providers, Christian denominational representatives, and some frontline workers who engage in ministry with older people. We prayed, shared and planned, as we

thought about how we as Christians can respond to the current pandemic. But whether in positions of leadership or not, we can all show society what faith, hope and love look like. We can be the hands and feet of the Lord Jesus to those around us who may be lonely or afraid or both.

To help you respond to these needs, we at Faith in Later Life have written blogs and created resources covering a range of topics including anxiety and mental health, engaging with those who aren't online, coronavirus and dementia, and supporting each other when we can't physically attend a funeral (they're available free of charge on our website: faithinlaterlife.org).

Additionally, we have partnered with the Church of England and Holy Trinity Claygate to launch a national free phoneline, Daily Hope, for Christians and non-Christians, and particularly those who do not have internet, to connect, listen to hymns, and share in prayers and reflections (0800 804 8044).

We can all play our part. Do you know older people in your church or wider community? Why not give them a call today and find out how they are? You could tell them about Daily Hope or ask if they need any groceries.

We're living in extraordinary and difficult times, but we have a timeless God with a heart for justice, who calls us to “plead the widow's cause”.

Over the years, and especially in this moment, we have seen God provide for our needs and the needs of those in our community, shares **Claire Grafton**, an elder at Tabs.



The miracle

OF GOD'S PROVISION

Over 25 years ago Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth, set up a small charity to help with what seemed to be an increasing problem with homelessness in the area. A bond scheme was formed and in the first year three folk were helped into accommodation with bonds of £30.

The work has grown and today more than 80 households are supported with bonds of up to £550 each. However, over time we came to realise that helping someone into a home is just the start of a long journey together. When you are struggling to pay rent and other bills on a low income, most often the first thing to go is food, and about 10 years ago we became aware that there were people in our community who were going hungry.

In 2011 Pyramid Rock came to Tabs, as our church is informally known, and children at the summer holiday club learnt about the story of Joseph from Genesis, that throughout the ups and downs of his life God had a plan for him. It was a plan that would bring provision and security not just for the nation of Egypt but more importantly for Joseph's family in Canaan. When God gave Joseph the meaning of Pharaoh's dream, He also gave him the wisdom to administer the nation's food supply so they could survive the impending famine.

That year we continued Joseph's story at our Harvest Festival. Reading from Genesis

“
*Helping someone
 into a home is just the
 start of a long journey
 together.*
 ”

41, we invited the church family to donate a different sort of harvest gift, no longer cabbages, carrots and sheaf shaped loaves; non-perishable food items were now on the church shopping list. An old wardrobe with new pyramid shaped doors stood on the platform and as its makeshift shelves were filled, Pharaoh's pantry was born.

Since then God has blessed us abundantly. By downsizing our large Victorian manse we were able to purchase a building opposite the church. This ministry centre is home to our housing charity, Home Access, the foodbank and several community groups. The foodbank is supported by churches of all denominations across Penarth, together with schools and many other local organisations. In 'normal times' the foodbank is one day a week and at the same time we serve breakfast, enabling us to spend time getting to know the people who come in, to pray with them and to provide appropriate support. There have been times when the pantry has seemed bare, but God has always provided

enough food to meet the need and we have been guided by Jesus' instruction in Matthew (10:8): "Freely you have received; freely give."

Responding to sudden change

In March, everything changed. Within the space of a week churches across the country were closed as the Government announced a lockdown to prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Panic buying led to shortages of some food items, and those not able to organise or afford online shops quickly found their cupboards empty. As social distancing measures were introduced, we realised that in order to continue serving the most vulnerable in our community we would need to do things differently.

Just before the Government announced the first period of lockdown, we moved the foodbank across the road into the church building. This allowed us to spread out and work within government guidelines for social distancing. In anticipation of greater need we made the decision to open daily. This meant that we would need more volunteers and more stock. At this point the miracle of God's provision began. A photograph of the food store on the town's helping hand's Facebook page together with opening times announced that we were ready. Virtual conversations around the town took off and we were soon overwhelmed by offers of support from across the whole community.

People called wanting to help with gifts



of food, money and time. In the same week the local newspaper published an article not only about the foodbank, but also about how we as a church were responding to the crisis. They wanted to know what plans we had to care for our members and how we would continue to worship together given the closure of churches. Alongside details of the foodbank, they published details of the services we were streaming on social media platforms.

We are now weeks into lockdown and are now seeing the effects of reduced hours, furloughing and job losses. Across the town more people are finding it difficult to cope financially, and we are trying to reach as many as possible and to make it as easy as we can for them to access help. We realise that for lots of people pride and shame compete with need and so we have returned to calling the foodbank a pantry in our publicity, inviting people to share the resources we have been given.

“
*He promises to
 open the windows
 of heaven and pour
 down a blessing.*
 ”

To help overcome any stigma people may feel we are inviting them not only to visit us but to contact us by email and telephone. We have planned deliveries for those unable to leave home. Another difference in the way we do things is that we no longer make up standardised food parcels; we now encourage people to give us a shopping list. In some cases this has led to us giving less rather than more than we did previously as they take just what they need. Volunteers then put together bags of fresh and non-perishable food, toiletries and household

products as requested. As people wait other volunteers are nearby to listen, chat and pray with them. Each bag given out includes our verse for the year postcard, appropriately Joshua 1:9 – “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, do not be discouraged” – and has a personal prayer of encouragement written on the back.

Over the years, and especially at the moment, we have seen God provide, not only for our needs but so much more, enabling us to meet the needs of others and thereby sharing His love and expanding His kingdom. As we look back to our early days and revisit the story of Pharaoh’s pantry, we realise that God has been preparing us for this moment. In the book of Malachi (3:10-12) God challenges all of us to honour Him with our gifts and in return He promises to open the windows of heaven and pour down a blessing until there is no more need. At Tabs, we can testify to the reality of that promise.

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Tearfund's chief executive, **Nigel Harris**, explains how the charity and its global network of local churches and Christian partners are playing a pivotal role responding to this global health crisis.



Made for TIMES LIKE THESE

Tearfund was born out of disaster. In 1968, the Biafra crisis in West Africa resulted in 40 million refugees. As images were broadcast across the world, it proved a wake-up call to the evangelical church and Christians in the UK.

They could not stand by while millions suffered. Many felt compelled to give in response and the Evangelical Alliance started to receive their donations. From this, Tearfund was formed: a Christ-centred response to global poverty and emergencies, working through the local church wherever possible.

Over the last five decades, Tearfund has been at the forefront of responses to global emergencies, such as the HIV/AIDS crisis from the 1980s onwards, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa, and the ongoing climate crisis.

Over these decades we have learnt, developed and sharpened our response to emergencies. Much of our work now helps

“
Over these decades we have learnt, developed and sharpened our response to emergencies.
”

poor communities prepare for and become more resilient when disaster strikes. As well as supporting communities to find solutions to the poverty and injustice that they face, we also offer training and expertise through our network of Christian partners. This means that they are better prepared if an earthquake, flood or medical emergency hits.

We have now established a growing network of 15,000 local churches to call on to respond, with an ambition to double that over the next three years. Together, we offer a truly global response to the biggest emergencies across the world

including drought, hunger, lack of water and sanitation, conflict, the refugee crisis, child exploitation, ending sexual violence, environmental degradation... and now coronavirus and COVID-19.

The last few months have been a testing time for us all, with huge upheaval and the need for a resilient, united response to this global pandemic. We are continuing to pray for all of the Tearfund family: our supporters and their loved ones, friends and communities. We feel their pain deeply, share in their mourning, and have lost friends and colleagues too.

But through it all, as always, Tearfund has faced up to disaster, following Jesus where the need is greatest. Our response has been swift and targeted. I've been hugely impressed at how our staff on the frontline and in the UK had to, almost overnight, refocus the direction of much of our work.

In late April, the course of the virus was not clear. But across the world, it's the poorest and most vulnerable who are

likely to be hit hardest. That is why we have been concentrating our efforts to stop the spread. We are particularly concerned for people in the countries where Tearfund work, who already struggle because of food shortages, conflict and the climate crisis. Poor health care and nutrition, lack of water and sanitation, and cramped, often overcrowded, homes have been shown to spread the virus more quickly. For these people, coronavirus could be devastating.

Elderly and homeless people and people with underlying health conditions are at greatest risk. This includes those with weakened immune systems, such as people living with HIV, and those who suffer from diseases that are common among people living in poverty such as malaria, tuberculosis and pneumonia.

But it is not just the pandemic that is causing families hardship. Lockdowns and quarantine, while clearly necessary, are much harder for people in extreme poverty. Those forced to stay at home cannot earn an income to support themselves and

their families. Many have no government provision to help them out.

Restrictions such as social distancing are much harder in poor communities. Often people live in close proximity with extended family and may not have spare rooms to isolate sick relatives. People who live on limited income (many on less than \$1 a day) are finding it hard not to be able to shop for food daily. This means that they have to choose between hunger and risking their health and the health of others. The best way to combat this is by preventing the spread of the virus through education and public health messages.

Tearfund and our network of churches were at the forefront of the Ebola crisis response (2014-2016 and 2018-present), and we are using the knowledge and expertise we have gained to save lives and protect families from coronavirus. From our Ebola experience, we know that working through trusted local churches and faith

leaders is vital to effectively communicate hygiene messages.

Alongside churches and our Christian partners, we are making sure that the poorest people have access to correct information and life-saving support. We are

“We have done all this in the context of a very tough year for everyone in the UK, including charities.”

We are also constructing water tanks and tap stands and delivering emergency food to the most vulnerable. Our existing projects – such as feeding centres and emergency cash assistance programmes – are being adapted to make sure the people we’ve already been working with before the coronavirus crisis are still supported, and will continue to be.

We have done all this in the context of a very tough year for everyone in the UK, including charities. In recent months we’ve faced difficult times with church buildings closed and summer festivals and fundraising events cancelled. We are concerned about what happens if we receive fewer donations – particularly the effect this would have

on people living in poverty.

Please offer your support where you can. When this crisis has abated, Tearfund will still be there on the frontline facing the biggest worldwide challenges in some of the toughest contexts: we work in more than 50 of the world’s poorest countries, including



working to prevent the virus from spreading through sharing hygiene training and hand washing guidance. As well as helping to stop the spread of the pandemic, this vital work will prevent other illnesses, including diarrhoea – the second biggest cause of death worldwide for children under five.

When the crisis broke out, we immediately sent out hygiene training guidelines to 250 Tearfund partners. These will be distributed through thousands of local churches to help protect lives in their communities. Tearfund has quickly taken action to produce resources in multiple languages (including sections in Amharic, French, Portugese and Swahili) for our staff and partners to use to spread the message of good hygiene and public health practices. Our Tearfund Learn (learn.tearfund.org) online resources have up-to-date guidance for local churches and small businesses, and a practical guide to building a simple handwashing station.

the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, South Sudan, Haiti, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. You can give to support our coronavirus appeal at www.tearfund.org/coronavirus

But above all, please pray for the communities we serve. We have resources to help you do this at www.tearfund.org/pray, including a coronavirus prayer guide. We cannot do this in our own strength, so please ask for God to be with us and lead the way.

It is at times like these that the words of Psalm 46 become a rock on which we can stand to face the present and find hope for the future: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...” For 50 years, as Tearfund has faced the greatest global emergencies, these words have proved true time and again.

Yes, we face challenges today, and we will face more to come, but God is our refuge and strength, and we were made for times like these.

Refugees are more isolated than ever, and while churches around the UK are stepping up to provide a warm welcome, there's more we can do, says **Karina Martin**, executive director, Welcome Churches.

NO REFUGEE *alone*

The refugee crisis has not gone away during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, it's getting worse. Globally there are now an estimated 70.8 million forcibly displaced people. That's 70.8 million fathers, mothers and children who didn't want to leave their homes, livelihoods and family members but had to because of war, famine or persecution.

Maybe that feels too overwhelming to do anything about, but of those 70.8 million there are approximately 157,000 refugees and asylum seekers living in the UK, right on our doorstep. Some of them might even be living on your street.

In 2002 our family was happily settled when we sensed a prompting from God to welcome the stranger arriving in our city. We moved with our children and a team from our church into the city centre. We had no idea how to connect with the refugees living around us who had arrived from countries like Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Responding to the verse that tells us "a gift opens the way for the giver" (Proverbs 18:16), we nervously decided to visit some families with a box of gifts to see if we could connect. The response was overwhelming. In their best broken English people expressed their gratitude: "Thank you for coming", "We don't know anyone in the city", "Please stay longer", "When can you come back and visit again?"

We still have friendships with some of those families and have had the joy of seeing their children grow up and flourish in the UK. One young refugee, Leila, was five when we gave her a welcome box full of colourful pens and toys. She is now about to start medical school and may help our country fight the next pandemic.

In normal circumstances refugees are some of the most isolated people in our communities, but during the coronavirus epidemic they are even more vulnerable. I heard about one woman who was afraid to even step outside her front door because she thought she would catch the virus. Others are struggling to home-school their children in a language they are just learning themselves. With only £37 a week to live on, asylum seekers can't afford the luxury of unlimited data or online shopping.

There is a reason the scriptures are so strong about how we should treat foreigners. Separated from social support networks, limited in job opportunities

In normal circumstances refugees are some of the most isolated people in our communities.

and unable to understand the language well, refugees can be marginalised and exploited. The scriptures are clear: "You are to love those who are foreigners", it says in Deuteronomy 10:19, "for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt".

Society may encourage us to tolerate those who are different, but as God's people we are called to go the extra mile and love them – as God does. Carrying God's heart for love and justice can be as simple as helping secure a school place for a refugee child or attending court to ensure a fair hearing for an asylum case.

The trauma refugees are already carrying when they arrive can be compounded by having to move three or four times in the first few months after arriving. This is where the church is really helping. All around the country churches are helping refugees settle when they arrive in a new community.

Recently I spoke to Helen, an Iranian woman, who in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown had been moved with her daughter to a new city. Anxious and alone they reached out to us through our welcome network and we contacted one of our partner churches. The church visited (at a safe distance) with a welcome box of gifts and other essential supplies, and helped them connect with a local foodbank. Helen was delighted to join the church's weekly Farsi language Zoom group and an Iranian neighbour she invited has joined too.

The welcome boxes project is now running in 13 locations around the UK, connecting local churches with newly arrived refugees like Helen. Other churches are teaching English or running community meals. Our online welcome network is helping refugees find churches that are ready to support and welcome them. Our mission at Welcome Churches is to help the church welcome every refugee who arrives in the UK. The result of the church responding with

love and welcome is that refugees are finding community and finding faith in Christ.

Churches are changing: Bible studies in different languages are starting, worship in various languages is being introduced, and God is raising up leaders from among those strangers He is bringing to our shores. My own church, which was 97 per cent white British five years ago, is now 15 per cent refugee background, from many different nations.

This is such a blessing to our church family.

Yet there is much more to be done. We know for every refugee who gets a welcome from the local church there are still hundreds more who are isolated, without friends and often without hope. God has brought the nations to our door but there is a danger we will miss what He is doing in our generation. Jesus warned us to be aware of the season we are in. In John 4:35 He says, "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

God is doing an amazing work of salvation, healing and restoration among refugees, using Christians across the UK who are available to Him for this ministry. At Welcome Churches we say every church can do something to welcome refugees. For every new arrival in the UK to be welcomed, each church would need to welcome just one refugee a year.

If your church would like to get involved, we can provide training and resources to help you feel confident to connect. You may like to run welcome boxes if you are in an area with many refugees and asylum seekers, or a welcome holiday if you live somewhere more remote. If you are already welcoming refugees to your church, please join our welcome network so that more refugees can find you.

"A gift opens the way for the giver" is a familiar proverb, but the verse goes on to say, "and ushers the giver into the presence of the great". When I visit refugees I'm mindful that each family is very precious to God. Refugees may be marginalised in our society but the Bible is clear, refugees are extremely important to God. May He help us carry His heart of love and justice for the foreigner and extend a welcome into our towns, cities and especially our churches.

If we can help your church support refugees, please get in touch at info@welcomechurches.org or www.welcomechurches.org

COVID-19 poses extra challenges to securing justice for people, but there's no reason to give up hope that we can still do this, says **Dana Buzducea**, partnership leader for advocacy at World Vision.

HEARING THE *Cry* OF THOSE IN NEED

Years ago I was a social worker in a children's hospital. All our patients were chronically ill, and most were abandoned by their parents.

I remember some days being harder than others, when fear and anxiety filled the ward like a dark wave. Inevitably, on those days, a child in pain – physical, psychological or emotional – would start a fight, and it would often spread until it became near impossible to stop. But if someone acted quickly to tell that child, “I know you suffer. I'm here for you. You are important,” the results were remarkable – the violence stopped.

Throughout history the most vulnerable have paid the highest toll in any economic crisis.

Securing justice for people, in its essence, is about telling the suffering children of our Father: “You matter.” Expressions of justice vary, but they all start with hearing the cry of those in need and

seeking to do the right thing. Isaiah 1:17 says, “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

The coronavirus pandemic demonstrates how interconnected we are – we depend on each other more than we thought. Galatians 6:2 says, “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” Securing justice for people is about stepping up as one to stop the wave of inequality from drowning the most vulnerable among us. For us at World Vision, this means enabling children to flourish and realise the life in all its fullness we believe God desires for them. But this

dream feels even harder to turn into reality when the world is faced with a global crisis.

Throughout history the most vulnerable have paid the highest toll in any economic crisis. For some, this will be extreme – the injustice of a mother becoming unable to earn the meagre wage she needs to put food on the table. Some children – potentially millions – will have limited access to life-saving health services, including immunisation. For others, it may be less life-threatening but just as critical – not being able to access education, falling even further behind until eventually they are fully disconnected from school. For some, the lockdown is a chance to reconnect with working parents; for others it means facing abuse behind a locked door.

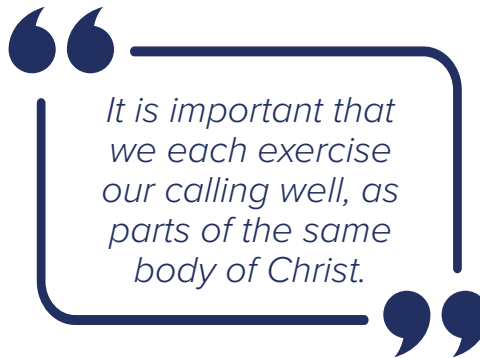
Let's consider the ripples that flow out from a child's life – the things we must address throughout this crisis in order to ensure children grow up with the rights and life they deserve.

Ripple one: Children at the heart of the response

To secure justice for people, people – children included – need to be empowered to be part of the solutions. The Bible teaches us that “blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble” (Psalm 41:1). Our Christian approach is grounded in hope and dignity, especially when it comes to sustainable change.

World Vision's experience tells us that when empowered, children are not helpless victims. In fact, they often become the hidden heroes in a crisis. A growing body of evidence shows us that when given a chance, children and young people actively embrace opportunities to advocate for social change, and to promote and protect the rights of the most vulnerable among them.

We've spoken to children all over the world about how COVID-19 is affecting their lives and those of the young people in their communities. Despite the challenges, they share a great sense of justice, wanting to serve others, and to use their voice to support the vulnerable and marginalised. They want to play a pivotal role in raising awareness on coronavirus and providing information to people in need. These



children see things that we may not. It is extremely important that we create the opportunities for them to not only be heard but to use their creativity to be part of the solution.

I think of 14-year-old William, who had to flee his home because of the conflict in South Sudan and is now living in a refugee camp in Uganda. Keeping a safe distance from other people and wearing a mask and gloves, he goes door to door, sharing with other children how they can stay safe. It's much more difficult to socially distance and stay clean while living in a refugee camp, so William's messages are crucial to ensure the virus doesn't spread.

Then there's 15-year-old Salimata in Mali, who has begun producing videos teaching people about good hygiene practices. More than two million children in Mali aren't able to go to school even when they are open, and over half of the country's young people can't read or write. Videos play a vital role in ensuring that everyone understands what's needed during this difficult time.

We want and need to be empowering children to be active in their communities. It not only has a transformative impact on them, but also on wider society as social structures and institutions become more inclusive and responsive to children's rights.

Ripple two: Protection from violence, and healing

Since I first heard about lockdowns at the beginning of this crisis, children being locked in abusive environments have weighed heavily on my heart. Before this crisis we know 1.7 billion children around the world were experiencing violence every year. Now, already stretched education and protection systems have been wiped out, leaving children at a higher risk of domestic violence, abuse, neglect, mental distress,

sexual exploitation and child labour.

It is so important that while the world's attention may be on this pandemic, we make time to stand up for those whose voices have been silenced. All over the world, I see encouraging signs of this happening. But we cannot be complacent. We have a new fight on our hands. And we must stand ready to heal where we are currently unable to prevent. We cannot allow coronavirus to excuse and enable people who commit violence against children.

Ripple three: A world, united

We live in a complex social reality; justice can only be provided by working in partnerships. None of us, no matter how big or important, can alone have all the answers. But it is important that we each exercise our calling well, as parts of the same body of Christ.

World Vision partners with communities, faith leaders, organisations, the UN, businesses, donors, and governments. And, perhaps most importantly, we partner with our supporters, who are the reason we can do what we do every day.

One of the brilliant ways we're seeing cooperation during this crisis is through faith leaders. Around 400,000 Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu faith leaders in our network around the world are communicating with each other virtually, sharing stay safe messages and myth-busting around coronavirus. They're using these to reach their congregations, meaning more people are kept safe.

Together, we will beat coronavirus

COVID-19 poses extra challenges to achieving justice and fullness of life for every child, but there is no reason to give up hope that we can still make it happen. World Vision is running its largest ever emergency response to make sure we reach as many vulnerable families as possible in more than 60 countries.

Together, we will beat coronavirus. If you'd like to find out more about our global emergency response, or how you can be praying for us and the families we serve, please go to www.worldvision.org.uk/our-work/coronavirus-response

We stand with our brothers and sisters on the continent as we continue to respond with confidence and creativity to the coronavirus crisis, says **Kent Anderson**, British director of European Christian Mission.

A photograph of a woman and two children standing on a balcony, looking out at a large brick building with a prominent tower. The woman is on the left, wearing a brown sweater and white pants. The two children are in the center and right, wearing blue shirts and jeans. The balcony has a black metal railing. The building in the background has a red-tiled roof and a tower with a cross on top.

AN *explosion* OF EXPERIMENTATION IN EUROPE

People across Europe find themselves in various forms of lockdown as governments seek to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Many have been facing this for longer than us in the UK. My colleague Jules Mercer-Wilson, based just outside Madrid, wrote in April, “Today is day 36. During our lockdown, I’ve been to the supermarket twice and the airport once.”

Most of us have never faced isolation on this scale. And there is good reason for our isolation. As I write this Italy, Spain, France and the UK alone have already reported more than 84,000 deaths and more than 634,000 known cases (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control).

It’s hard not to be anxious when every person you meet might be carrying a potentially deadly disease, which leads on to the negative mental impact of the virus. A stark reminder of this came when European Christian Mission (ECM) workers in northern Spain asked me to pray for a student friend who is so upset he is considering suicide.

The mantra “we are all in this together” may be true in many ways. However, in other ways we are not in the same situation: social injustices, health inequalities, poverty and faith can dramatically affect how we find ourselves coping.

But there’s also hope here as we find ourselves being encouraged to care more for ourselves and others. Even secular organisations are promoting ‘love your neighbour as yourself’, which Jesus challenged us to do more than 2,000 years ago. Take the suggestions published by the World Health Organization: protect yourself and be supportive to others; stay connected and maintain your social networks; find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images.

Good news stories have begun to make it into the global media. My favourite was people in Italy, Spain and France gathering on their balconies to applaud frontline medical staff. This celebration of support has since spread to the UK and I now join in every Thursday evening. Positivity is ‘in’, but of course the good news of Jesus is still the best.

Yet the negative effects of the pandemic abound. Closed schools leave children and their parents concerned about the future. Overwhelmed hospitals have postponed other medical procedures. Businesses have closed, people have lost their jobs, and dire

economic predictions are commonplace. Where is God in all of this? How can we show His love? What more could we be doing as His children?

I’ll assume because you’re reading this issue of *idea* that you are involved in a church and possibly even a leader. As such, you will have been affected not just personally by isolation but also in how you try to minister to others. We have been taken back to the old saying: “The church is not a place; the church is the people.”

Most church buildings across Europe are closed. But this challenge has led to an explosion of innovation and experimentation as Christians seek to continue to reach out and care for those around them.

Discipleship

We have seen an increase in new digital discipleship initiatives and people wanting to engage with them. Many believers are using this time to delve deeper into scripture and other aspects of their faith. David Delameillieure’s church in Kortrijk, Belgium, hasn’t only taken its service online: early every week church members receive a resource pack – which includes an audio sermon, recipes, a weekly challenge and more – themed to the next Sunday’s service, which helps them engage with God throughout the week.

Outreach to children

Meeting together is still important for children, even if it can’t be in person. Gary and Iona Stoll were running a popular kid’s clubs in a number of local villages, as well as youth work, connected to their church in Piatra Neamt, Romania. The youth meetings are now being done digitally via web-conferencing and the children’s work is continuing, using weekly videos. As they say, “We are still working on the ‘mission field’, however it is more like a ‘digital mission field.’”

Caring for those in need

We all want to keep ministering, especially with the increased needs we see at this time. For many, ‘remote’ is the only way, but others are called to frontline service as part of the essential workforce. My colleague Jules Mercer-Wilson says, “Today we went out. We saw trees and vegetation (we can’t see any from our apartment) and spent the morning with five others from our church.

“It was so exciting to talk without using

technology. We were helping with a project that supports pregnant women and those with children under the age of three by providing food and nappies and other necessities for their children.

“We worked unloading the van of supplies, stacking and storing them, creating a workable system, and bagging up basic, yet urgent, supplies for people. Others on our team of six were able to chat (at a safe distance) with the people, finding out how life is going for them, and with some they were even able to pray.”

Church unity

In some places the inability to physically meet is encouraging church leaders to gather virtually to learn and plan together. Stephen Bell in Croatia explains, “Last Thursday I held a Lausanne Croatia Zoom conference. Church leaders from all over Croatia and multiple denominations overcame corona challenges to meet up again. Tomorrow we are expecting more than 50 leaders from all over the nation to discuss how Christians and churches can grow during the crisis; how we can evangelise during this period; and how we can best prepare the church to meet the new opportunities as the lockdown recedes and people come out of their homes again.”

My hope is that the creativity being seen across the continent will inspire Christians and churches around the world to continue to explore ways to love and reach out to those around them. As my colleagues Terry and Christine Miller, based in Cordoba, Spain, shared recently, “Most people seem to be more keen to discover what others think and believe. We have got to know our direct neighbours better (we have adjoining rooftop terraces), and have connected with all the neighbourhood (more than 500 people listen to the concerts Terry does with his mission partner Esther), and Terry was able to sing a reflective song about Jesus’ death on Good Friday).

“The real virus/enemy for all humanity is not the coronavirus, tough though it is, but sin, which separates us from God, controls our life, and commands our destiny. We really need Jesus.”

As we stand with our brothers and sisters in continental Europe, responding to COVID-19, let’s not give in to fear. Instead, let us give in to faith and may our faith lead us all into loving and caring action in Jesus’ name.

We're moving towards a vision of a church fully engaged in urban life so that we can serve people on the edge of our communities, says **Rev Ian Rutherford**.



SHAPING THE CITY

TO HELP THOSE ON THE MARGINS

In my work helping to combat homelessness and insecure housing in Greater Manchester I am constantly motivated by two scripture passages, Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25.

"...Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice..." (Isaiah 58:6). In Isaiah 58, we see a vision of community, which theologian Walter Brueggemann described as "ethically demanding", requiring "policies and actions of a neighbourly kind"; and he earnestly encouraged the church to be engaged in "worship and public ethics...otherwise there is a distortion of social relationships".

Similarly, Elaine Applebee, in her

“*We want to properly tackle homelessness. It's not enough for us to simply help a person in their current situation.*”

contribution to the 2003 edition of *Faithfulness in the City*, with reference to Isaiah 58, presented this same biblical picture of community – one that has securing justice for people at its heart.

She wrote that “healing for the people of God, both individual and communal, is tied up with being involved in the healing of others – the avoidance of injustice and meeting the needs of the poor”.

God's heart for justice is, of course, amplified in the gospels too. In Matthew 25:40 we read the words of Jesus: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” According to biblical scholar Graham Stanton, Matthew 25 ought to be read on theological grounds “as a solemn exhortation to the church to give priority to the hungry, thirsty and needy of the world”. Jesus' faithful disciples' acts of mercy, which

He sets out in the parable of the sheep and the goats (verses 31-46), reflect their commitment to Him, and God's commitment to justice.

For, "to welcome strangers is to do Jesus' teaching of indiscriminate love especially for the marginalised, healing the broken", stated Dr Warren Carter, an exegete specialising in the gospel of Matthew. He added, "Such actions are to be contrary to dominant cultural practices in that they are nonreciprocal and are concerned for the needs of the other, not the honour or social credit of the giver."

What a clear mandate to elevate the voice of the ignored and silenced, the vulnerable, those in the shadows, as we seek to reflect God's heart for justice.

Collective response

Like most major cities in the UK, Manchester has a current humanitarian crisis, though this is probably not a phrase most would typically associate with rough sleeping and homelessness. Since March 2017, when I became the city centre minister at Methodist Central Hall, I have been engaging with the civic authorities, the business network, health leaders, and the voluntary sector to combat these prevailing, and grave, social issues. As Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham's faith sector lead for this, I have contributed to the development of the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network in this period, and the results have so far been positive and progressive.

The network facilitates collaboration and teamwork, and is enabling the whole region to work together, across the public sector, voluntary sector, faith sector, grassroots groups, businesses and local people, for the sake of those on the margins. We have proposed a holistic approach to dealing with the homelessness crisis: reduction, respite, recovery, reconnection. This model is to: prevent rough sleeping in the future (reduction); provide a safe place for people off the street (respite); manage issues, stabilise individuals and work towards independence (recovery); and enable individuals to lead meaningful lives with choice and agency in the community (reconnection).

We want to properly tackle homelessness. It's not enough for us to simply help a person in their current

We are now challenged to use this time to work out how we can ensure that people do not return to the streets.

situation; we want to provide them with the support to participate as an active and integrated member of their community, where they live. And no one group can achieve this single-handedly. We know co-production is a critical element of our work. We know the key is to have a whole-society, cross-sector approach with a strong contribution from the faith sector.

Take 'A Bed Every Night' as an example, which has operated in Greater Manchester since 1 November 2018. The scheme is not a sticking plaster but part of a new systematic approach to end homelessness. Collectively we have sought to move people through emergency short-term provision into the right accommodation and support option for them, to enable them to stay off the streets. Collectively we want to build a supportive, therapeutic relationship for a time of personal crisis.

Making A Bed Every Night a success has been a colossal challenge, but one that we have risen to, by working together, learning as we have gone along, and continually adapting how the scheme works based on what we hear from homeless people and frontline workers.

Maintaining momentum

The Homelessness Action Network has been tried and tested by the coronavirus crisis, but we, as testament to our strength in whole-society, cross-sector collaboration, stepped up to play a full part in the significant emergency response across Greater Manchester. Over a two-week period, all of the people who were sleeping rough or living in shared accommodation (well over 1,000 people) were helped to move into hotels, guest houses and other self-contained accommodation. The workforce from day centres and frontline charities were redeployed into hotel teams, food preparation and delivery, and non-face-

to-face support, which has involved offering creative activities and emotional help during lockdown.

From the city's Methodist Central Hall, food from the foodbank attached to our befrienders project has been made available to the effort, and cakes and other dishes from our Nexus Art Café were given to one of the outreach organisations. In my role as faith sector lead, I received a request from one of the hotels for Bibles for some of the guests with the most complex needs, and I was able to mobilise the local branch of the Gideons to immediately respond.

This period from crisis to recovery is very much a change moment. We are now challenged to use this time to work out how we can ensure that people do not return to the streets. There will be a lot of new things to construct, to fund, to legislate and to administer; and this calls for an open strategic conversation as we contemplate and start to build a system change, a new future. The faith sector will play a key role in this conversation given the extent of our involvement on the frontline, and our desire to "loose the chains of injustice" and take care of "the least of these".

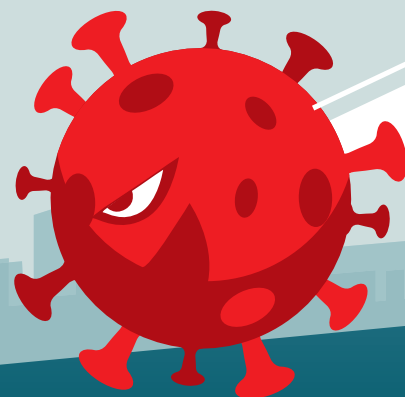
We're moving towards a vision of a church fully engaged in urban life, not only with compassion, but campaigning for justice, not only in consultation, but in contribution to the design and planning process, whilst utilising the example of its own diverse yet united make-up to drive the cohesion of the communities in which it serves. Having an informed and theologically robust position on justice and community, which is expressed ecumenically, will provide an appropriate platform for contributions at all levels.

The church, according to Rev Dr Andrew Davey, vicar at Holy Trinity Upper Tooting, has an "exilic directive from Jeremiah 29 to partner with city shapers" to ensure that the city thrives. This can only happen where there is "commitment to its wholeness and wellbeing and where its welfare is recognised as being bound up with the lot of its exiles and poor".

This is the vision to which I am committed in Greater Manchester, but I submit that it is a vision for all who would seek to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God within the place in which they are called to serve.

We at Stewardship are committed to helping churches and charities as they respond to the ever-increasing needs in their communities, writes **Debbie Wright**, head of creative services, Stewardship.

PARTNER, FINANCE & RESOURCE



“**W**hat started as a trickle soon became a deluge as overwhelmed treasurers, trustees and church leaders got in touch with a myriad of questions. It was the first week of lockdown and we all had found ourselves in a very different world,” explains Jackie Fletcher, who leads the treasurer services team at Stewardship.

The lockdown changed everything for church communities. With no face-to-face meetings churches that relied on weekly offering plates and fundraising events had their income dramatically halted. Other churches who depend on income from renting out their spaces to nurseries, coffee shops and gym classes also saw an immediate and dramatic fall in revenue. Income fell while still having the overheads of running a church with employees and premises.

“Our treasurer services team here at Stewardship quickly realised that there was an immense need for financial and legal advice, particularly at the beginning, when the Government’s guidance kept being updated every few days. To handle the tsunami of enquiries, the team quickly set up a series of webinars. The first one was billed as: The impact of COVID-19 on churches and charities. We brought together a panel of Christian financial and legal experts and within one minute of broadcasting we had hit our limit of attendees – 500 in total. I think it was at that moment that the enormity of the situation and what we were trying to

“.....
The need for supporting and caring for the most vulnerable and marginalised in society has increased.
 ”.....

achieve really hit me,” says Jackie.

With an urgent need for more information, the team followed up with two more webinar sessions covering employment issues, the furlough scheme, longer term financial planning and how to support the wider community. “In all there were more than 1,400 attendees asking quite literally hundreds of questions. It was humbling to stand alongside so many Christian organisations facing the difficult decisions ahead together and responding to God’s call to act with integrity and love as we serve Him,” continues Jackie. More webinars are planned over the coming weeks.

As well as providing up to date advice, Stewardship has been able to offer substantial practical help for many churches. “We have been able to help bridge the gap in finances for many of our client churches,” says Chris Perkins, head of church and charity lending. “Client churches struggling with mortgage repayments have been given respite arrangements and other churches with a sudden shortfall in funds are looking to remortgage to cope with what has occurred.”

But it’s not all bad news. “We have seen

churches adapt really quickly, and those who were once resistant to online financial activity are now using innovative ways with online fundraising through platforms such as our Give.net service, where volumes of online giving have trebled in recent weeks,” explains Chris.

Drop in income, rise in needs

While many churches and charities have seen their income dramatically drop, the need for supporting and caring for the most vulnerable and marginalised in society has massively increased.

The church has had to immediately adapt to providing the practical support needed by so many, by going online in imaginative ways and mobilising an army of volunteers who can work safely and effectively.

“We have been able to work collaboratively with our donors, who are keen to help churches and frontline charities working through local churches, to meet the needs of those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It feels a bit like we are battling in a warzone,” says Stewart McCulloch, CEO of Stewardship. “The church is an army of warriors for Christ on the march. Here at Stewardship we are the ‘corps of logistics’, providing sound information and advice, directing resources from amazingly generous givers and getting much-needed funds in the right places right now.

“Never has there been a time in living memory when the church has been so needed, and we at Stewardship are doing



our very best to support and enable that. I have been privileged to witness how the church has innovated and adapted so quickly through this pandemic. It is moving forward in so many exciting ways. For instance, we partnered with Spring Harvest and channelled generosity to enable them to go completely online within two weeks of lockdown. They managed to deliver an online programme of more than 200,000 hours of gospel-centred teaching, which attracted 1.2 million views from 16 different countries.”

Our donors have also provided much needed support to Christians Against Poverty (CAP). CAP has created a voucher scheme to help with basic utility bills and through local churches, volunteers have created hubs to deliver weekly care packages of food and basics. At the local level, a volunteer from C3 Church in Cambridge described how one care package of food was ripped open on the doorstep where the man started eating. This was the first food he’d had for three days. CAP knows this is just the beginning, as we are sinking into a major financial crisis. Once lockdown has eased debt, unemployment and financial distress will be at unprecedented levels and creditors and landlords will be recommencing their collection activities. CAP, the church and Stewardship have such a big role to play in bringing practical help and gospel hope to those in need.

The COVID-19 virus has touched all of our lives in so many ways. By directing

essential funding, Stewardship has enabled pioneering charities and churches to meet huge and varied needs. Youthscape, based in Luton, has reimagined all their church-based programmes to young people and are working with leading Christian counsellors, youth workers and psychiatrists to help reach thousands of young people who are struggling with mental health problems. Welcome Churches, which works with churches welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, has put all their training programmes online (read more about Welcome Churches on page 16), and Care for the Family is creating a remote bereavement counselling programme specifically for the circumstances of this crisis.

These are just some of the ways churches and charities are adapting and fulfilling huge needs with the very best possible specialist care online and through local churches. But for many, the online community isn’t available, large segments of our society are isolated, alone, trapped by poverty and fear, and the church is stepping up, adapting and particularly meeting food poverty needs. Soul Church in Norwich was already running a food programme for the local community, and once lockdown began the church saw a huge rise in demand. They quickly adapted their church building into the base for receiving, packaging and sending out food parcels.

“The demand was overwhelming but the support from local businesses and volunteers was incredible,” says Katy

Cooper, finance officer for Soul Church. “We had the loan of seven delivery vehicles, a chiller van and food supplies from local companies, and local people wanted to donate. Stewardship was quick to act; they helped us set up our online fundraising and the gifts in could be released as efficiently as possible.”

Soul Church has now moved the operation to bigger premises and church staff and volunteers are delivering an astounding 30,000 meals a week. “Stewardship, along with so many others, have enabled us to do this: the partnerships, the finance, the resources. But all the credit goes to God – it has been an amazing experience and God is at the heart of all of this.”

Stewart McCulloch realises that his past experience has been extraordinarily useful. “I joined Stewardship from World Vision where I specialised in helping smallholder farmers manage their livelihoods through major natural disasters – this experience suddenly seems much more relevant than ever in my current role. We are only in the initial response phase of this disaster as it is still ongoing; we have already witnessed the amazing work the church is doing to help people through this challenging time. A long recovery phase lies ahead to deal with the aftermath of the health and economic storm that has hit us. The church is stepping forward and people have never been so open to our message of hope and our outstretched hand of friendship – how can we help?”

Do you believe it is possible to see the UK foster care system reformed? asks **Elijah Kirby**.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF

BROKENNESS

When the word 'justice' is mentioned a few things might come to mind. Perhaps the word justice makes you think about the Justice League superheroes, or maybe we automatically think about courts, judges and sentencing. Justice is, of course, far deeper than superheroes donning Lycra, and it's much wider and richer than judges and courts. Justice embodies both just behaviour and treatment.

The church celebrates at Easter because we recognise that our sin had to be atoned for. The scales of the world were tipped against humanity and our penalty was death and a prospect of living without

"I'm very fortunate to be a dad of three boys, and it's quite remarkable how I see myself mirrored in my children."

God's presence in our lives. God had to pass judgement on us. Justice would have been well-deserved, but He didn't and, well, you know the ending to the story.

This speaks of so many incredible truths, but here are two: first, we get to understand, more than ever, the loving nature of God the Father. Second, it gives us a framework and an example on how to live our lives – how we're to interact and live justly.

Surely, the closer we are to God, the greater the level of value we place on others?

I'm very fortunate to be a dad of three boys, and it's quite remarkable how I see myself mirrored in my children. For my kids, the more time they spend with me, the more they begin to like what I like. The same is true for our relationship with God. Those collective moments of time with Him result in us sharing His deep care and passion for people.

Sadly, every single one of us will have experienced injustice in some way. Perhaps you are reading this and you can relate. Maybe there was that conversation or that situation where you felt misunderstood or mistreated. For others, a wrong was done to you that was completely out of your control, yet you were forced to live with the consequences. Injustice is such a pain-filled word.

Thankfully for us, God inspired many authors throughout the Bible to capture His heart, and He has communicated so many notes as an antidote for this pain. Isaiah 30:18-19 says, "Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious (there's that Father's heart again), and therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are those who wait for Him."

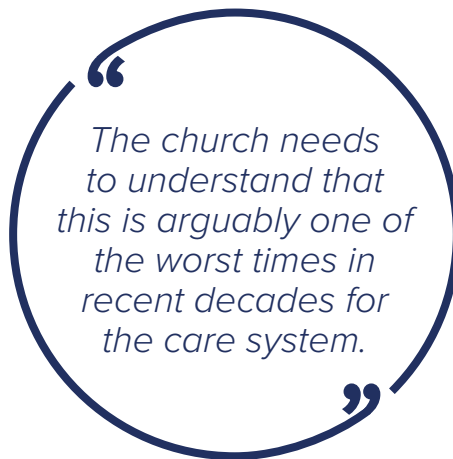
Intimacy with God is one of the most beautiful acts of everyday justice. We may be wronged, misunderstood, hungry and destitute, but still that verse in Isaiah declares that blessed are those who wait for Him. God the Father has made His presence available for you today. In fact, more than that, He has called you His own and you're an heir to the kingdom of God. Let that soak in for a moment.

We can change the stats

I was brought up in the foster care system. I remember the day so clearly when I was taken away from my family. There were police officers and social workers outside and their job was to forcibly remove a three-and-a-half year old me. There had been a catalogue of serious physical abuse and neglect. My biological mum was a prostitute and my biological dad was probably a client. There was no involvement from him and mum's new partner was violent.

For a while I bounced around various foster homes. There was a string of seven different schools over five years. After a repeat pattern of landing somewhere new, with my black bin liner of my worldly belongings (of which I was so grateful), I would get settled into a new place and then it seemed I would be off again.

I eventually ended up with an incredible Christian family and life slowly started to become normal. I stayed in the same class with the same friends, began to trust more easily, and remember feeling lucky enough to have found people to love me. In my



teen years, I discovered that my real dad had recently died of a heroin overdose. My dream of knowing a dad who I'd never met before was suddenly obliterated. I felt robbed.

Injustice. That is exactly what I remember feeling so clearly at various times throughout my childhood and, if I am honest, it can still be a thought even today. I would visit friends' houses after school and would see a family unit so interwoven and I would think "that's what I've never had". I would see dads turn up to football games and cheer their lungs out for their kids and part of me would grieve.

Did you know that in the UK right now, there are currently more than 80,000 children in very similar situations of injustice? They too have been forced to go on a journey of getting used to life away from their birth families.

The church needs to understand that this is arguably one of the worst times in recent decades for the care system. There are currently more children entering care than leaving it. In my local area there's been a staggering 77 per cent rise in the last year alone. Nationally, we need around 8,000 more love-filled homes to meet the demand. COVID-19 has added huge pressure to an overstretched system and we expect a tidal wave of referrals.

The current care system is in crisis and we are not seeing enough children within it flourish and go on to lead wholesome lives. Care leavers make up a huge proportion of some of our most depressing national statistics and many go on to have children who are then also placed in care. On the cycle of brokenness goes.

I believe we can change the statistics! That's why I founded NorthPoint Care, a non-profit independent fostering agency, set up to serve and reform the UK foster

care system. We are practitioners, working to provide world-class support for looked-after children as well as carers. We're also advocates and champions and seek to provide a voice for those feeling powerless.

Research tells us that if a child experiences sustained unconditional love from adults, but most certainly God, then trauma incurred in the brain can be undone. There is hope.

That was my story. As a teen the wheels where well and truly off. It was an encounter with God, aged 15, that changed everything for me. Through a youth conference evangelist Mike Pilavachi MBE was preaching and prayed for me. We had never met before but I remember Mike reeling off so many details of my life, things that I hadn't told anybody, but clearly God knew and was telling me how He had been there through it all. That evening I encountered the presence of God and the change in my life was undeniable. I suddenly had a deep care for others, I felt alive, full of purpose and chosen.

For me, Jesus is the answer to the desperate grief and injustice tens of thousands of our children and young people are experiencing, and the local church is the vehicle for transformation. Do you believe it is possible to see the UK foster care system reformed? I believe every person reading this is able to make a contribution. The church has such a precious opportunity to combat injustice, to be a voice, to stand in the gap and change the course of our communities. One young life at a time. Let justice reign. The impact from your action could have a ripple effect far beyond anything you can imagine.

Here are four ways you could help during these times:

1. Pray for those in the care system.
2. Encourage any foster carers and social workers you know. It takes a village kind of vibe.
3. Become a foster carer: provide a love-filled home and transform a life.
4. Sign up to mentor to a looked-after young person.

Elijah Kirby is a senior pastor at Teesside Vineyard Church and the founder and CEO of NorthPoint Care (www.northpointcare.co.uk).

Perhaps we should embrace a new normal for the church, one where we spend much more time in our communities, says **Liz Mednick**, author of *Jesus in Town*.

CHURCH WITHOUT *walls*

“Go, make disciples of all nations...” This was the exhortation of Jesus to the early church. He did not say, “Tell the people to come.” He told the disciples to “go”.

Have we, the church in the western world, until now, largely ignored this instruction, preferring to stay within the church walls and expecting those who are seeking answers to come to us? Now, suddenly, there is no church building to come to; our churches are closed.

What is church? We are representatives of Jesus. We always say that we are the church; now is the time to prove it, to really represent Jesus to our communities. ‘Church’ can be taken to every home, street and workplace. A ‘new normal’ may emerge after this time for church. More people at this

“Many are struggling with poor housing, debt, unscrupulous landlords, difficulties with family relationships, addiction.”

time will be seeking answers and wanting to know God.

Over the last 10 years or so, we at Barking Churches Unite (BCU) have been taking Jesus’ love into our town of Barking, east London. We did this first by establishing a foundation of different prayer strategies across the denominations. This took the form of regularly held different groups and

projects, church leaders’ breakfasts, street praying, an intercessors group held in a home, and a larger united churches prayer meeting.

We then made overtures to our local shopping centre as God directed, offering to establish a prayer opportunity presence at Christmas and Easter. These were well received, and, amazingly, led to our being given a retail unit, free of charge, which we called The Source. From here we offer free lunches to around 90 homeless and poor people a day – an initiative called Pitstop. We run a range of other services too, key working some of the Pitstop guests, offering advice to the public, and signposting to other agencies in the borough (the story of how the ministries of BCU were established is told in my book, *Jesus in Town*).

A former guest, now in a hostel, became homeless after his legs were amputated



“
There are so many opportunities in these times to demonstrate Jesus' love to those around us.
”

people like this, among the most vulnerable in our communities. People in our towns need, more than ever before, hope, evidence of God's love, or even evidence of the love of other people. So many are in desperate need of hope and love. Many are struggling with poor housing, debt, unscrupulous landlords, difficulties with family relationships, addiction – to name a few social problems. Many are plunged into despair and harsher circumstances than they have previously encountered.

Repositioning ourselves

We, the church, can position ourselves, as never before, to reach out to those around us. Now is the time when churches should be working more closely together in partnership. There should be greater opportunity for this as leaders have more reason to talk to each other about serving a common need. Additionally, churches may have a greater opportunity to connect with voluntary organisations and their local council or businesses.

What did Jesus do here on earth? He didn't spend time 'in church'. He walked among people, He befriended them. He served, He healed. He counselled and blessed them. He shared a joke, a story, an encouragement, a meal.

We have seen, over the past weeks, people who would perhaps not usually speak much to strangers, having conversations (from the correct social distance) in the street. Many with free time are volunteering to do all kinds of work they would not previously have done. As Christians, we can and should, where possible, be joining with this 'war effort' against COVID-19, bringing what we have: the message of hope in a loving God and His enduring compassion for the world.

We believe that God is still in control of this crazy world disaster, and that He will work His purposes out in society to draw

many to Himself. This is, perhaps, a difficult message for some to hear and understand, but it is one which we can share and offer hope to those seeking a meaning.

During the pandemic, BCU has been working alongside the council, initially to provide takeaway food for the former Pitstop guests, as they can no longer sit to eat at the Source. The council has provided space in the Barking Learning Centre, as it is a large, temporarily unoccupied building, while the retail centre is closed. The council has also promised funding, and we are in the process of establishing telephone helplines.

What is emerging as the overriding need at this time? The answer is, surely, for us to offer a listening ear for bereavement, depression, domestic violence, and emotional trauma. We hope soon to be offering free advice from established agencies, and also opportunity for a friendly chat with Christian volunteer helpers over the phone. There are agencies such as Care for the Family, which offers training programmes for bereavement support, and Kintsugi Hope (featured in the May-June edition of *idea*), which helps those with mental and emotional health issues. We can use the resources of these Christian organisations and others like them.

There are so many opportunities in these times to demonstrate Jesus' love to those around us – through a word (from a distance) with our neighbours, an encouragement or prayer on the phone with a lonely friend, a word with someone in a supermarket queue. We have a friend who is intentionally making his local supermarket his mission field, ministering to some by paying for their shopping, engaging with conversations, no doubt praying with some.

There are many ways to share God's love with people if we look around. So, let us embrace a new normal. Let us be a church without walls and spend less time rebuilding them. It's time to love God intimately and know His heartbeat, and to be His hands and feet. Time to build, connect and love our community. Time for partnership with other Christians and churches. Time to pray with others. Time to prepare how we can adjust to a new way of doing things. Time to work inside our community and not just respond to those coming to our churches. Time for change. We can truly be representatives of Jesus in our towns.

above the knees. The hospital tried to discharge him to a Premier Inn, but there was no support to be found there. So a Source key worker tried to find a borough that would house him, keen to keep him off the street. After a lot of work, the borough of Barking and Dagenham housed him. Even now, the Source is advocating for him, sorting out issues with Universal Credit and rent payments.

Another guest started helping at Pitstop, preparing and serving lunches. This led to him cooking for another project and eventually he was offered permanent employment and can now afford a room. He told us that before working at the Source he had sometimes felt suicidal. Now he has self-worth and hope. Others have told us that if it wasn't for the Source they would have had to steal to survive.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the needs of



#CHOOSE joy

I sense God is challenging me to slow down and choose joy despite my circumstances, says **Hil Sewell**, head of people and facilities, Evangelical Alliance.

My immediate reaction to being in lockdown was positive; I am with my husband and two grown-up children who have flown the nest but suddenly, for various reasons, have landed back home.

What a lovely opportunity to spend more time together as a family, catch up and enjoy each other's company. Then it dawned on me: I can't invite friends for dinner, meet up for coffee or brunch at the weekends, play netball, host fellowship group; these people in the house are the extent of my personal interaction. So much had changed overnight.

I heard it put recently that we are all in the same storm but we are not all in the same boat. Whilst the storm is hard for us all, I do appreciate that the boats we find ourselves in will look different for each of us. But there is reassurance, because God sees where we are and speaks to each of us there.

Early on in this time of lockdown I was drawn to the book of Habakkuk and I related to his crying out to God. How long? And the answer was clearly "wait". I was challenged to use this time to wait on God and to see how He would speak. I was encouraged to remain positive, to count my many blessings, and above all to recall that "the sovereign Lord is my strength". After all, our response to the challenging situations we encounter is more important than the situation itself.

So my decision at the outset was to remain positive and encourage others all I could. Along the way I reminded myself to speak to myself with the same compassion with which I would speak to friends, and that I can't resist all the negative thoughts, but I can consciously replace them with positives and not sign up to the 'everyone seems to be handling this better than me' philosophy.

As I reflect, there have been many positives. I celebrated a birthday in lockdown; the party I had planned couldn't happen, but the Evangelical Alliance staff team sang happy birthday to me, and the most creative of presents arrived through the post. I learned to use my daily exercise productively, to bake regularly, and leave freshly baked goods at people's doors, pressing the bell and watching the reaction from a distance. I have always loved writing cards to people and this time has presented a fantastic opportunity for this.

Research suggests that in the first few weeks of a major change we will be adrenalin-filled, but 30-40 days in and our energy begins to drop. I recognised this and started to plan the summer party I would have to replace the birthday party I missed out on. I soon realised that this probably won't happen either.

In all this I recognise that I need to develop resilience. These are not easy times and our brains are often wired to focus on the negative. We need to focus on the positive. In my household we've enjoyed more menu planning, family meals, games

and projects than we have in years. We have laughed and cried, but throughout it all we have known in new and unexpected ways that the sovereign Lord is our strength.

A bonus has been to start to read the pile of books on my wish list. Interestingly, John Mark Comer's *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* was the first. Considering whether busyness is healthy the pastor asks, "What if it's an airborne contagion, wreaking havoc on our collective soul?" What a question for these times, which caused me to reflect on Jesus' words to Martha: "You are worried about many things, but only one thing is needed." Is this the time to understand that the usual routine busyness of our lives isn't healthy?

Our family lost a very dear friend before the lockdown, and we have been recounting happy times with her. She lived the end of her life with a terminal diagnosis but chose daily to '#choosejoy'. We are reminded that life is fleeting, our days are a mere handbreadth to God (Psalm 39), so all the more reason to choose joy whatever our circumstances. Paul encourages us to do everything without grumbling or complaining and for me, as I am reminded of the passing of life, I remember that my citizenship is in heaven.

This pandemic that we face may seem huge and at times overwhelming, but it is fleeting to God. Let's slow down. It will pass, and my hope remains secure, even though I do not see Christ now, I believe in Him and am filled with an inexpressible joy.

The COVID-19 lockdown can be our catalyst to go deeper with God, discovering His heart for justice, says **Chris Ringland**, research assistant, Evangelical Alliance Scotland.

REDEEMING THE TIME

How many of us started the COVID-19 lockdown in March with the intention to spend more time with God? How are we getting on? Might now be a good time to challenge ourselves once again to seek our Father's face?

In Ephesians 5, Paul, pretty much, does exactly that, as he encourages the church to "look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17, ESV). I love the NKJV translation of verse 16: "redeeming the time".

Granted, with schools closed and physical distancing measures in place, lockdown has made many busier than usual, perhaps with just about enough time for a verse and quick prayer each day. But surely, for those who have more time on their hands there remains a golden opportunity to make good use of it.

The wisdom from those verses in Ephesians is clear: we would do well to search out the best ways of using our time, redeeming it, leading us to a greater understanding of our Father and His character. So, how can we make the best use of this time? My recommendation is that we spend more time in God's word, approaching our times of Bible study like diligent students. You might choose to...

Dedicate a time and place

Find a time and location where you'll be able to read the Bible and pray each day.

“
As we take seriously our time with God, we start to see how His plans and purposes fit together.
”

Establishing a routine is important because it'll begin to mould that part of our day into a habit, resulting in it becoming more unusual not to spend time with God than setting aside time for Him.

Know your learning style

I'm wired to be systematic in everything I do. I love planning, lists, schedules and targets, and employing these techniques helps me to make the most of my time and prevents me from becoming overwhelmed. What's your learning style?

Have realistic targets

Set yourself realistic and achievable goals. I usually give myself a month or longer to finish studying a book, because this time allows me to understand what God is trying to teach me and results in me being less likely to speed through a book to just check it off my list.

Read an entire book

Spend time going through a book of the Bible from beginning to end. This can be a good way to understand both the themes of a particular book and how what is recorded in the book fits into the wider biblical narrative.



Think big

Expanding on the previous point, when studying a book of the Bible, have the big biblical pictures in mind. You might think God's redemption

plan (Genesis to Revelation), God's faithfulness / Abrahamic covenant (Old Testament), God's wisdom and love (Job, Psalms, Lamentations), the church's calling (Corinthians, Titus, Jude) or something else.

As we take seriously our time with God, going deeper into the individual books of the Bible, we start to see more clearly how God's plans and purposes fit together, and this helps us to grow into the image of our saviour, Jesus Christ. So, shall we put some of these suggestions into practice today or this week?

In line with the theme of this edition of *idea*, we can endeavour over the next month or so to know even more God's heart for justice. We can start with Genesis, as right from the moment Satan deceives Adam and Eve (chapter 3), God promises that he will be overcome by Jesus (verse 15).

Or we can start with Romans, the book Dr Karen Fulton based her article on (page 2). Instead, we might opt to start with Isaiah, a book referenced by many other contributors to this edition of the magazine. Or, how about one of my favourites, Micah, about which senior pastor Stephen Um writes: "We were created to worship God, to walk with Him through our lives. And true worship of God calls us 'to do justice, and to love kindness'"?

By Gavin Calver, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance

No time like **NOW**

This has certainly been quite a time to have taken over as the CEO at the Evangelical Alliance. Our society is experiencing things we never thought we would face and yet much is changing that directly impacts on how we minister, share the gospel and be the church at this time.

Firstly, there is a clear change in spiritual temperature of our country. The coronavirus pandemic is the ultimate bitter-sweet moment. The amount of people suffering, struggling and dying is absolutely tragic, and this is making this season so challenging. At the same time this crisis is presenting us with the greatest evangelistic moment of my lifetime. It's like we are living in wartime, although we are sat on the sofa. People's openness to the gospel is profound because they are living in the light of their own fragility. Mortality salience is not normally all that prevalent in the UK but right now it is front and centre of people's own consciousness.

People are looking for hope. Google has seen a huge spike in people searching for prayer and Jesus during the UK's lockdown. A piece of research from our member organisation Tearfund, published on *The Guardian's* website, revealed that 25 per cent of the UK population has accessed a religious service during lockdown. That is remarkable and just about a five-fold increase on normal church attendance in person. The spiritual temperature of our country is rising, and

—“
Let's take this moment to extend our view of what God can do.
 —”

this is an incredible opportunity for the gospel.

Secondly, there is a change in style for us all. The substance of what we are has not changed, but the style is so new. We thought for so long that we couldn't do online church, then one Sunday morning not long afterwards it appeared that the UK church broke Zoom as we all used it at the same time. As well as online services, churches are like never before providing so much for their communities through foodbanks and compassion ministries as well as community connections. People are looking at what we do and joining our services. As many preach into iPhones I'm reminded of some advice I was once given: preach each sermon as if your 13-year-old son is sat at the back and giving Christianity one last go. We all need to go for it in this season.

Thirdly, there's a change in cultural narrative. When I started leading the Evangelical Alliance in October I was asked on a daily basis what my view was on this or that moral issue. The culture seemed to

want to catch me out and caricature me as hateful or prejudiced. However, in lockdown these questions have stopped. No longer are we asked what we think about moral issues but instead what we as the church can do to help the country recover and survive in this season. It feels like the walls are down. Let's not let them be rebuilt. Cultures are defined by the stories they tell. Let's keep ours hopeful.

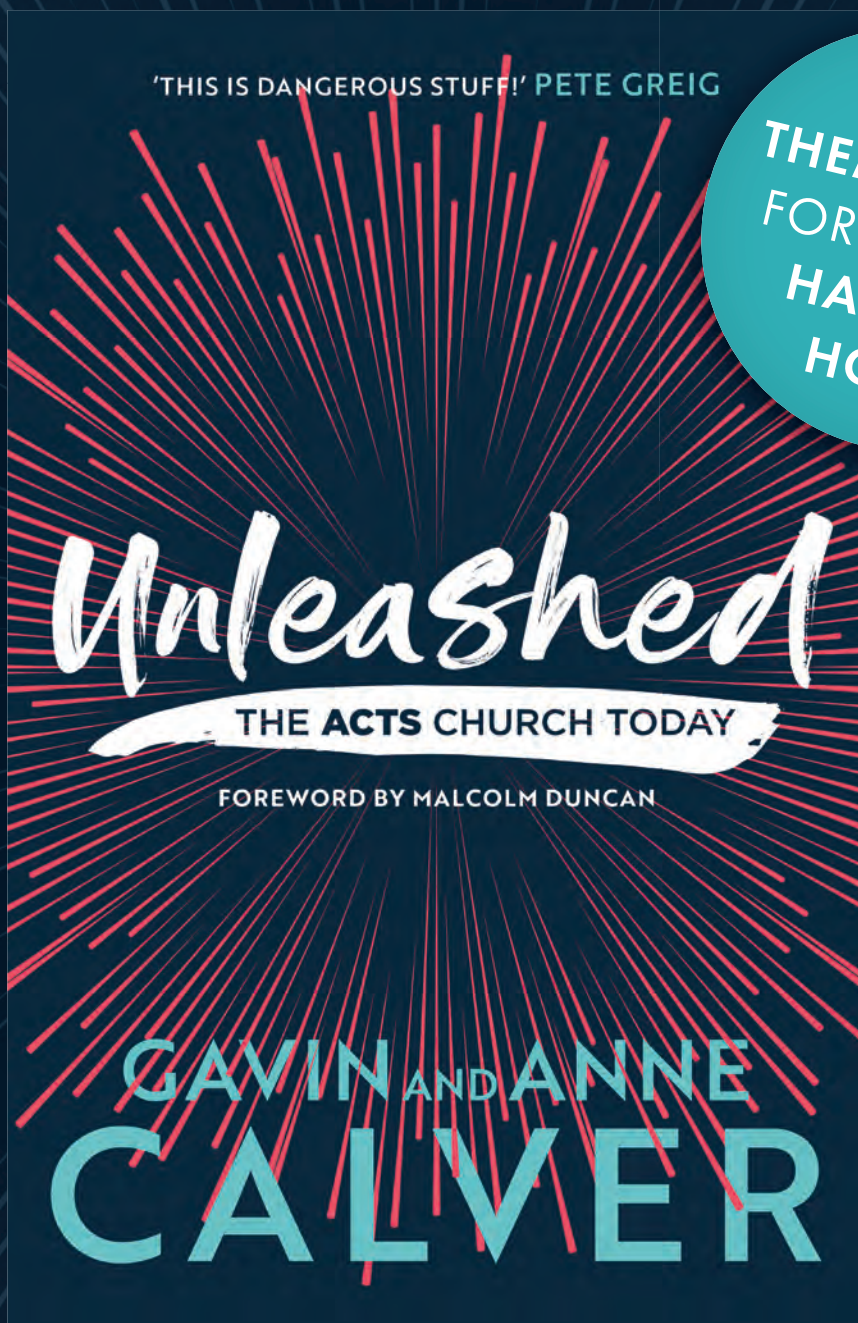
In response to these changes in spiritual temperature, our style of doing things and the cultural narrative, I believe that we, as evangelicals, are to grow our prophetic imaginations as to what's possible. Let's take this moment to extend our view of what God can do. I wonder if at times we've made Him small or safe enough to suit us and not disturb what we have going on?

We are living in an incredible moment and the same God of the early church and recent revivals in places like China and Iran is here with us in the UK. With Him nothing is impossible, and we need to begin to expect greater things. This is a really hard time, but it is also an amazing opportunity. We won't get to live this moment again.

As lockdown eases further in the weeks and months ahead so will somewhat of the opportunities available to us. I have been blown away by the church and its response in this season. May it continue to have a great impact. Ultimately, my dream is to hear in testimonies all over the UK in the years ahead this simple statement: "I surrendered my life to Jesus during the coronavirus pandemic."

UNLEASH YOUR FAITH

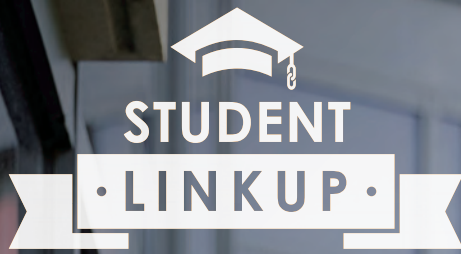
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