

Faith and mental health explored

One community of churches in Bath and Wells has tried to address the uncertainty caused by the Covid pandemic, by sharing a unique course designed to raise awareness and start conversations about mental health.

St. George's, Wembdon near Bridgwater, signed up for the free online course provided by Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries. Faith, Grief and Covid-19 is designed specifically to explore Christian engagement in the mental health conversation, expand understanding of mental health, reflect on the importance of companionship, learn about self-care, and ways that community can



A time for exploration and reflection in Wembdon.

support mental health.

Revd Simon Taylor, Curate at St Georges in Wembdon, believes the course has encouraged people to talk about the powerlessness they feel because of the pandemic, as well as helping them address some of the challenges the crisis is posing to their lives and their faith.

“It has helped us think about how our faith intersects with loss and particularly those losses around Covid. Not just bereavement, but losses relating to our normal pattern of life, how we worship, how we play, how we work, how we study, how we physically relate to each other, to family and friends further afield.”

People took part in different ways, either in groups or individually, in one long session or over a period of time and regardless how they have taken part, Simon says “It has made a huge impact on those who have tried out the resources.”

Find out more at: www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith-mental-health ■

News in brief

Live prayer service

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Have you lost a loved one during the COVID pandemic? Join Bishop Ruth for a live hour of prayer live for those who have died, and those who loved them.

Watch live on the diocesan website or on Facebook www.facebook.com/bathwells at 2pm on 3 March. Submit the names of those you mourn, so they can be remembered either live on Facebook or submit a name in advance to comms@bathwells.anglican.org ■



Seeds of joy

Curry Mallet C of England primary is celebrating after receiving a cash boost for their school bee garden and veg plot in the Seeds of Joy competition. Although not overall winners, they received £1,000 from the Higgidy, the pie makers, thanks to support of people across the diocese. The company, who were looking to support community garden projects, were impressed by the school's aspirations ■

Fly the flag for Somerset Day

This year Somerset Day organisers are asking people to #flytheflagforsomerset on 11 May. That can be by flying the distinctive Somerset flag with its bright red dragon from a flagpole, or simply by painting Somerset flag picture to display in your front window.

Bishop Ruth, a Patron of Somerset Day, says, “On Somerset Day I share with others in giving thanks for all the amazing people whether neighbours or strangers who share such smiles and warmth and care for each other everyday in Somerset – Thank you Somerset.” ■

Pay loving attention

By Nigel Stock, Assistant Bishop, Diocese of Bath & Wells

With the Lenten Season well under way, I wonder how it is going for you?

I always anticipate Lent with a slight feeling of having to brace myself. Come on make an effort in something! If I am going to give something up don't just make it an exercise in self-improvement, how is it going to help others? If I am going to do something positive what will be its long-term effect? It is all too easy to 'over think' the whole exercise.

Once the season is underway I begin to appreciate it. But in the end it should be about paying attention to God. I am always struck by the end of the story of the temptations in the wilderness.

Jesus refuses to be a cheap miracle worker to benefit himself, and refuses to follow the route to worldly power and status. He faced temptation by stripping away all the necessities of life and knew deep hunger. At the end of this exhausting wrestle with his vocation the Gospel tells us "... suddenly angels came and waited on him." (Matthew 4:10)

Whatever Lenten discipline you are following, perhaps the #Live Lent course, or a local study group, a focussed effort to support others or a form of self-denial (or all of them!), may it bring a greater focus on God. There were those who ministered to Jesus in the Gospel stories. The angels in



the wilderness, the woman who anointed him, Simon who carried his cross for example. We might not be able to do those things for him, but we can pay loving attention.

When we emerge from the austerity and effort of Lent, which has had an even more austere aspect in Lockdown, we come to the bright hope of Easter. We know in the Risen Christ the same relief that Jesus knew from the Angels. As we offer our love to Him, His love for us is always returned.

May the blessing of the Risen Christ be with you ■

Going the extra mile

Steve Gillan, Headteacher of Thurlbear CE VA Primary School shares how they have stepped up to the challenges of the pandemic.

How differently have you had to work in the pandemic?

I have seen our teachers adapt to unique challenges and problems like never before. From day one, we committed to doing whatever was needed for our families. We offered to be open for pupils of key workers and vulnerable pupils, through half term holidays and at weekends to allow one parent, an NHS hero with no family support, to work.

What has impressed you about your school community?

I have been here nearly 9 years and I knew that we would stand up and be counted when it mattered. What has impressed me most has



Thurlbear staff - there for all families

been the level of enthusiasm, drive and community swell of support.

How have you and your staff been sustained?

Sustaining a level of teaching at this intensity is incredibly hard. Our teachers have been delivering both online, live lessons every day as well as teaching the 40% of

pupils who are still in school. The resilience and drive of all staff is a wonder to behold.

Does any moment stand out from the last year?

When I emailed the staff regarding opening for the weekends within 10 minutes I had 30 replies from staff volunteering. That was a tight-throat moment and quite overwhelming.

Any advice for worried parents?

Every family will have had some beautiful, golden moments at home; the kind that you couldn't get in school. Children are incredibly resilient and positive. Read more at: www.bathandwells.anglican.org/extra-mile ■

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