

## IN THIS TOGETHER

As I write this, the country is trying to return to whatever the new normal may be. Shops are open again, restaurants and cafes serving, churches and other public buildings beginning to open up. Yet there is still a lot of fear and anxiety about. Job cuts are growing, and Government guidelines seem to change almost daily; meaning all this uncertainty is leaving folk wondering about the future. There are challenging times ahead.

So, as the church, how do we face those challenges? We could simply retreat and hold on tight to what we have, ensuring those, who are part of the church now are cared for and listened to. But is that what God requires of us? I would argue not, along with many others I'm sure.

Here in Harwich, we felt the lockdown as much as most other places. It became like a bit of a ghost town. Yet there was a lot happening. Through local community and statutory partnerships and with churches together, a helpline project was formed and responded to the local community needs. We delivered shopping and prescriptions, created food parcels, set up a pastoral chatline, made and delivered cooked meals and several other tasks and programmes. One of the things that struck me most was the way in which so many of these local organisations came together to work as one, for the good of the community. There was no real agenda other than looking out for the vulnerable in Harwich. No one of the organisations could have done it alone, it had to be a co-ordinated effort. There were over 20 groups involved.

MEMBERS OF THE HARWICH HELPS TEAM !!
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It seems crazy to me that this can't happen all the time. We need to be able to let go of political, financial and personal agendas. I have always been an advocate for joint working, it just seems to achieve so much more. So, when folk, who were part of this project began saying how they would like to work together more in any future ventures, my heart sang. We have seen and heard some real tragedies over these last six months, and no-one should forget that. The hurt that so many are feeling is real and the fact that folk are grieving and feeling isolated at the same time makes that even harder. The world as we had come to know it has been flipped around, and that is difficult to get your head around. Yet, also in the news, we heard stories about how people came together to ensure vulnerable folk were looked out for. A genuine sense of community formed in many areas. Here in Harwich we felt that real sense of coming together and forming relationships that will see us through all sorts of challenges.



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MEALS TO GO  
OUT ←

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Surely, that is how we are created to be anyway. No man, or woman, is an island. We are all inter-dependent. You know what, even God works as community to achieve greater things. We have father, son and spirit working together. I think that's a pretty good model for us.

So, it seems to me, if the church is to continue to be relevant and active in its local community, and to face the new challenges of today's society, it needs to team up with others to achieve more. We may have some very important things to say in any given context, but we need to be at the table to say them. That means leaving our buildings first. We are only a part of the community. I see many organisations doing great things, the children of God acting out of care and justice for others. I felt privileged to be part of the project here, and certainly saw God at work in the lives of many people. Whether the church is here or not, God is always active in communities, I guess we just need to discern where and then look to join in with God's mission. That can only lead to an exciting adventure and a hopeful future. *Mark Tubby*