

Household worship in church

The Time to Wonder Boxes are still available!
If you or someone you know would like one, do get in touch.

We continue to monitor their usage and content and as the lockdown eases and we all emerge from our hibernation from the busyness of life I wonder what changes will remain as permanent in our lives with those that we live with and what will be left behind as we resume previous patterns of living?

Many have noted that they have valued the time and space to simply slow down and be with those in their immediate family circle, literally the people they live with. This is not to say they haven't missed their wider family whom they haven't been able to see and be with but restrictions have brought about unexpected positives as well as negatives.

There are growing stories of households playing board games and card games together, even meeting up with others via Zoom and similar platforms to play games. Some have rediscovered the dying art (actually deceased!) of eating together rather than staggered meals throughout the evening. It has become almost common for family units to be seen taking a walk together and chatting as they go. What will remain of these patterns of living and what will quickly be lost?

It has been said that faith has to be seen and experienced by children so that they can engage with it and experience it for themselves. We have sometimes been too quick to reduce faith to a series of processes and patterns, rituals and knowledge rather than a way of life and interactions with each other and God.

Lockdown, for all its many difficulties, has afforded moments to simply be and wonder, to question and consider, to wrestle and cogitate. There needs to be downtime and space for these processes to occur and as life takes a new turn with the next instalment of living there is a danger of that space being squeezed out. Now is the moment to decide what is worth holding onto as we move forward and what we can let go of.

Let's not be in too much of a hurry to, 'get back to where we were before' but consciously take with us the faith building elements that we have valued.

Toddler Groups

What does the future of Toddler groups look like? Will they all start again? Who will come and take part in helping? Who might come to a group and what are their needs?

The current easing of restrictions has meant that groups may start to meet once again but with limitations. It would be all too easy to assume that groups that functioned regularly and to a very high standard previously will simply pick up where they left off prior to the lock downs.

The forced closures have allowed these groups to pause and take stock of what they want to achieve, who they want to support and how they might achieve all these things. I am aware that some groups might never reopen and others will shift their focus.

I am starting to make contact with group leaders to arrange socially distanced meetings to help them work out what the next steps might be for their groups. This could be a very significant time where big questions can be chewed over without any preconceived ideas blocking progress. It is perfectly okay for groups not to start again, but equally it could be a time to reimagine what you are trying to achieve and what you need to make that happen.

I am happy to journey with you as you start to work your way through those questions and others. You don't need to know where you will end up before you start to journey. Nor do you need to limit the questions you might like to pose before you ask any of them. To dream and to wonder are good things. Don't be limited by what you can see or know at the start of the process.



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Should 'Online Church' continue?

Having experienced over a year of online church I find myself with mixed feelings. I stand in awe of the way church leaders responded with lightening speed to offer numerous ways for their congregations to attend a church service as well as other church meetings. Some have proved to be useful and innovative while others have fallen short because the medium of 'online' simple doesn't suit what they were trying to achieve. That is in no way to criticise the efforts but to acknowledge the situation of lockdown has forced some impossible tasks upon them. I think the reason for some of their failure goes back to changes in our society over the past 30 years. In the late 1990s schools changed the way they undertook acts of worship (assemblies to you and me) which were required under the law. The change to the law at that time was in recognition that society was no longer predominantly Christian and to make children attend and take part in a 'Corporate Act of Worship that was mainly Christian' was no longer appropriate. The word 'corporate' was changed to read 'collective'. The nuance of this can be missed but is fundamental to what we do in church Sunday by Sunday. Corporate worship is where a group gathers as a single unit to express shared worship. Collective worship is where a group gathers as individuals to express individual worship. In the context of a school each child, although sat together in a hall, remains separate and worship their god in their way. What occurs is a presentation in which the children are offered ways to engage with their god or philosophy. In the context of church each person makes up the whole and we worship together, corporately, one God while the person leading this act of worship presides rather than presents. Over the decades the individuality of Collective Worship has crept into church services

and we often pick and choose which bits we like or agree with and ignore or not take part in portions that we don't warm to. Style of worship has often overtaken the key element of being corporate in the worship of God. The language of 'We' is important in Corporate Worship. Hence creedal statements often start with 'We believe'.

The dilemma of online acts of worship is that by their nature they are individualistic. We can choose to be anonymous, pause the presentation, watch it at a time that is more convenient, nip out during the sermon to make a coffee! We are not corporate, we are scattered in our own homes. Those leading don't preside they present. Once again it isn't their fault but rather the weakness of the process on offer.



The celebrated surge in attendance of online services by 'non-churchgoers' has occurred because they can remain separate and possibly engage in Collective Worship but this format can never substitute the physical gathering of people who, as one, worship God together. Even if that has to be socially distanced it is still being corporately together. There is an argument for maintaining an online presence once we can return to Corporate Worship as a 'window' for others to see who we are and what we do but that must be with the intent of drawing those people into the physical community and not solely being an online community.

Simon

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Easter Video

It has been noted by many of our users that we are very versatile and able to respond quickly to their needs. So it was good to be able to assist a church who were looking to reach out to their families over Easter. Recognising they wouldn't be able to physically meet up with them at that time they decided to develop a format that they had successfully run at Christmas. They supplied each household with craft activities and pointed them to their website to watch a daily video that unpacked a part of the story that related to one of the crafts. This time they wanted to develop the video element by having the story of Holy Week, Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, with some puppet comments interspersed and so they got in touch.



I must confess it is a long time since I have done this sort of thing. It was common place for us to create videos that were used on RE Days but I don't think I had done any videoing of puppetry since the creation of the Holiday Club material, 'Grand Prix Winners' back in 2003! That project saw the birth of Jan-Carlo Fizzy-Cola who rarely gets an outing these days.



The challenge of creating a simple studio at home using my phone to record the video footage without any swanky lighting or microphones was a real test of my ingenuity and patience (or lack of it at times!). The final result was very pleasing. The church were thrilled with it, particularly how it added to what they were trying to achieve. It was good once again to return to scripture and read the different accounts from the Gospels and try to weave them together to tell the greatest story ever told. The images were free for use for this type of project.

My favourite drawn character was Pontius Pilate.



Having created the video it seemed to be a waste not to offer it to other churches to use it, and so I did. To date, I know of 3 churches that have used it during their online Easter services, 2 diocese have placed it among their online resources, a Boys' Brigade Company have accessed it and it has had approximately 200 individual views via our YouTube channel.

I hope to hear back from anyone who has used it and how it was received.

If you would like to view the video for yourself either jump on our website, www.thefact.co.uk and follow the link or use this direct link <https://youtu.be/5KueRQxlwqg>

The question now is should I create one for Ascension and Pentecost? Anyone interested? Could you use it with the households that you have contact with?

What do we see?

An ICU nurse recently gave a TV interview in which she reported that at the height of the pandemic over the Christmas period she stopped seeing patients with names but saw them merely as living bodies that needed medical interventions. As she told her story she wept with exhaustion and sadness that she had sunk to levels that were far below her normal nursing excellence of care for the individual. The pressure and volume of the tasks meant she was process focused rather than person focused. No-one blamed her for this, rather the opposite, everyone rallied to her side to thank her for going beyond the pale in her role as a nurse.

This story reminded me of another comment made many years ago by a retiring Head of Personnel who said that it was time for her to stand down, not just because of her age but she feared for the changes that were coming, some for the better but some for the worse. Departments were being reorganised and renamed, no longer would they be Personnel Departments they would now be HR Departments (Human Resources). She feared that in the march to improve, quantify and clarify workers' rights and entitlements they would lose sight of people themselves and that compassion, tolerance and care would be lost. She said, 'The clue is in the name!'

As we continue to move forward on the, 'Roadmap to easing lockdown' it is all too easy to be caught up with dates and entitlements and to miss people. I confess as I've started to wonder about future ministry for FACT I have sometimes been impatient with churches, toddler groups and the like who aren't moving quickly enough for my liking. 'Why aren't they? Why don't they? And as I've posed these questions I have slipped into focusing on the process and product and inadvertently missed the needs of the people involved. All those in positions of leadership are doing their best and they are all overwhelmed by what has occurred. These people need compassion, care and encouragement not castigating and criticising. I have paused and thought about my own needs at this time, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual and as I have, I realise that I'm not unique or flawed by my needs but can stand empathetically with those people and I can worry about processes later.

Then there were 4

In the last newsletter we were very excited to tell you about the newest Trustee, Stuart, who had joined the Board. This time, as I write, there is a certain sadness as we now say goodbye to one of our long serving Trustees, Simon Taylor. Simon has done two 5 year stints during which time he has held the Treasurer's post for a period and recently led us through the Government's NEST pension process. At our Zoomed Trustees Meeting in April we said our farewells and thanks and gave Simon a small gift to note our gratitude for all he had done over the last 10 years. We will miss him. However, this means that we are once again reduced to only 4 Trustees and so we are on the look out for new faces and skills to support the work and ministry of FACT as we move into uncharted territory!

Perhaps this is now the right time for you to look at something new to be involved with, something from which you will receive as much as you will give. Perhaps it's not a time to pick up where you left off with other commitments of the past but to strike out with something new. Something that you can give yourself to and grow with. Perhaps you have discovered new skills and passions during lockdown that fit with FACT and its ministry and you are the right person for this time and place to join the merry band of Trustees. (When I say merry I mean in the sense of being happy, not inebriated! We don't have those type of meetings!)

Be bold and get in touch for nothing more than a chat to explore the possibilities. What have you got to lose? Probably nothing but what you might gain is a very exciting opportunity to be involved with supporting me at the cutting edge of ministry amongst children and households in our locality.



A socially distanced coffee and chat is the next step. Drop me a message, I look forward to hearing from you.

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity. Acts 2:46