

Updates and maintenance

Keeping the wheels of FACT turning is no small task. So much goes on behind the scenes to keep a registered charity functioning legally and efficiently but without it falling into 'maintenance mode'. The Trustees have continued to play their part and will meet once again in July to look back over the last 12 months and consider the future as we come to the end of our financial year.

Without wishing to sound like a stuck record We are still desiring new Trustees to join our merry band to keep the wheels turning and if this is something that has caught your eye in the past but you haven't quite gotten around to doing anything about it yet then strike while your attention has been grabbed once more and get in touch. I have been able to update our website over recent months and, thanks to the vigilance of one of our Trustees, correct some dysfunctional elements that I'd missed! If you haven't been on our website recently have a little look and let me know what you like and dislike!

We have looked at the [Time to Share at Home](#) box and have now included a '[Creative Commons Licence](#)'. We hope this will encourage and enable people to use the materials and adapt / extend them to suit their unique situations without worry about copyright infringement. This is such a difficult area and we have tried our best to get it right and make use of this type of licence to set people free to use what we have created in their unique situations, every home is different, every church need is different.



If you would like some boxes for households you work with or to chat about additions or other developments do get in touch as we would love to support you in this. I'd also be very happy to visit your group / church to demonstrate and give away boxes if that is something you'd welcome. As always I'm only a message away.

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Toddler Groups

I am currently describing this moment of ministry as "coffee and chat". It's a tough job but someone has to do it! Catching up with people face to face over a coffee / beer is wonderful. Hearing their news and sharing mine is fantastic way of re-establishing friendships and acquaintances after an enforced absence. One such catch up was with a Toddler Group Leader. It was so good to encourage each other and hear that we are asking so many of the same questions about the future. I will be working with this group to help them think through their new era, possible different emphasis and how to start from what feels like a new beginning.

I know that other groups I've worked with are still not sure whether they will start again or their leaderships have changed and are still evolving. To you I say I'm happy to offer help and encouragement if that would be useful and desirable.

Other news

The gradual unlocking following the heights of this pandemic has allowed me to start to return to the office on a part-time basis, currently 2 days a week. As more needs to be done and undertaken so I will increase my days and reduce the amount of furlough I'm taking. The scheme will come to an end this autumn and regardless of the situation I will be at work full-time at that point.

On returning to the office following working from home part-time I discovered that the chocolate biscuit supplies had been depleted to zero. Sad times! However, on my second day in the office two volunteers dropped in on the off chance and brought with them numerous packets of chocolate biscuits and then the following week when I caught up with someone over a coffee in the office they too brought a gift of chocolate biscuits. Phew, normal service has been resumed!



Faith Awareness
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Sweet Ebenezer!

During a recent devotional time at the office my mind alighted on an old John Newton hymn, 'Begone unbelief, my Saviour is near'. I couldn't remember all the words so chased it down on YouTube. I must confess I reverted to my childhood and found myself smirking at the words in verse 2 mentioning 'broken cisterns' and wondering about leaking toilets and I also had to refresh my memory about what 'repine' meant. It's nothing to do with IKEA furniture. The verse in the middle of the hymn was what really drew me in with it's reference to 'Sweet Ebenezer'.

The Old Testament records the story of Samuel the prophet calling the nation of Israel to repent of their idolatrous ways. Having done that, they went into battle with the Philistines and following their victory Samuel marked the spot with a stone that he named *Ebenezer*.

Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer (which means "the stone of help"), for he said,

"Up to this point the Lord has helped us!"

Sweet Ebenezers are memories of when God has been with us in times past. We have a God who walks with us. He doesn't lead us up a garden path only to dart behind a hedge and hide when we most need him. If God seems distant or we are unclear about what is next we can take heart and courage from our past encounters with Him. Just because we can't see what lies ahead doesn't mean there is nothing. Things may be unknown to us but never unknown to God.

As I come further out of lock down fear about what the future might look like has stealthily risen within me. I like certainties and things that are familiar, they are very comforting and can make me feel safe.

Conversely when things seem unfamiliar I can feel fearful of not being in control. (Being in control is of course an illusion that I like to take part in!) The gentle reminder for me from God at this time about Ebenezer is very timely. *"Up to this point the Lord has helped us!"*

The future of what FACT might be doing in ministry remains cloudy and uncertain to me, but not to God. So, I am going to push forward and attempt to remain vigilant to God's still small voice to direct me, or a howling wind if I'm proving to be a little deaf.

This generation of children and the households that they live within still need to experience the reality of God in their lives. We live in a time when biblical literacy is at an all time low, yet there is still a hunger in people to find something that helps make sense of life and death and give meaningful purpose beyond hedonistic pleasure.

The ministry of FACT continues to be a very real need in the third decade of this century. Exactly what that looks like will unfold in the coming months.



This is a broken cistern for which I have no repine!

Simon

FACT enabling children and households to reflect on the Christian Gospel

An intergenerational Pentecost Service

New era, new ways



How can we do intergenerational worship well? How can we help all ages worship together without dumbing it down to the lowest common denominator? How can we increase the expectancy that we will meet with God during our times of worship on a Sunday morning? How can we worship if we can't sing? How can we use simple words to pray together? How can we use liturgy with children?

The opt out answer is we can't! Yet at St Nicholas Church Shepperton we did on Pentecost Sunday.



As I chatted to people after the service at the door one conversation with a very young child was all about the streamers we had used and the interactive prayer of St Patrick's Breastplate, while the next was with an elderly woman who smiled and said, 'Thank you, I loved every moment of that service and I found it very moving to worship like that.' This wasn't Collective Worship but Corporate Worship. Individually we had engaged and encountered God at our points of need and understanding but also as a whole congregation we had worshipped God through, and with, each element offered by us.

Many Anglican services end with a simple dismissal instruction to 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.' And the people respond, 'In the name of Christ. Amen.' An acknowledgement that we don't leave God in the church but go with him into the week, into our homes, into our schools, work places, and leisure activities and we don't go alone but with Christ.

So how can we continue to know Christ in our households, which is where we will spend most of our time Monday to Saturday? What are some simple but effective things we could do with those that we live with to bring Christ into the everyday? How can we make it normal and not awkward? What about others we live with who don't hold a faith, can they be involved? How can our faith grow while away from church?

These are some of the questions that FACT is wrestling with as we exit this latest lock down (hoping it will be the last) and considering what the future faith development models might look like.

We are considering running some sessions with either adults or cross generational groups to encourage and support faith in the household, faith in the everyday and faith in specific situations in life.

Early days in this but if that strikes a chord then get in touch to chat things through. We don't need to have an answer before we pose our questions. It is often in the journey that we find our way.

Jeremiah can be a tough book to read as the story is told of a people taken into exile and subsequently who long to be back in Jerusalem so that they would be able to worship at the Temple. The reason for their exile was their abandonment of God and the barefaced hypocrisy of worship in the Temple one day, while worshipping idols and their associated practices the next day. While in Exile Jeremiah writes Psalm 137 made famous by Boney M over 40 years ago.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion..... How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?

The people's desire to be back where they thought God was, was mistaken, The prophet Ezekiel picks up the story of the presence of God leaving the Temple but eventually returning to the renewed hearts of the people in exile. God was not confined to one place. Theologians think that it was during this time of exile, being away from all that was familiar in their worship patterns, that synagogues first came into existence. It was a new way to worship that is today the norm for most Jews.

At this point in time churches are gently considering what new things will be developed and what old things will be left behind as lock down comes to an end. Undoubtedly things will never be the same as before, they can't be as we have all changed with our numerous experiences of life under Covid.

I smiled to myself recently as I played with my 4 year old granddaughter. She announced, 'Granddad the cafe is closing'. Then informed me, 'We can only do it outside because of Covid!'

This has been her norm but that will all change in the coming weeks and months. Eventually it will be lost in the annals of her history and a new norm will take over. This pandemic will pass but we will all be changed by it, often very subtly and in nuanced ways.

One of the new discoveries for many households during these lock downs has been the intensity of living together. At first very uncomfortable for many, including the pressure of home schooling, but as the new norm, that had been forced on them, set in,

these everyday patterns of living proved to possess some benefits not previously experienced or that had been superseded with other patterns of living. One of those benefits included sitting and eating as a household where everyone ate the same food and conversations flowed across the table. Parents were either working from home or had been furloughed so this was easy to organise. There has been a growing appreciation of being together rather than being apart.

Pre-Covid segregation was expected and desired in most walks of life. Segregation by age at school, in the home environment and also at church. Having spoken with some households these previously expected and desired approaches no longer fit or are wanted to the same degree. They want to maintain the eating together in an evening, and very importantly they want to be together in church rather than be segregated into age groups.

This might be one of those times where had it not been for the enforced situation of Covid we would never have discovered (rediscovered) the benefits of being together rather than apart.



From Temple worship to Synagogue worship, from segregated age worship to intergenerational worship. From individual faith journeys to faith journeys as a people of God.

What will your church do to usher in the new era and new ways? If you want some support and help then now is a good time to get in touch and start a conversation. To try to return to what has past may not be an option as some families I have spoken to won't return to the same old, same old!

The Lord replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. Jeremiah 1:7