

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL COMMUNITY FORUM (CCF)

Salisbury Cathedral in Lockdown: Services and other Activities, March – June 2020

In view of the Covid-19 lockdown, it was decided not to hold the Cathedral Community Forum meeting scheduled for 17 June, but instead to attempt to take stock of cathedral online services and other activities during this extraordinary period, to send the results to the Dean and Chapter, and to file them with the minutes of regular CCF meetings.

The following paragraphs draw together comments from members of the CCF, including Canon Robert Titley. These reflect their own impressions and those of a – necessarily limited - number of contacts in the Cathedral community. They deal mainly with experience of services and other cathedral-based activities during lockdown; the final paragraphs touch on the current limited reopening of the cathedral and look further ahead.

There is widespread appreciation of the way the challenges of lockdown and the closure of the cathedral have been met through creative thought, organisation and technical skill, and a great deal of hard work on the part of all the cathedral clergy team, and others involved in keeping things going behind the scenes. There is also a feeling that experience in working online has brought about a steady increase in the level of professionalism in the way it is done. The transformation of cathedral activities is impressive, as are contact arrangements designed to maintain the sense of a worshipping community. Outreach has benefitted - we have heard of people who are not regular cathedral worshippers but have viewed the cathedral's online services and talks. There is much to be thankful for.

Online Sunday Worship

The Sunday services of the Word with lovely music have been much appreciated, and the special celebrations of Easter and the other great festivals have drawn viewers into the joyous spirit of the season. With increasing experience and greater confidence, the participation of members of the congregation in readings and leading prayers, and music sung from home by the lay vicars and choristers (rather than archive recordings as at the start of the online services) have increased the feeling that the cathedral remains a living and active witness to the Christian faith. Seeing members of the choir - especially the choristers - recording music for the service is welcomed. This feeling has been further enhanced since the member of the clergy leading the worship has been allowed to officiate from inside the cathedral.

However, there seem to be a substantial number of people who miss the Eucharistic worship which is normally at the heart of the spiritual life of the cathedral and its regular congregation. A number of other C of E cathedrals and churches have been streaming communion services. There is a significant gap here, and we welcome the prospect that it will very soon be filled.

There must be members of the congregation without wi-fi who cannot access cathedral services online; we have heard of some who feel deprived. It is hard to know what if anything could be done about this. However, other contacts with them continue – see below.

The recently introduced 'Zoom coffee' arrangements after the Sunday morning service have been welcomed by participants.

The 800th Anniversary Service and Anniversary Year Events

The anniversary service has been widely applauded. It was wonderfully creative, with Bishop Nicholas and members of the Cathedral School recalling the reasons for the move from Old Sarum, a description of the foundation stone laying ceremony, and photos of the old cathedral site as well as views of the present cathedral. There was lovely music, including a new composition relating to the move. The shortened version broadcast on BBC Radio 4 was also very successful.

The loss of the major events programme planned for the anniversary year has been an enormous blow, both financially and as a focus for raising the cathedral's profile and encouraging a wider public to get to know it better. However, an excellent interactive virtual tour of the cathedral's art exhibition, Spirit and Endeavour, is available online. Fortunately, the hugely successful Sarum Lights event took place in February, before lockdown.

The cathedral finances have also been seriously hit by the loss of visitor contributions, normally representing over half of the cathedral's income.

Midday Prayers by Zoom and Daily Reflections

Midday prayers (from Common Worship) attract regular participation by around 30 households, including some who would be unable to attend services in the cathedral. The prayers are followed by conversation on Zoom.

The range of subjects in Daily Reflections covered by the clergy team (each contributing about once a week) is diverse and the approach often original. In general, these are thought-provoking short talks delivered in a relaxed and approachable manner. The reflections are widely appreciated – feedback is positive, occasionally enthusiastic. They have reinforced the sense of clergy presence within the community and helped people to get to know the clergy better - many have been especially pleased to 'meet' the Revd Pete Atkinson who arrived as the new Minor Canon for Young People just as lockdown was beginning.

Both the midday prayers and Daily Reflections contribute to keeping the cathedral community connected and maintaining their sense of 'ownership' of the cathedral.

Other Clergy Contacts with the Community

There are widely advertised phone and email contacts for anyone needing pastoral help. Beyond that, the clergy team's 'round robin' emails to their 'constituents', based on a share of the congregational roll, are a useful means of updating the community and reinforcing the feeling of connectedness. We understand that the clergy get appreciative feedback from some recipients. However, this exercise has shown that the congregational roll is incomplete and points to the need to update it – and to persuade members of the congregation of the importance of registering their details.

There is also an updating message from the Dean on the cathedral's weekly online notice sheet.

Contact is being maintained with members of the congregation without email, by phone or occasionally by post. This seems to work as well as possible.

Volunteers

Great care has been taken to keep volunteers informed, with warm and appreciative emails from the Dean, cascaded through team leaders. The Dean's thank you gift to volunteers for Volunteer Week of a subscription to Jacquie Lawson virtual greeting cards was greatly appreciated. Team leaders have also kept volunteers informed of online services and other developments.

Guides are mostly keen to return when they can be confident of feeling safe, and able to engage with visitors. Flower arrangers are keen to get back to work.

Opening the Cathedral – 'Supervised Individual Prayer'

There is general relief that the cathedral is now open again, if on a limited basis. Those who have visited it comment on how peaceful it is – it is indeed a privilege to be there in present circumstances, with very few other people. One visitor's comments no doubt represent the reactions of many others: 'It was wonderful to go into the cathedral again and the whole building exuded peace and prayerfulness. Obviously, much care had been taken to make it accessible to all, and this worked very well.' Another suggested that the re-opening of the cathedral could perhaps be made known more widely – 'the peace and calm of reflective space is a great blessing.'

What Next?

It is excellent news that the cathedral will begin to offer 2 communion services on Sundays from 5 July, though with advance booking for limited access. The online service at 10.30am will be maintained for the time being. We all look forward to the resumption of the traditional pattern of worship in the cathedral, together with real (as opposed to virtual) coffee sessions, though this will doubtless take time. Planning for the reopening for traditional worship is doubtless in hand. Risks and sensitivities are already clear. One Forum member found that an elderly neighbour, who missed the regular Eucharistic services, was very nervous about returning to the cathedral after shielding; another spoke forcefully of his anger and frustration at the closure of the cathedral, despite explanations.

Forum members will be glad to do anything they can to help make arrangements work smoothly when the time comes.

Rosemary Spencer

Chair, Cathedral Community Forum

30 June 2020