


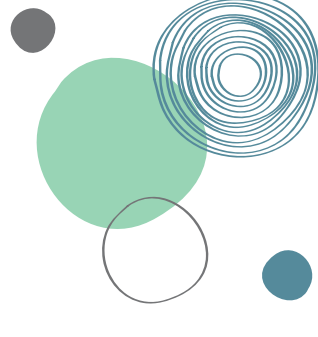


**REPORT:  
CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN  
RESPONSES TO THE CORONAVIRUS  
PANDEMIC IN LEEDS**

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# CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN LEEDS

This is a summary report on the responses of Christians, churches and Christian organisations to the Coronavirus pandemic which also includes more recent reflection on what has been learnt that is useful to us as we move forwards. It draws on the research and experience of representatives from Gather Leeds, Leeds Church Institute, Unity in Poverty Action (UPA) and St George's Crypt, so that it covers ecumenical diversity as well as both church, missional projects and individual perspectives. There are spotlight sections on the tackling of food insecurity and homelessness, and the experience of church congregations and leaders. It concludes with a biblical reflection and set of questions which we hope is helpful to readers at the time of publication when we continue to live with the insecurity and shifting landscape of this latest stage of the pandemic.

## Remembering where it all began

**Monday 16th March** Announcement of major restrictions ahead to prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

**Wednesday 18th March** Staff from Leeds City Council, UPA and Leeds Food Aid Network, Trussell Trust, FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink Food, Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) and Leeds Community Foundation met on Skype to plan and initiate a coordinated response to food insecurity.

**Thursday 19th March** A Food Parcel Delivery Scheme was started by We Care Leeds and supported by the Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN).

**Mothering Sunday 22nd March** Churches were closed to worship and many met online for the first time.

**Monday 23rd March** New provision for children qualifying for free school meals Schools started. At first lunch bags, then weekly hampers, finally vouchers.

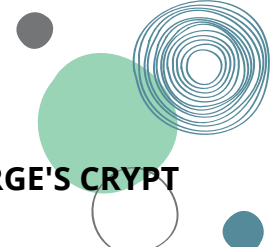
**Evening of Monday 23rd March** Official national lockdown announced at 8pm.

**Thursday 26th March** The Everyone in Scheme is announced and six local hotels are used to provide shelter for the homeless. Also the Welfare Support Scheme devised the previous week was implemented.

**Sunday 29th March** Online services were filmed in people's homes not churches due to changes in restrictions.

**Monday 6th April** Channel 4 produced Day in the Life of Coronavirus Britain which featured Revive church in Leeds leading the final song Lean on Me.

**Early May** the Leeds South and East, Leeds North and West and Wetherby Trussell Trust Foodbanks moved to a citywide delivery food parcel scheme. It was run in partnership with a Citizens Advice helpline which people could use to request assistance. The scheme ran from St Wilfred's Church in Halton to the South and East of the City and different venues were used to deliver to the North and West including Moortown Methodist Church building. At the same time the delivery scheme run by We Care Leeds and FAN was disbanded.



## LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE CORONAVIRUS BY ROGER QUICK, CHAPLAIN OF ST GEORGE'S CRYPT

It was at the very start of the pandemic; in St George's Crypt we had just begun the required measures of social distancing, hand sanitizing, take-away lunches, directional tape on the floors, and housing many in alternative accommodation instead of our usual dormitory spaces. Masks were not yet common.

The first sign I had of illness was conjunctivitis; then I started with a dry cough, but still didn't feel particularly unwell. By the Thursday I suddenly felt terribly weak and things began to progress rapidly. By the middle of that night I was struggling to breathe, and propped myself up on a pile of pillows. This seemed to go on for hours, with a dry fever, and an uncontrollable shaking.

I had to get up at one point, and on my way back to bed, holding on to the wall, I remember looking heavenward, and saying to my parents, "Get ready, I'm coming home." It really felt like that. Somehow, I must have fallen asleep; I remember being quite surprised to find I was still here in the morning. For the next week I slept. The fatigue was extraordinary. It was about two months before I felt normal again. During that time good friends did all my shopping; I was eventually able to get back to work, partially furloughed.

When the pandemic began, I had thought that I would contract it sooner rather than later, and because of underlying health conditions, probably wouldn't survive. Many of my colleagues continued to work through those early, particularly frightening days, with quiet courage, steadfast faith, and disregard for their own safety. We now believe that many Crypt staff had Covid19 early on; at least twelve of my colleagues tested positive at different times; some were quite ill; at least one spent time in hospital. We prayed for the people we look after, fearing that they would be very vulnerable to this new plague. In fact hardly any seem to have contracted it, and none we know of were very ill. I believe that to be an extraordinary answer to prayer.





## THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHURCHES AND MISSION PROJECTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

The perspective of the churches as described below reflects a series of structured conversations conducted with 15 churches leaders from a variety of different Leeds churches; leaders include lay and ordained, men and women, and different ethnicities. There are also some case studies offered as illustrations, and the churches or projects mentioned here are not necessarily those who were part of the conversations. The perspective is grouped around seven key areas of Christian concern and action.

### **Worship services and church life**

During lockdown, all leaders were involved in offering online worship in some form; on Zoom, pre-recorded streaming, YouTube and Facebook. In the light of this, creative and experimental approaches were attempted. One interesting example involved interviewing members of their congregation in their gardens, prayers from each of the parks in Leeds with some local history thrown in, often with Christian reference. The leader of this church felt that using an online approach would become increasingly important so he completed an online media course during the pandemic. However, another leader commented that although the discovering of using an online approach enabled people to connect, he still felt that it was far from ideal. "Jesus didn't just zoom in, he became flesh and blood!"

It was obvious that people missed the spiritual and fellowship dynamic of physically gathered church. Not being able to meet and sing together was particularly hard for some congregations. This situation caused some to reconsider "What is church?" which grew the consciousness that the centre is not the worship service or meeting in a building, but about a people, expressing God's love to all, both to those within the church and the wider community.

As the pandemic eased there was quite a variety of approaches adapting to changing regulations: some ran a booking system because of the restriction on numbers; others experimented with holding more than one service, but as in the case of one church, felt it was better to have one service with different leadership teams being responsible. There was a clear sense throughout of having to be adaptable and responsive to the changing situation. Many churches chose to develop a hybrid approach to Sunday worship, although some leaders were concerned that two congregations were forming, both online and in church.





## Prayer

Many leaders reported that there was a greater desire to pray amongst their congregational members especially as the pandemic took hold. As well as individual responses using a number of resources such as Lectio 365, there was a variety of gatherings for prayer on a number of levels both, locally, denominationally and nationally. The overall impression is that the prayer life of each church deepened with a greater regularity and commitment to pray. Some commented on how they experienced the importance of “listening to God” rather than just bringing requests. There is evidence too of informal smaller prayer groups emerging during this time and greater sharing of spiritual resources for prayer through, for example, church magazines. There were a number of cross denominational citywide prayer gatherings held predominantly online.

### **Citywide prayer events during the first year of the pandemic.**

**Face to Face 24 Hour Prayer** when 100 Christians gathered at St Matts Church, Burley and prayed about the growing pandemic.

**Night Prayer and WhatsApp Group** established and coordinated by Leeds House Prayer House.

**Gather Leeds** hosted zoom events for prayer and support gathering 40 Christians working in the NHS, Business, Media and homelessness; and 50 people working in education, foster care and Care Homes.

**Global Day of Prayer** zoom gathering to pray with Christians of different nationalities in Leeds and globally about responses to the pandemic.

### **Prayer Breakfast with James Rogers, Deputy Chief Executive of the Council**

**Praying for Salvation and Transformation during the Pandemic** event with over 100 Christians joining together on zoom.

**Prayer Lunch** for the NHS which included presentations and prayer

**Pandemic Response and Recovery** zoom meeting of 100 people for information sharing, discussion and prayer.





## **Pastoral Care**

Leaders spoke of the way the pandemic put the already vulnerable under increasing pressure and made people more aware of the fragility of life. This re-emphasised the church's role in pastoral care and the importance of attentive listening to people's needs. Many comments were made about the social and emotional impact on individuals and families of loneliness and isolation; and particular mention was made of the restrictions on funeral practice, making bereavement and grief harder to process.

As the pandemic developed, pastoral care was conducted by all means possible: by phone, email, end of the garden visits, meeting in parks, a buddy system, and younger people being mobilised to help with basic needs. All these methods were being employed across the churches and were often not limited to congregation members. There were examples too of churches supplying food parcels and ready meals. Most leaders spoke of how many people within their congregations had "stepped up" when it came to exercising pastoral care within and beyond the church.

## **Caring and outreach case studies**

One church made sure that every member had a mobile phone and if not supplied them with one, so that they could be in contact. They were also able to provide a number of tablets to older people who were isolated and gave them basic lessons in how to use them. During Lockdown, they worked to provide meals for 50 families, cooked in the church's kitchens and distributed to people's homes.

In the first three months of the pandemic Lighthouse Church was able to support around 70 households with regular food parcels and face to face doorstep visits. In June they began outdoor services and from July were able to use St George's Church for worship.

Gateway Church in the community of Woodhouse and Little London worked with local partners Caring Together and Oblong to deliver meals to vulnerable households. As well as the food, those who were experiencing general isolation appreciated the visit and human contact.





## Spiritual growth and reflection

Many leaders commented that during the first lock down, reduced time travelling to meetings meant they had more time for quiet reflection and prayer. Mention was made of being more enriched by bible study, especially verses that brought sustenance and hope, and discovering that the pandemic did not diminish their experience of God's presence. There was a sense of "the pause button being pressed" which led to some reflection on the meaning of Sabbath and valuing the need for rest. Thoughts were expressed around time being suspended, or a time of waiting, like the disciples experienced during the death and resurrection of Jesus. Many leaders referred to a renewed appreciation of creation and the environment.

Leaders also noted spiritual growth among congregation members and that people were individually taking more responsibility for their spiritual development and that of their immediate family and friends. One church went to extraordinary lengths to produce an online daily magazine for a number of months, with relevant news items, spiritual devotional material and prayer focus. This was also printed and posted to those who did not have access to digital technology.

During lockdown, many leaders found themselves and others asking "How is church relevant in this situation?". It was admitted that there were no quick and easy answers; and leaders shared a range of thoughts on this. The image of the vine in John 15 was referred to in terms of a season of pruning for further fruitfulness. There was a strong sense that there was a lot of pruning happening, personally and corporately that fruit-bearing was not inevitable. There was much comment about not wanting to return to "normal" and one leader said that we mustn't be too quick to define the new normal. Some mentioned the need to reconsider "material values" and the need to get rid of "excessive baggage" especially regarding church life. Questions were raised such as could this be "a wake-up call" regarding inequality, climate change, economic greed and a time of discovering what church is really about. This was expressed as a challenge to individualism as there was a growing recognition that, unlike is often assumed, we in the West are not invincible.







## PROPHETIC MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Involvement in prophetic mission was through identifying societal needs, speaking out, participation in social action in community life and in different spheres of the workplace. Leaders identified that pre-Covid issues became intensified during Lockdown. These included food poverty, economic inequality in the city and globally, the campaign for a living wage, unemployment and debt, the plight of asylum seekers and refugees, and racial inequality. Churches also noticed that people in areas of greater economic and social deprivation were suffering disproportionately and felt the need to respond directly to specific implications of the need for justice highlighted during the pandemic.

Stronger links were made with secular based community groups in working for the common good of their local communities during the pandemic. Other aspects of prophetic mission which have developed more during the pandemic included being a voice for young people, for those suffering from domestic abuse and mental health issues. A number of people in different congregations were taking up these causes. There was also evidence of more involvement with asylum seekers and refugees reported by some churches.

Leaders reported that the issue of diversity race and anti-racism was discussed, especially after the George Floyd murder. Some said that there was a greater awareness of the need to embrace diversity within their congregation and their local community. Three churches spoke about being involved in issues around Black Lives Matter, although two of these expressed some caution about the full agenda. Over 90 churches were signatories to a letter to a letter sent to Leeds City Council calling for a stronger response to racial abuse and inequality in the city. In terms of pursuing this, some leaders are now involved with Leeds Citizens in continuing to seek a way forward in positive action with the Council.

### **Case Study of St George's Crypt by Andrew Omond, Head of Marketing and PR**

When COVID hit we had to look at the way we offered all our services and change. All direct engagement with our clients indoors had to pause. There were no more sit down, three course lunch service. No health and wellbeing interventions that required an inside space such as opticians, dentistry and physiotherapy. We had to stop meeting for morning prayers and lost the opportunity to worship communally around the high holidays; Christmas, Easter, Harvest.

They say that through challenge true resilience is tempered. We knew we had to continue our service, or some of the most in need people in Leeds would potentially go hungry, sleep on cold, hard concrete, potentially face isolation and endure hardship during these unprecedented times.

We developed and built upon partnerships with agencies across the city to ensure we did not miss those most in need. Our team came together in the face of unparalleled adversity to change the way we work to be COVID-secure. If ever there was a demonstration of the power of God working through people this was it.

Our emergency accommodation service had to change. We moved shared bed spaces out of the main Crypt site into individual rooms dispersed across the city including use of two sizeable hotels. This changed how we managed our service and led to some great partnerships springing up.







Whilst we lost the ability to worship as we had done before, the pandemic provided an opportunity to reassess how we practise our Christian belief. With an absence of formal services and organised prayer, we were reminded that everything we do serving the homeless and vulnerable is a practical manifestation of the love of Christ.

When the restrictions eased, services began returning, but things have changed. We will keep developing strong networks across churches and statutory organisations in Leeds to make sure we are well prepared to face any future challenge together. We are working and will continue to work with partners to bring back services that we have had to pause. We will stop for a minute and reflect, looking at the work that we do every day, and remind ourselves that we are living out the Gospel, and will continue to do so.

### **Case Study and analysis of action to tackle food poverty by Dave Paterson**

There had been substantial partnership work addressing food poverty facilitated by Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN) since 2014 which included the Council, FareShare, Trussell Trust, Rethink Food, St George's Crypt and smaller providers such as Neruka's Soup Kitchen, Holbeck Foodbank and St Aidan's Church. These pre-existing partnerships enabled a speedy response when the pandemic hit. The largest scheme to tackle food insecurity in Leeds was the revamped welfare support scheme devised and run by a partnership of organisations working with the Council. Food was distributed through 30 Community Hubs, 4 of which were run in churches (Pudsey Parish Church, All Hallows / Hyde Park, Roundhay St Edmunds and Interact @ Stainbeck URC). A number of other churches were involved in helping their local hubs, including Moortown Baptist and St Mary's Hawksworth Wood.

In the first few months of the scheme, food was allocated when individuals contacted one of the helplines. People were allocated into a traffic light scheme put on the basis of need:

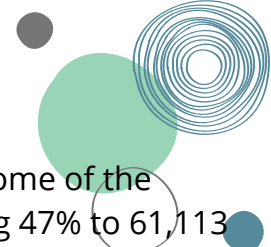
**Red denoting urgent need requiring a direct delivery of food.**

**Amber denoting referrals to Community Hubs**

**Green for help with shopping for those who were self-isolating and able to pay**

This was an innovative system that worked well. Initially food was stored at and distributed from one central warehouse, and from September 2020 FareShare Yorkshire became responsible for providing supplies from a smaller location. Some Hubs had officially come to an end by June 2021 and others by the end of 2021. Churches and Christian organisations have continued to support the community hub infrastructure throughout the pandemic.





In addition to this, many churches responded to the crisis even if they weren't part of some of the citywide schemes. churches and Christian projects contributed to foodbank usage rising 47% to 61,113 and to the number of food parcels given out informally increasing by 960% to 153,335 (Year 2020/21). As well as the successes achieved, some individuals and churches felt frustrated by not being able to do more, whether it be through food or something else; they also felt challenged by the need to keep socially distanced meaning they couldn't freely 'pop round' to people's houses. Those Churches that had pre-existing relationships with vulnerable people in their community were able to respond the quickest.

### **REFLECTIONS FROM CHRISTIANS IN THE NHS AND CARE HOMES**

During the first lockdown staff working on the Covid19 wards were very busy while others found they were caring for far less people than usual. The West Yorkshire Christian Medical Fellowship gathered weekly on zoom from the end of March until the end of May 2020 and people found it helpful to share their differing experiences and support one another.

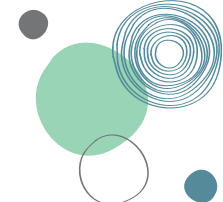
Richard Vautreay, a Christian GP in Leeds, reflected that in community and hospital settings, staff worked tirelessly and with huge dedication to provide the best possible care to patients despite very difficult circumstances. It meant making hard decisions to prioritise those who needed immediate care, both patients ill with COVID-19 and people with other serious conditions. Other NHS staff talked about specific pressures such as having to tell people on the phone, not in person, about the health of relatives at the end of life and the impact of occasions when family members couldn't say their goodbyes in person.

Staff in Care Homes also had to negotiate caring through the challenge of restrictions. Ted Britten from Leeds Methodist Homes felt that the roles of chaplains had been crucial. He was grateful that the presence and ministry of chaplains could continue even during lockdowns. At a time when visits were most limited the support of chaplains has been invaluable in helping older people feeling isolated.

### **CHRISTIANS WORKING IN BUSINESS**

There was mixed feedback about the ways the pandemic was affecting those working in business. Some people reported being busy as demand for their service shot up while others lost work. Prior to the pandemic, for example, one business was developing around the idea of open work spaces in churches but during the pandemic couldn't make progress. Similarly, a motivational speaker lost work significantly when the events business closed but was then able to develop new business opportunities through Zoom. Anna Crump, a stockbroker who is chair of CIB Leeds, spoke of the volatility of the stock market resulting in high demand for services and also the threat that that could all change as and when the market flattened. Christians in Business (Leeds) met between April and July 2020 on Zoom a number of times for support and prayer which recognised the varying and changing challenges experienced by businesses during the pandemic.





## **EVANGELISM AND NURTURING OF NEW CHRISTIANS**

Even though there were many reports of new people accessing churches online, there was not much evidence of people formally joining churches during the lockdown. Many churches did experience growth in the number of people 'on the fringes' of church life which continued after restrictions were lifted. Discussions are currently taking place as to how they can best move forward with the "large fringe" that has emerged. Generally there has been a growing sense that as the pandemic has gone on, many people have begun to question what life is all about, and there have been reports of many meaningful conversations.

Some leaders are reconsidering their evangelistic strategies in the light of the pandemic. One church decided that their current model of evangelism was not working and produced their own course similar to the Alpha course. Another church began a creative arts group on zoom during Lockdown where people produce paintings and other creative forms with a spiritual theme. This has involved those who do not attend church. These have been posted on the church's website and there are now contributions coming in from different countries across the world.

### **Case Study from New Life Community Church in Yeadon**

Pastor Denver Thompson found during the pandemic that one of the key characteristics of evangelism was that with less face-to-face interaction it was good to take new opportunities using written text, visual video or recorded audio. He encouraged sending videos out on social media to friends encouraging them in the challenging situation, sending a text to friends asking if there's anything specific people would like prayer for or posting a note through a neighbour's door with the offer of help. The aim was always to show that the body of Christ could still reach people with the spoken gospel even under lockdown restrictions.

### **Case Study from St Mary's Beeston**

At an All-Leeds Deaneries meeting this year, over 140 representatives of Anglican Churches discussed church growth during the pandemic. They used a reflective tool devised by Revd Lindsey Pearson, Vicar of St Mary's Beeston, which encouraged people to identify high and low points during the pandemic and to consider the effect on church growth. This was then used as the basis for identifying how to strengthen support for people newly involved in church life. At St Mary's Beeston, this is implemented through looking at how more opportunities can be created for people get to know and support one another better, especially when the usual ways are restricted; and a wider offer of support for wellbeing in the church and community.





## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

There was general agreement that this had been one of the most difficult aspects of the pandemic. During lockdown, leaders felt the challenge keenly of how to engage with children and young people who often felt “zoomed out” after having online lessons at home. Younger children particularly found it harder to be online for church activities even though bespoke activities were created for them.

One church felt it was more important to support families rather than spend too much time organising children and young people’s activities from the church. Some leaders spoke about how resources in the church were stretched so much, they felt they did not have the capacity to fully address the issue of ongoing development of this aspect of their ministry. They did not want to make their congregations feel guilty about this, even though they felt that when they could, they would give serious consideration to children’s and young people’s work in the ongoing.

Alongside this, two churches mentioned their wider support and involvement with Kidz Klub. Although the work of Kidz Klub was profoundly affected during the first lock down because visiting children in their homes was restricted, staff and volunteers worked around this to reach children with craft packs and other practical links.

### **Capacity and response among youth work, reflections by Ben Jones**

Churches and projects were concerned to maintain engagement and support with children and young people during the pandemic. The National Youth Association disseminated helpful information regarding restrictions to youth work organisations via Leeds City Council. This included advice on holding outdoor meetings and also explained that youth workers had key worker status which allowed face to face contact with vulnerable people when essential. Those churches and projects, such as Kidz Klub, that were connected locally with Leeds City Council and nationally with the NYA significantly benefited from this information and support.


Some youth leaders, however, were working reduced hours or were put on furlough. This limited their ability to address the significant levels of mental health and well being issues experienced by young people which was a matter of concern. It is also important to recognise that youth and children’s workers themselves experienced these issues. Moreover, this needs to be seen in the wider context of difficulties with recruitment to youth work among churches and projects.

Looking to the future, with respect to both these sets of issues, youth work will be strengthened by maintaining strong connections to local and national bodies, and we want to encourage youth workers to support each other across churches and projects in these pressurised times.

### **Case Study: Reflections on Covid 19, church worship and family life by Jo Sadgrove**

St Michael’s Church in Headingley had become a special place for the small number of local families who attend. The children’s corner at the back of the church is not a contained, soundproofed space. Children play in the environment of the service and there is an unusual fluidity between their experiences of church and liturgy and those of their carers and the wider congregation. I had taken my children (now 8 and 5) to St Michael’s regularly since my eldest was a year old. The community of St Michael’s has been remarkably welcoming of children within the worship space as fully embodied humans who are physically vibrant, disinterested in the proscriptive rules of the liturgical space and who are noisy.





The impact of Covid 19 on accessibility of church and worship for families and younger people has been profound. Whilst, after the initial closure of churches, services have resumed, measures taken to mitigate the risk of Covid transmission have radically altered the space of the church for children. At St Michael's, the children's corner has been closed; people have not been able to move freely around the church; the collection of adults who gathered to support parents and children have dwindled. We have only attended church once as a family during this time. We all sat in one row of seats and the children, whilst behaving very well, expressed frustration and regret at the changes of their experience of church. They wanted to play with the toys in the children's corner and enjoy the church with their friends, now confined to separate pews. I had my own concerns about bringing children who posed an infection risk into contact with older, vulnerable congregation members. So we have not attended church for over a year, and that loss has been felt by us all, in ways that we cannot fully realise or anticipate.

## **OVERALL OBSERVATIONS**


During the pandemic period churches, Christian charities and mission projects have been on something of a roller coaster. There have been high and lows, times of learning and development, rising to the challenge and feeling exhausted. Moreover, it has proved true, as Bishop Nick Baines said early on, that it is harder to come out of pandemic restrictions than to adjust to them at the start. This summary report has gathered together different aspects of the experience and responses, in order to assist with this next stage of re-building as we, hopefully, move into a post-pandemic future.

Churches and projects have found the pandemic to be a time when people actively sought participation in church life and made a greater contribution in areas such as sharing in leadership in online worship, a wider range of people were involved in and receiving pastoral care, there was greater appreciation of what can be gained working together co-operatively in small groups, in circuits and deaneries and with other community groups. It was felt that in these ways, progress was made on long term development goals around greater inclusion in ministry.

The pandemic has certainly brought a fresh sense of urgency to all social, economic and spiritual challenges that were pre-existing. It has been a time to respond to the more extreme manifestations of social issues during the crisis e.g. inequality and the growing gap between those who are well off and those suffering deprivation, unemployment and debt, community relations and racial discrimination, loneliness and the difficulties of long term mental health problems.

Through all the different stages of the pandemic, the value and importance of different levels of our connectedness has been highlighted. This has been in terms of church unity which has been both seen as fragile and also actively strengthened in the face of isolation and restrictions. Unity is seen to be key to the church developing in relevance and responsiveness, both prophetically and in action. For example, churches need to consider afresh how to engage with children and young people and consider how best to resource activities. Some are considering that more partnership working maybe the way forward, both with other churches and organisations.

The experience and power of unity has also impacted at community and city level, where the organising power and achievements of partnerships has been highly significant. There has been an unprecedented response particularly to food poverty issues and reaching out to people who were isolated. There is a desire to see this continuing even beyond crisis point, a change for the better.





## Knocking on the door, biblical reflection from Kerry Tankard, Chair of the Yorkshire West District

Sometimes I sit back and think I have lost the last 18 months, and at other times I realise that they were not lost, they were just different. More recently I have started to consider them as an unexpected guest and in doing that I am drawn to one of the stories of Jesus, as it is told in The Message:

"Imagine what would happen if you went to a friend in the middle of the night and said, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. An old friend travelling through just showed up, and I don't have a thing on hand.'

The friend answers from his bed, 'Don't bother me. The door's locked; my children are all down for the night; I can't get up to give you anything.'

But let me tell you, even if he won't get up because he's a friend, if you stand your ground, knocking and waking all the neighbours, he'll finally get up and get you whatever you need."

Imagine being part of this story, as your church or mission project. Consider being the family tucked up in bed, and change is knocking at the door; change is there because people are not receiving the bread of life and we are one of the keepers of it.

Change (God?) has been knocking on the door of the Church for a long time, and if we are honest our response has not always been warm. Often, we have shouted in our polite Christian ways from our metaphorical beds, "Awfully sorry, we're tucked up in bed and quite comfy. Off you go." The knock of change has become even more persistent during the pandemic and I wonder how have we been responding?

We have been disturbed from our beds; we have scrambled around, in the dark at first, finding what we had to share. Sometimes we didn't get our hands on the best bread first, but it at least responded to the immediate emergency. The effects of the pandemic have been a disruption to us, but have they at the same time enabled us to recover our generosity, and increased our awareness of the wider hunger and need for God in the world.

When I look back and consider the disruptions to church life as an unexpected guest, I begin to wonder about the better ways that we have been prompted to embrace. Perhaps the following questions will help us reflect further on this:

How is change (God?) knocking on the door of your church or charity? What is change asking of you, and who is it asking for?

What does your metaphorical comfy bed look like?

How have the last 18 months caused you to rethink the purpose of church or mission, and what you are called to be?

How is your church or charity re-imagining life in a world that is living with Covid, and what does getting out of bed look like for you?

