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Dear Friends,

There is a huge amount of change in the air – churches begin to reopen their buildings, I might get my hair cut before the end of the year. Lockdown is easing for many.

This is raising all sorts of questions that up until now have been hypothetical. What is this “new normal” that we have been talking about so much that it has become a cliché? How do we ensure that those who can’t get to church buildings are just as important a part of church as those who are able to gather (strictly in accordance with government and denominational guidelines)? Are people being left behind or disregarded?

We have been discussing what to do about this weekly newsletter with our partners. We have together concluded that this will be the last time it is sent on a weekly basis; we will be sending it fortnightly instead. As lockdown eases, it feels right to reduce the frequency, and we will keep this under review.

I am particularly mindful as I write of two groups of people. Firstly, those who haven’t been able to get to a church building for some years, and who have finally been able to join communal acts of worship. Secondly, the people of Leicester who now face different challenges as their freedoms recede for a while. Up until now, there has been a sense in which we are all in this together. As situations change, it is my prayer that we will each be able to follow our calling as a faithful disciple, and to play the fullest part we can in the Body of Christ.

With my love and prayers to you all,

On behalf of all at the Arthur Rank Centre

Claire

Bible Reading: Isaiah 51:1-3

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord:

Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.

When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many.

The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord.

Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”

On reading our passage from Isaiah for this week's reflection, I sensed God speaking these words over our communities, encouraging us to keep doing what we feel called by God to do; provide and facilitate in the communities in which we live and have access to.

In a meeting just last week a colleague reflected that very early on in this pandemic, a number of us had identified that what we were about to embark on should be likened to a marathon. Something would potentially sap all of our energy, challenge what we've been used to doing and the means by which we deliver it and also stretch our resources, physically and emotionally too. How true that has proven to be!

But the question that arose during that time of reflection was why, then, had we not taken that on board and were we still running this race set before us. To quote the Apostle Paul; like a sprint!

I, like many of you I am sure, had not taken any time off since the beginning of the year and hit a point in May where I knew I needed a break. I really cannot encourage enough to do the same. Our reading from Isaiah this week also speaks of the God we serve being the one through whom things will be lovingly and with compassion restored.

Yes, some of that restoration by God's grace takes place through us. But what good will we be if we're exhausted and burnt out?

It is the same for many in our communities, as our churches begin - if they are - to initially re-open for private prayer and slowly and safely resume services, however different they may be. We will be able to provide a place of refuge for those who are worn out to come and be refreshed by Holy Spirit. Put back together piece by piece after what has been an extremely challenging and difficult season in the lives of those around us and whom we seek to serve.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, would you the source of all wisdom, knowledge and discernment, the one from whom, and through whom all blessings flow,

give us the courage to face the coming days, knowing that we have the resources of heaven on our side. If we would but ask, seek and know.

Would you equip us to see our communities as you see them

and give us a Spirit of compassion as we seek to be your hands and feet, your eyes and ears, your mouth piece. As we go about our daily tasks and seek to be a source of hope, life and peace to those we meet. Amen

Response

How could your church community consider...

- Survey your community to discover what the less obvious needs may be?

- Look to provide a safe place for people to come, when it is safe and accordance with the guidance to share their struggles and concerns. One possibility may be to look at the [Renew Wellbeing](#) training website being offered at the moment.
- Send cards to some of those people in your community who you know may be struggling at this time to encourage them and let them know they are being prayed for.

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