

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE CHAPLAINCY

As we enter the next stage of Covid-19 with the Government slowly beginning to relax some of the lockdown precautions, for many of us it will be a while until we can return to our offices in Canary Wharf. The chaplaincy team has still been very active but working virtually from their homes. I have asked each of them to give you a flavour of their chaplaincy activities and those in their own faith communities.

Revd Dr Fiona Stewart-Darling writes:

As we enter the next stage of Covid-19 with the Government slowly beginning to relax some of the lockdown precautions, some who are critical workers may start to return to their places of work. From 1st of June some of the retail will open on the estate, with others possibly following in mid-June. However, we do all need to get used to the distinct likelihood that life will not completely return to how it was pre-covid-19. Many of us will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future.

Last week was Mental Health Awareness Week. For many working from home this has been a good experience, people are having more time with their children, others have enjoyed not having to commute every day. However, not everyone is enjoying working from home. This might be because their home is not big enough for two parents to work from home and homeschool their children. Some people who live on their own have really missed the buzz of being around people in the office. For many this is an anxious and fearful time, while some cope better being alone others are lonely. Being confined to our homes can as some have found really strengthen their relationship, as I remarked to my partner it is good preparation for retirement! For others it has tested and put a strain on their relationships.

The Prime Minister has said we need a plan that gives people hope. But hope is more than a plan, we need hope that will give us the strength and help to face each new day with all its uncertainty. To encourage us to look after ourselves, yes exercise and eat healthily (at least most of the time), but also to look after our mental wellbeing, taking time away from work, having some space and realizing you are not alone.

As a team we continue to pray for you, and we are still 'business as usual' albeit we are working virtually.

Rabbi Dr Moshe Freedman writes:

Since the lockdown began, the Canary Wharf chaplains have continued to work hard to support those who work on the estate by providing pastoral care remotely. Catching up with friends and colleagues helps people know that they are not forgotten, as the effects of social distancing and working from home can be profoundly detrimental to one's mental health.

One of the great achievements of the Jewish networks at Canary Wharf has been to run a "lunch and learn" group every week at Clifford Chance. Employees are invited to enjoy lunch together while a guest speaker offers nourishment for the soul, through studying our ancient texts and their meaning. This not only give employees an opportunity to learn something new, it offers important social benefits.

During the past few months, I have helped maintain the lunch and learn programme remotely (albeit without the lunch) and many have enjoyed participating. While videoconferencing cannot replace the power and effect of real human interaction, it has been a lifeline during this time.

I hope that as the lockdown eases, we will remember to appreciate the little things in life, such as sharing a meal with friends and colleagues, that we had previously taken for granted.

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra writes:

The lockdown due to the Coronavirus has changed the way we do things for almost everything. Religious communities have been affected, arguably in the most significant way. Places of worship are closed, worship suspended and access to religious figures and authorities curtailed, the virtual world has come alive with prayer and worship like never before.

Chaplaincy also, has adapted to meet the changing needs of people. I've been calling and emailing people who have seen me previously, and also those who have given me their contact details should I ever want to be in touch. I'm happy to report that things are well with those people and their loved ones. One phone call to a lady even brought joyful news of the birth of a baby girl to her - welcome news amid the painful stories of so many lives lost to Covid-19.

Last Friday I delivered, what I can crudely and vaguely call a 'Zoom Friday sermon' to a grateful group of Muslims in Morgan Stanley. We also had questions and answers about Ramadan & fasting; Zakat (alms giving) and whether 'Id (Eid) prayers could be performed at home.

Covid-19 has thrown up issues that I had never anticipated. May God grant a speedy and full recovery to all those affected and keep us all safe, amin

Revd Barbara Hume writes:

As a team we have been emailing and texting retail managers to remind them that the chaplains are still here for them, but working remotely. Fiona and I have been putting together weekly reflections for those Christians on the Wharf and also holding a Christian reflection on Zoom instead of the Thursday Eucharist in the prayer room. At home I have been shopping for those who are vulnerable and checking on friends and family on a weekly basis. There have been folk who have lost loved ones and I have been a listening ear for them on FaceTime. I have also been keeping up to date with Essex and East London Workplace Chaplains on Zoom.

CHAT TO A CHAPLAIN - Just to remind you we are still here that through this strange and challenging time and can be contacted via the contacts page on our website.