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News & Prayer Update Christmas 2020



Dear Partner

I woke at some strange hour a few days ago, and found my mind focussed on the traditional Carol 'O little Town of Bethlehem', with the original lyrics racing through my mind. That probably says everything about my sleep patterns at present, but I was reminded of the line:

'Yet in the dark streets shineth, an everlasting light,

The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight'.

I was wide awake and found my spirit lifted.

Yes, I had been seeking some inspiration as to what to focus on as I write to you, but the synergy of the hymn-writer with our current season struck me as being so significant and appropriate.

I do not intend to re-iterate all of the descriptions, sentiments, expressions, phrases and laments

*In our dark
streets shines an
everlasting light*

that abound as a result of this Covid-19 season that we are in. Even as I write, my home town has been recognised as one of the top areas in the country for the proliferation of the virus. AND our streets are dark – a lack of joy in people's faces, that is if you can see them behind masks: a darkness in spirit and a sense of depression harboured by so many. No anticipation of fun and festivity and a huge question mark over the traditional expressions of celebrating the Infant King.

But this lovely carol reminds us that even in the extremity and darkness of experience, a light shines brightly - a reminder that, even in these alien times, our hopes and our fears find resolution through Christ. That first Christmas provided opportunity so that people who walk in darkness can see a great light.

LIGHTS

This season of the year is usually characterised in our communities by the proliferation of lights.

Various faith communities use candles and all kinds of electronic devices to herald the season of celebration and certainly from a Christian perspective, the Christmas narrative in the New

Testament is well illuminated in so many ways...

And, in recent days, my own personal experience has been marked with lights...both inspirational, symbolic and indeed physical as you will discover in the following paragraphs. Even though I write this letter at the end of November, it is very clear that our celebration of Christmas this year will be muted and probably under a level of restriction that is still to be defined. There might be some relaxation of protocols, but we will all need to be aware of our responsibilities in keeping Covid-19 under control, and there are inevitably going to be some:

RED LIGHTS

These will warn us of straying into areas where it is deemed to be unsafe. Even as I write these words, I can hardly believe what is now staring back at me from my screen. Who would have thought it twelve months ago when many of us were beginning to plan for the Festive Season?

For those of us who fall into the 'mature' category, we do need to be careful and that is certainly true for those of us who are trying to steer a Christian Mission organisation through uncharted

territory. We have been blessed in Flame as you will discover later in this letter, but the recessive nature of our communities with 'lockdowns', social distancing, the necessity of wearing masks, together with redundancies, furloughs and closures has meant that there has had to be renewed awareness of 'no go' areas.

For some, this has created a sense of depression and resignation which is very understandable. However, it is also important to seize the opportunity that comes with a new style of living – radically different, yet still with opportunity. I have been blessed listening to older folk sharing their experiences in lockdown and bringing encouragement to those who might be having a tough time. No singing and no close fellowship, not to mention restricted numbers is something we are all struggling with but, even though staring at a screen wears me out after a while, at least we have a measure of contact in this electronic age ... but all of this will change.

Let me write that again in bold type...**IT WILL CHANGE.**

In the meantime, creative thinking is imperative if we are to continue with all that God has called us to do,

reading the red lights, exercising patience and a renewed sense of 'waiting on God', yet still planning to be salt and light in our communities and in the world in which we live.

God is still wanting to bless and encourage. There is a bright light shining into dark streets.

In Flame, that light is shining brightly, even if we have had to be very careful in our stewardship of time and money... not that this is different to our normal style of operation! BUT we are keeping a watchful eye on our budgets and being ever thankful for the financial and prayerful support that you are providing which are not taken for granted.

One of the areas we are having to re-consider is our office base. We moved to our new office in a local church, but Jackie has had to work from home. I think we have been in the office for no more than 5 days since it opened and in fairness to the church, we are paying rent each month. Going forward, we are therefore exploring some other opportunity that has presented itself whereby Jackie's time may well be shared

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with another ministry, to maximise her amazing administrative skills and abilities, and yet, at the same time, provide all of the support we need in Flame. I am sure that this is a season that should prompt us to think increasingly about partnerships to achieve good stewardship and maximise resources. Which leads me on to sharing some:

GREEN LIGHTS

The Playground project in Romania.

Great news indeed ... the Playground - an outdoor therapy space for children and young adults with physical and mental disabilities - is well underway in Northern Romania. Many of you have met Calin Rezmues, my

practical assistant, who was born and raised in an orphanage in Northern Romania. Calin has always wanted to give something back to his original home area, and he has pioneered the building of this facility in the city of Sighet. As I write, the diggers and construction equipment are on site and I shall shortly be receiving some pictures that I will post on the website www.flametrust.org.

This has only been possible because of the amazing generosity and kindness of so many of you who have supported this project ... and the extra good news? It looks as if we are going to be within budget. The Director of the home, Put Florin is delighted and there is growing excitement amongst the children. Thank you again.



Calin with Put Florin
(Director of the Home)
and Marius (Building Contractor)



Construction in progress



Chaplaincies

Very difficult times at a number of levels, specifically as a result of Covid-19 and schools being closed to visitors, but we are finding an increased openness to our chaplains to be available to provide support and help. Just recently, there was a tragic road traffic accident – covered on National news – where students from one of our schools were killed. Gerry Denston, our Chaplains Co-ordinator, has been involved in the aftermath, supporting where possible, all those affected by this tragedy.

We are also currently compiling a video presentation on the meaning of Christmas that can be used in secondary schools. With the help of good friend David Robinson from Searchlight Theatre Company, we are providing this resource to ensure that, even with all of the restrictions, a light can shine into the world of our students.

Academies

Again, a challenging season, but a real privilege to stand alongside the students and staff at Q3 Langley where I continue to be Chair, and offer support and input. I am just preparing my Christmas message that will be used throughout the Academy on the

run-up to Christmas. I usually present my message in person, but as this is not possible this year, we are using technology to allow that light to shine, and remind students and staff of the reason for the season.

Sir Cliff

Many of you dropped a line to say that you saw the Piers Morgan programme on the life of Sir Cliff where I was honoured to be invited to contribute. 50 minutes of interview for most of the contributors was reduced of course, but it was a privilege to be asked to comment particularly on Cliff's faith and conduct down through the years. Considering the awful time he has had to endure, he is doing very well, and it was also a delight to spend some time with him in a mutual friend's home for catch up and updates.

Time Out 2021

If only I could answer the question that all guests are asking about Time Out in late February, I would be delighted, but of course, we are still waiting for clear guidance as to what might be possible. At the moment, we are planning for the event to happen: Sunday February 28th – Thursday March 4th 2021, but if the restrictions on communal worship and

assemblies are not lifted, we may be forced to resort to our traditional Time Out period which would be Monday October 11th – Friday October 15th 2021.

All I can say at this stage is ...'Watch this Space' although of course we shall be writing to all those who have booked, to confirm or otherwise when we have clear definition.

Keeping On - Keeping On

Of course, outside of these specific ministry areas there are always plenty of things happening. I have produced a number of messages for church fellowships, have been involved in mentoring and an element of counselling with folk in difficulty and have spent some time developing our future strategies.

The Vaccine

We are all hoping and praying that the current good news on the development of a vaccine will shine more light on what may be possible in the forthcoming months. We need to pray for those who are working day and night on developments, but we must not assume that normal service will be resumed immediately a vaccine is available. Indeed, and I say this carefully, there have been some lessons we all have learned that

we would not have appreciated without this difficult season – lessons on what really makes our church tick and the re-imagination of what our strategy should be as we go forward. I have found myself engaging in more meaningful conversations about life and death than ever before and I do hope that our default position will not be one of forgetting our new found skills and relational opportunity.

Personally speaking, since I last wrote, I have experienced:

BLUE LIGHTS

Some would say it comes with 'maturity', but a few weeks ago, I began to experience some heart thumps and bumps that hitherto had been infrequent. However, after a series of heart racing episodes during the night, I decided to call the paramedics who were amazing. They recorded my heart rate, and in no time at all, I was in the back of an ambulance ... (hence the blue lights) ... on my way to A and E. Of course, by the time I arrived, the heart rate was back to normal, but when the medics saw the recorded trace of its behaviour, there was a realisation that something was not quite right. The good news was that I

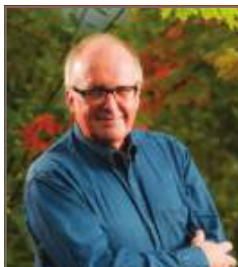
had not had a heart attack but that I have a condition that apparently is very common- Atrial Fibrillation. Our NHS staff were amazing, and later the following day I was back in the 'Vatican' with pills and potions that I now have to take on a daily basis.

Ongoing tests are planned ... (who was it who said you know you are growing old when your diary is peppered with visits to opticians, dentists, chiropodists and outpatient clinics?) and I am blessed with having the support and interest from a team who are determined to keep this under control. I still have persistent light-headedness, and this may be partly attributable to the blocked artery in the neck that was discovered 18 months ago, but I am assured that the blood flow to the brain via the other three arteries is strong and un-interrupted, so all should be well. However, a gentle reminder that our life and times are in God's hands and also a 'wake-up call' for me to stop thinking I can do what I did 40 years ago. End of the 'organ recital'... but ongoing prayers appreciated.

As I conclude, I want to express my appreciation to all those who support my ministry – my Board and their families, Jackie, Jen, Clare, Stewart and Calin, all working in different capacities with ever-changing roles and association, but all critical to accomplish our mission and calling. And of course, a massive thank you to you for your support, expressed in so many ways with the encouragement and input that enables me and us to fulfil our vision.

And of course, Christmas will soon be with us. I am sure it will be different, but I do hope that in the midst of this pandemic, you will experience the blessing of this season and know the significance of 'Emmanuel'.

May you sense His light shining into your life as we reflect on God's greatest gift to us all.



Wishing you a special blessing in this 'unusual' Christmas time,

Dave

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