



Nicholas Henshall
Dean of Chelmsford

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Dear friends and colleagues across the Cathedral Community,

OUR DAY TO DAY
Our Monday to Friday

The sun is high in the sky. A Bible study group is just winding up in the Guy Harlings Garden, laughing and just out of ear shot of a group discussing maintenance plans for the buildings. A Moslem woman sits relaxed and still in the Cathedral grounds while a large group from English for Women begins to put out chairs and tables in the sun on the far side of the Cathedral. In twos and threes people are arriving for the Thursday morning Eucharist, where the vergers have rearranged the seating from the big diocesan service the night before. There is still a glow in the city centre from the football semi final.

During the Thursday Eucharist people come and go - buying cards at the bookstall; exploring the postcard exhibition in the north aisle; simply sharing in the stillness of this beautiful space – a stillness that remains even as the worship continues in the nave. A young woman walks in to light a candle.

This strange time of re-emergence. Challenging certainly and there are still things that are restricted. But a new kind of normal. Each week, each day different. Earlier in the week the excitement of hosting a lunch in the Cathedral for city centre businesses and charities - bringing people together with the buzz of engaged conversation as people see new opportunities and develop new relationships. And last Sunday afternoon welcoming Bishop Guli for her first official engagement at the Cathedral.

As the business lunch comes to an end, there is a consultant in the north transept preparing her presentation on the masterplan for the cathedral grounds - a project that the Cathedral and the City Council have been working on throughout lockdown. Today is the day when officers from national institutions are coming to assess our plans and - we hope - give their blessing for the next stage of development.

As I sit quietly after the Eucharist, a large family group stride purposefully towards the candles. What burdens and thanksgivings do they bring today?

On a normal Thursday the Cathedral would now be undergoing its weekly transformation into St Mellitus, our local theological college. But the college is still meeting on line - a reminder that things are not quite normal yet.

This is a tiny snap shot of the Monday to Friday life of Chelmsford Cathedral. Each day different - and each day framed by simple gatherings for prayer, morning and evening, now shared with a whole new on-line community. The daily prayer is heartbeat of the Cathedral; the foundation on which everything else is built.

Next week will be different again as we seek faithfully to serve the city, the region and the Diocese of Chelmsford.

With my best wishes to you all.

Nicholas



WORSHIP GOING FORWARD

As I say in this week's newsheet, thank you for your responses so far to last week's letter, and do please note that I emphasised that our plans for Sunday worship going forward are provisional. How we shape the future together is very much an invitation to everyone with a stake in the life of the Cathedral, so please join in the conversation! As part of that conversation, there will be a short presentation on the Cathedral questionnaire straight after the 10.30 am next Sunday (18 July).

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING IS BACK FROM 19 JULY!

We are planning carefully towards the lifting of all lockdown restrictions on Monday, 19 July. We will have real freedom, but - like all venues - we also want to assure everyone that the Cathedral is safe and secure at a time of rapidly rising infections across our region. Most cathedrals and similar places will continue to encourage people to wear masks as appropriate, and hand gel will continue to be available at the doors. For now we will also continue receiving communion at our seats and only the bread - there is an on-going conversation across the churches about what to do about sharing the wine at the Eucharist.

However, we will no longer have to ask people to sign in as they arrive, and there may be some careful changes to social distancing. Above all **WE WILL BE ABLE TO SING TOGETHER!!!** Over the last 18 months not being able to sing together has been an enormous loss, and we will seek to pack our Sunday services over the summer with familiar hymns sung to great tunes. We are also planning a "Songs of Praise" style celebration at 3.30 pm on Sunday, 15 August - please see the Newsheet for details of how you can suggest a hymn.

An early Christian thinker wrote "the person who sings prays twice!" That's a great line and an important encouragement as we reclaim this fundamental aspect of our worship.