

## **Letter from our lead minister, Rev. Dr. Glenn Chestnutt**

**At time of writing, it is nearly one year since we left our building. I know that for many of you, one of your deepest desires is to return and resume life as it was at The Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul. This is an ominous anniversary and one which spurs me to recognize that these past long months have been difficult for all of us. There are many reasons for this, not least a pandemic which has isolated us from each other and thrown our way of life into chaos. It is no secret that many in our society of any and every age are suffering financially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually from the effects of long-term isolation. While some people within our community have succumbed to this dreadful disease, others have been able to survive it.**

**But for many of us the blessings we count are often the things we took for granted before this crisis, such as family, friends, homes, location, and even food. At a recent Coffee and Conversation after Church one participant mentioned that he was thankful simply for his bed, whilst another gave thanks for the beautiful neighbourhood she lived in. Some of us are closer to family and friends than we have ever been, connecting with our loved ones in ways we did not do so a year ago. Many people in our community are thankful for the outreach of others to them, whilst others are thankful for the worship services that we have been able to deliver online. We now reach more people through our online worship services than we have ever been able to historically. Some of us have found renewal in our spiritual lives as life has slowed down and we have had time to reflect upon our lives and what really matters to us. For others, we have found renewal in making new connections and finding new ways to serve our community. It has certainly been a time where the creative synergy of our community has been exhibited- everything from a virtual Fall Fair, to a recipe cookbook, to a virtual tour of a European Cathedral has been offered. Of course, we are all looking forward to that time when we will all be vaccinated.**

**The Christian life is one where we can find joy and thankfulness even during trauma, crises, and tragedy. Scripture is replete with characters who cope**

with tragedy in life whilst still having the ability to praise God and be thankful for what blessings God has given them. King David, the author of the psalms and Mary, Jesus' mother are examples of this. They were able to praise God despite the situations they found themselves in. May we too have the spirituality and the wherewithal to thank God and count our blessings, even amid this global pandemic.

Like many people, I have favourite Scripture passages I turn to when I need inspiration. One such text comes from the book of First Thessalonians: 1 Thessalonians 5: verse 11 and then verses 16-18. It reads: *And so encourage one another and help one another, just as you are now doing. ... Be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus.* These are powerful, encouraging, and challenging words that have often sustained me in my life of professional Christian ministry. These words were written a long time ago to provide hope, comfort, and challenge to the ancient community of believers in Thessalonica, Greece. May they be as relevant to us today in the twenty-first century, as we sit on the cusp of our second-year wrestling with Covid-19. May they give us the strength to continue to count the many blessings that God has given us, even despite our situation.

Your minister and friend,

Glenn