

Dear Friend



Palm Sunday and something of a special day at Othona. Our colleague Liz is to be licensed this afternoon as an associate priest in the Bride Valley churches. She'll still live and work here, but will help out on their ministry team when she can... and once the virus allows.

It was to have been a bit of an occasion today, with Bishop Karen doing the honours at Litton Cheney church up the valley. Now it will all happen online, with Liz (and us her colleagues) in Othona's chapel, the bishop and the rector connecting digitally. If all goes to plan there'll be a video recording anyone can access later (news of that another time).

Let there be Light

Today's picture is not from here, but the work of an Othona member who's a keen musician and craftswoman. **Gaye Reynolds** writes: "[In early March] I finished a week's course in stained glass, this included sand blasting, enamelling, leading, soldering and firing. Each of us worked on our own designs, and I felt, with others, that there seemed to be a dark cloud heading our way.

"I based my design on the wonderful phrase from Haydn's Creation when they sing "And there was LIGHT!!!!". Little did I know at the time why that would be so

significant in such a short time. It was one of the most thrilling things I have done, and I only wish I had started 30 years ago - it is physically hard work."

More Frontline Despatches

Here are two more word-pictures from Othona folk who aren't confined to home. Worth quoting at length, I feel. First from our local town, Bridport, where **Ian Todd** spends some of his time volunteering with Cupboard Love foodbank:

"I am one of the lucky ones. I can walk from my home and in less than five minutes be in open, empty country. Even in normal times on some of my routes I rarely meet another soul. So my once-a-day-get-out-of-homejail exercise can be a bit more extensive than that available to many others. Wild garlic and young nettle leaves have gone into my soup pot.

"I have stood in silence absorbing displays of primrose and violet and the first bluebells are saying hello. We have been so lucky to have had blue skies on most days since the Prime Minister's broadcast two weeks ago that took us into this strange altered world. And looking up at those big blue skies from open country is another reminder of new times - no light aircraft and no jet con trails. Just the mewing buzzards.

"As I head back towards the outskirts of town I pass other people taking their daily exercise and this is one of the joys of this drama: strangers, while keeping their physical distance, are keen to stop and chat. I have now shared time and thoughts with many people who in the old world would have passed by with a silent nod at the most.

"And closer to home I have met neighbours who until now I barely acknowledged. Many of them are elderly and are either self isolating or are in lockdown following medical advice. So I find myself food shopping and dog walking for these isolated souls, talking with other dog walkers and the result - perverse though it may seem - is that my own solitary life has taken on new meaning. I can help!"

Sandra McDermott is a carer who with her colleagues is "helping keep, between the four of us, 160 vulnerable people out of hospital beds and as far as we can hope away from the dangers of Covid 19, but we are still awaiting adequate PPE as being under the umbrella of the NHS but hardly recognised as in need, we are relying on a handful of face masks, however at the present we have gloves so we are great full of that.

"It is hard putting yourself on the frontline but when you love your job and truly care for those whom you care for pushes you out of the door each day. Hoping beyond hope that you are keeping yourself protected and keeping those who you care for safe too.

"Being unable to see your partner as you don't live with each other is also hard for your mental health and wellbeing, especially when your partner has mental health issues too, it makes for a very stressful time, however this afternoon with the sunshine beaming it has inspired me to cut the grass and wash the car, that's the most toughest part of social isolation and with the weekend off and some warmth from the sun I

hope to get a walk in as I have been so stressed and mentally exhausted to muster the energy to do so far...

"Laughing at silly things and watching some simple and harmless programs brings much needed distraction, my colleagues and I manage most days to try and get a laugh out of each other before we leave on our rounds to lighten the mood to set us up for the day.

"Thankfully it is getting better trying to get food to keep our minds and bodies healthy with the social distancing measures being adhered to by many people and the majority of stock still left on the shelves when we finish work helps too. Which my 86yrs old neighbour is great full of as I still try to shop for her too once a week.

"I have joined in with the Clap for the NHS and Social Carers although I cannot seem to stop crying when I hear others clapping too, hopefully this will ease. Am I clapping for myself or others, sometimes I am confused for I feel lost but great full at the same time, confusion reigns!!"

Thank you Ian and Sandra. (My pedantic self considered changing Sandra's spelling to "grateful", but isn't "great full" a rather lovely way of conjuring up the feeling?)

Easter in a Time of Isolation

Gail Fernyhough - who does not have email or internet - rang me yesterday to say how very valuable she finds the body prayer she learnt from **Tess Ward** on an Easter retreat at Othona 3 years ago. So I feel prompted to repeat what I said last time: from today Tess begins posting material for an online Easter journey that any of us can join in. Just click onto [her relevant webpage](#) to learn more or get started.

Furlough

Just so as you know, all of us employed by Othona (here and in Essex) are being put on furlough. This means the financial hit on the charity will be reduced thanks to government providing 80% of what we are paid. (Another time I may say a bit more in answer to those who've asked about our money situation.)

It also means we're not doing any of the normal work that brings in income. Activities like my writing this newsletter are voluntary - just as members of our trustee board and committees regularly put in umpteen hours to support Othona merely for the love of it. We're very conscious of their support at the moment.

Mini Sermon anyone?

As I was completing this I heard from **Colin Hodgetts**, past chair of Othona trustees and the man whose example first drew me to the idea of one day attempting my current role. In retirement now in Edinburgh, vivid and thoughtful as ever, Colin offers [these reflections for Palm Sunday](#). If you'd like to receive more of his 'sermonettes' please write to him on colin@colinhodgetts.co.uk

And finally... (am I channelling Trevor McDonald here?)

Paul Fox has been a devoted member for many decades at both Othona centres, especially Bradwell where his son Tim is the warden. I salute [Paul's undaunted ingenuity](#). Let's all keep pedalling!

Tony - on behalf of all of us isolating at Othona: Robin, Liz, Kate, Gavin and Sean

P.S. I send this out with lots of nice white space between paragraphs etc. but I know some of you find it downloads all squeezed up. As far as I know there's nowt I can do about that - sorry.