

Keeping in touch from Andrew Darling June 2020

Whilst we are physically unable to meet our churches continually try to keep in touch. Each week a member of our congregation or group leader will share a thought with you.

This week we hear from Andrew Darling our Bell Captain

From Andrew Darling -Bell Captain

At St Margaret's we are proud to have the youngest band of bellringers in the whole of Cheshire. We have 7 youngsters, aged 18 or below, and they have only been ringing for a couple of years. It makes for a vibrant, noisy atmosphere. Often it can take years for a ringer to become really competent and we're really proud about how far these kids have come in just a short time.

Ringling is different from any other musical instrument. Even if you were playing a violin in an orchestra, you could still practice at home. Bellringing isn't like that – a bell only represents a single note. If anything, the whole instrument only exists when multiple bells are ringing together. Since you can't ring more than one bell at a time you need to have a group of 5 or 6 other people there to help you to progress.

We've come up with some pretty innovative approaches to try and allow our learners to develop more rapidly. We've introduced holiday Boot Camps where pairs of ringers get are able to ring for an hour a day and we've also laid on additional practices each week to get more time on the bells. We've even rigged up a simulator, so that the bells can ring silently, the noise being created by a computer that is connected to sensors on the wheels of the bells. And we've created a broad network of people who have been giving up their time to help us, often travelling from all across Cheshire and Trafford.

Lockdown obviously brought all this to a juddering halt. A bell tower is a breeding ground for a virus like COVID – groups of people crowded into small, musty rooms, taking it in turns to handle the same bell ropes. Viral transmission is a very real worry. For this reason, bell ringing is out of the question for the time being and a unique aspect of the UK soundscape has simply vanished.

How are we coping? Well, we've been developing some Home Learning activities for learners to explore. Bellringing is heavy on the theory so Lockdown presents a good opportunity to brush up on some of this. And we've been developing our Bellringing curriculum as well. A couple of us are teachers and so we're trying to bring to bear our understanding of how people learn to update the pedagogy of bellringing – it's only about 300 years out of date so this is quite an enterprise.

Many of the youngsters are chatting via the games they play on the X-Box and we've got a plan in place for a Kahoot Quiz. And, of course, I do like to share terrible jokes with everyone from time-to-time.

I am certain, in time, we will all be reunited and, once again, the sonorous tones of St Margaret's bells will loft across the rooftops of Altrincham. Until then, it's WhatsApp and Zoom and Remote Learning... Just like everyone else!

Andrew