

Swiss Church News

Summer 2020

Swiss Church in London
Eglise Suisse de Londres
Schweizerkirche in London
Chiesa Svizzera a Londra
Baselgia Svizra a Londra



Image by Ella Mettler

Dear Reader,

You are reading a shortened version of the quarterly Swiss Church News and I hope you enjoy this special edition! Since the beginning of the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Consistoire together with the team have been working tirelessly to adjust to the sudden loss of income following the closure of the church. We are committed to keep our lovely church community afloat, and to remain a creative and open space for everyone.

It has been amazing to witness the uplifting and supportive spirit throughout our community across the different parts of London, and also to hear from people newly joining the congregation thanks to the online audio Sunday services. Perhaps our bond has never been stronger! Sadly, we have had no choice but to close the weekly Breakfast on the Steps for homeless people. The American Church and the Francophone Catholic Church Notre Dame de France in Leicester Square continue their soup kitchen attended by many of our regular guests. We will financially support the services that remain open, and provide support within our capacity.

The lockdown restrictions and social distancing measures have a huge impact on many people's lives. But for some, it is not necessarily a big change, especially for elderly people, introverts or people with certain health conditions who are used to be at home alone often. For me, whose life has been overturned quite a bit by these restrictions (although not necessarily in a negative way), I have found talking to those who are used to living life primarily in their own four walls uplifting. Some of our congregation I have spoken to over the past weeks have been amazingly positive and comforting. There is a lot we can learn from the experiences and attitudes of the older generation in this crisis.

I am grateful each and every day, for living in a safe and loving household without immediate material shortages and with (so far) everyone in good physical and mental health. We should not take it for granted. Poverty, job loss, domestic abuse, damp or cramped living conditions, ill health and loneliness can make this time in lockdown incredibly hard. It is true for all of us, that without the many distractions and preoccupations of daily life, we are confronted more intensely with ourselves and our life choices. This can be a healthy and creative time, putting things in perspective and perhaps lead to new ways of looking at things, but

it can also be overwhelming and too much to bear.

No one will experience this time in the same way, and what awaits us at the other end of the tunnel will also differ from person to person. Some will benefit from this public health crisis, or experience it as a constructive time; others will lose everything or mourn loved ones, their lives turned upside down. I wish that we can use this time to build up our inner strength, either for ourselves, or for people who will need a shoulder to lean on. We are neighbours, we are friends, we are sisters and brothers, parents and work colleagues. Our relationships will be the most important asset to shape our society after this pandemic, and each one of us can play their part.

Keep well!

Yours,
Rev Carla Maurer

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From the Consistoire - by Colin McIntyre



The temporary closure of the Swiss Church as a result of the corona pandemic has presented us with significant new challenges. I would

like to take a few minutes of your time to explain what the Consistoire are doing to lead the church through these uncertain months. The Swiss Church in London is totally independent. We do not have a synod, diocese or Head Office in London or Berne to help and direct us. We are legally structured as a church charity and not-for-profit organisation with trustee directors, (referred to as Consistoire members in recognition of our French-speaking founders). We have to stand on our own two feet.

The trustees normally hold board meetings every two months. Since lockdown we have formed a four-person Strategy Steering Committee consisting of Barbara Wachter, Marco Mambelli, Carla Maurer and myself. It has already met twice in the last month by video conference, and will continue to meet regularly. We are

delighted to welcome a new adviser to the Steering Committee, Hassan Mohanna, with a background in business development.

Running the Swiss Church costs over £200,000 a year. We budget very carefully, and in recent years we have managed to produce a modest surplus. Hire of the church hall and gallery provides approximately £100,000 of income a year. Covid-19 has brought an abrupt halt to all of this income. Therefore, we have agreed a revised emergency budget for 2020. To control costs most spending excluding essential maintenance has been frozen. Hirings and Office Administrator Emily Rose Simons is now on furlough under the Government's scheme. We are grateful to building caretaker Rupert Ackroyd for regularly checking on the building. Reverend Carla Maurer has reduced her working hours. By doing all this, we intend to protect the future of the Swiss Church. At this point I would also like to thank Finance Officer Heidi Holenweg for taking on some extra administrative tasks.

We are very fortunate that some cantonal

churches, and individual churches in Switzerland support us. In addition, members and friends in the UK and Switzerland generously support us. In 2019 we received almost £100,000 of donations. Asking for donations at this time is difficult. We realise that many of you are also facing much financial uncertainty at present. But, if you can donate, every penny will help. You can give via our website www.swisschurchlondon.org.uk/donate

The Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, 21 June. After some consideration the Consistoire have decided to stick with this date for now as we think it is unlikely that we can hold the AGM safely in the near future, even if postponed by a few months. Instead, we will look at alternative ways of remote voting as suggested by the government to avoid our membership to having to travel in. However, we will monitor government guidelines closely and take a final decision nearer the date, all whilst complying with Charity Commission and Company House rules.



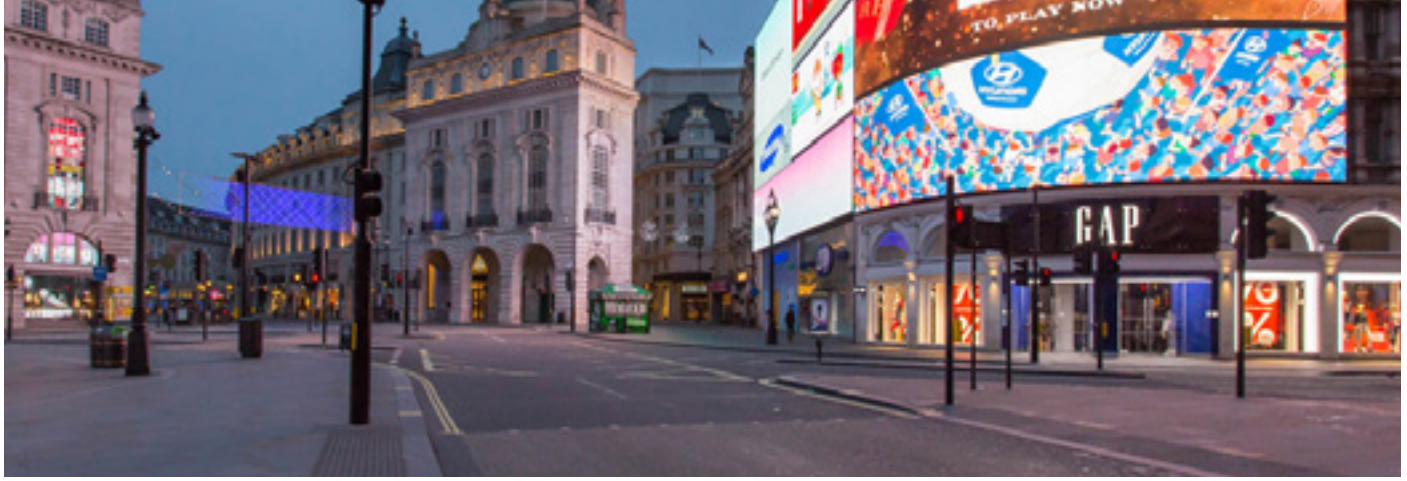
*Our doors may be closed but our community is very much open, **here are some activities available at a safe social distance***

Sunday services are recorded and available to listen on our website swisschurchlondon.org.uk/downloads

We have set up a Whatsapp group where you can chat with other members. To join send a message to Carla on [07968 530 380](tel:07968530380)

You can listen to Carla's brand-new podcast 'More Tea, Vicar' on reflab.ch or your usual podcast provider





We are not at war - By Reverend Carla Maurer

"I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more."

These are the words of a young teenage girl, who spent two years of her short life in a confined flat with her parents and her sister. A walk in the streets or even just opening the window could have cost them their lives, and so they hardly ever set foot outside the concealed rooms behind a bookcase in a townhouse in Amsterdam.

Anne Frank is one of the most discussed Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and she gained fame posthumously with the book "The Diary of a Young Girl" published by her father Otto in 1947. He was the sole survivor of the Frank family. Anne and her sister Margot died at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in February or March 1945 following the discovery of their hiding and their deportation. If they had survived another two months in the camps, the two girls would still be alive...

In May 1945, a mild and sunny spring like this year, the Second World War came to an end, a war that the eldest members of our congregation still remember from their own experience. To this day, the trauma and the psychological consequences of this inhuman war can be felt in Europe and across the world. Those born during or in the years after the war, witnessed the reconstruction of a ruined continent during their

childhood and youth. Their children and grandchildren now have the chance to address and unlock the collective trauma - a huge task!

To talk about war in the context of the coronavirus pandemic is exaggerated. We are not at war. The references to 'war cabinets' and 'front lines' demonstrates belligerence more than anything else, and the suggestion that those worst inflicted by the disease can fight it off by sheer will power and strength regardless of medical, social and economic circumstances is "glib to the point of insult", as Guardian columnist Marina Hyde recently wrote, quoting the late Deborah Orr who died from cancer and had written her rules how to talk to cancer patients. In a war, humanity turns against itself, killing each other for ideological reasons without consideration for the value of individual life. In a public health crisis, as we are experiencing it at present, the opposite happens: humanity pulls together in one big effort to save lives. We really have to think about better analogies than war, if any are needed at all. Perhaps the only parallel between war and pandemic is "that they both involve strengthening state power and spending, and both require collective action." (David Edgerton in the New Statesman, 3 April 2020).

The war analogy used by many state leaders suggests that there is a cruel enemy that we have to fight off. There are good reasons to feel like that. Some aspects of nature are fatal for the human race. But if we look at the reasons and at the far-

reaching devastating consequences of war that affect generations, the comparison doesn't seem appropriate. The identification of the virus as an 'enemy' illustrates that we see ourselves as separate from nature, whereas in fact we are a part of nature, or to quote priest and zen teacher Alan Watts: "You didn't come into this world. You came out of it, like a wave from the ocean. You are no stranger here." And the Bible says: "All come from dust, and to dust all return." (Ecclesiastes 3:20) When we are personally affected by loss and illness, it can be challenging to reconcile the fact that we come from nature with the experience of its destructiveness.

This public health crisis brings the best and the worst out of people. We see raided supermarket shelves as well as neighbourhood help, self-restriction to save the lives of people we have never met as well as racial scapegoating. The virus doesn't differentiate between rich and poor, but our social circumstances and ethnic background can affect the exposure to the risk and access to treatment which illustrates the high levels of injustice in our societies. I hope that the lessons learnt from the coronavirus pandemic will highlight the need for fundamental change and increase our ability to follow the path of justice, humility, forgiveness, empathy and peace – not just in the immediate aftermath of this health crisis, but for a long time to come.

In memory of Albert Bertin

6 December 1925 – 27 March 2020

By Reverend Carla Maurer

The Swiss Church in London has lost its longest standing member Albert Bertin. With much sadness we had to say goodbye to this wonderful man who will be remembered for his wit, kindness and historic knowledge. Due to the current circumstances and Albert's age the committal service was brought to his friends and family via live stream from Hendon crematorium.

Albert leaves behind his wife and life companion Serenella and many friends and family who cared for him until the very end. Serenella and Albert, whose parents migrated to the UK from Northern Italy, met at the Swiss Church in London. They had been married for over sixty years. Albert's cultural identity as a French-speaking Italian and Valdensian was hugely important to him, and he stayed faithful to his roots until the very end. Albert first joined the Swiss Church with his mother and sister Elena who was also a member of the church until her death in 2018. They had been introduced to the congregation by a Swiss family friend.

In the past months there was one particular memory that Albert was keen to share with his visitors. When his mother and her two children first came to the

Swiss Church, she pointed out to the then Reverend Hoffman that they weren't Swiss citizens. Reverend Hoffman said: "*Dans mon église il n'y a pas besoin de passeport.*" – "*In my church there is no need for a passport.*" This story made Albert chuckle, and the wit in his eyes will always be remembered.



Switzerland became his adopted country just as much as England.

Albert was a source of knowledge, especially of the history of his native Italy as he once successfully proved in the famous English TV programme *Mastermind*; he spoke five languages and he also knew the history of the Swiss Church in London inside out having served as the first non-Swiss member of the Consistoire, the Parish Council, which filled him with pride.

Albert lived with his parents and sister in

Kentish Town when the Blitz during WWII started. Because of his young age Albert was evacuated to the countryside. He later became a teacher at a technical college in Westminster.

Albert's health deteriorated rapidly over recent years. He last came to attend the Swiss Church on his 90th birthday, a memorable date as it fell on the day when Swiss people celebrate Saint Nicholas. Albert was admitted to hospital shortly after Christmas last year and was then moved to a care home where he passed away.

A memorial service to celebrate and commemorate Albert's life will take place at the Swiss Church in due course. Our thoughts and prayers are with Serenella and with Albert's family in Italy and Switzerland, as well as with their carer Pamela who has shown them so much love and care on a daily basis over the past years, and with his close friends and neighbours who stayed at his side until the end.

Jésus dit: «C'est moi qui suis la résurrection et la vie. Celui qui croit en moi vivra, même s'il meurt.»

Rest in peace, Albert.

In memory of Eric Escoffey

15 October 1926 – 11 April 2020

Eric came to join the Swiss Church as a child through his parents who had moved to London between the wars and settled in Hendon. The Swiss Church was an important weekly fixture for Eric during his childhood and youth. The family still maintain the friendship with a family from Geneva that began thanks to the Swiss

Church. Eric re-established his links with the congregation in recent years, although it was logistically difficult to attend services.

Frauenverein

Every first Tuesday of the month.
Mrs Cecile Mistry 07778 508 405

La Causerie

Every second Tuesday of the month.
Mrs Lisa Hall-Zeller, 020 8894 2114

Mothers' Group

Every second Wednesday of the month.

Vegsil

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“Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another person is the silence in us. Not the sort of silence that is filled with unspoken criticism or hard withdrawal. The sort of silence that is a place of refuge, of acceptance of someone as they are.”

(Rachel Naomi Remen, born 1938, American author and professor of integrative medicine)

“Zen does not confuse spirituality with thinking about God while one is peeling potatoes. Zen spirituality is just to peel the potatoes.”

(Alan Watts, 1915-1973, ~ British theologian)

“God has told you what is good; and what does he want of you but to act justly, to delight in showing kindness, and to walk in humility with your God.”

(Micah 6:8)

To give online: swisschurchlondon.org.uk/church/donate and follow the link.

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