

A REFLECTION ON LOCKDOWN

by Fr William Pearsall, SJ, Parish Priest of the Sacred Heart, Lauriston

Our last public Mass at Sacred Heart, Lauriston was celebrated on March 19th, the feast-day of St Joseph. St Joseph is the patron saint of many causes but we might look upon him especially as the patron saint of changed plans.



Members of the Jesuit Community at Sacred Heart ringing bells in a salute to the NHS.

pandemic, after all - but also and more immediately we were focused on our own lives: our families, our livelihood, our community, our schools, our churches. The introduction of lockdown was a surreal experience. At first it was a novelty and we entered into it in the spirit of the Blitz. We were facing a grave situation together and our anxieties were shared. In time we began to be more personally affected by the unnatural conditions of enforced isolation, the social distancing, the suspension of normal activities and routines of work and study.

For the Christian community the reality of closed churches was hard to bear. For Catholics, accustomed to dropping into a church at any time in the week for private prayer or for confession or daily Mass, this was a particularly painful privation. The heaviest blow perhaps was the loss of Sunday worship and all that goes with the sabbath-day gathering. This loss we shared with all the churches. Gradually, the parish began to establish new networks of communication. We were fortunate in having taken a parish census in the autumn and so we had the makings of a usable database.

Although there were gaps, we were able to ensure that no-one we were aware of would be left out of the fellowship of contact and care in the months ahead. Through phone calls, emails, newsletters, through a continuing stream of video posts on Facebook and the church website, the parish community kept itself going with news, shared stories, music, liturgical celebrations and helps to prayer. Everyone found a live-stream transmission or TV broadcast of Sunday worship. We experimented with a live transmission from Sacred Heart.

People in the parish have said that in some ways the experience of Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost this year was like witnessing the early church being born. We improvised and we adapted. We learned to be creative. We focused on the essentials. Our outreach to the needy continued thanks to the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Our Justice, Peace and Green group, our care of the elderly and sick, our catechetical programmes, our Lauriston Centre speaker events -- all continued to function within the conditions of the "new normal". And thanks to zooming we were able to create new parish groups: coffee mornings, young adults (reading The Screwtape Letters!), a Faith Matters discussion forum and weekly Taizé worship. An added blessing has been the new faces emerging thanks to these new ways of being Church.