

Being intentional

Mones Farah, Archdeacon for New Church Communities in our diocese, has been surprised by what he has achieved during the lockdown and feels he is better equipped for what the future may bring

It all began in Bethlehem. For anyone who knows me, the thought of spending 8 weeks in isolation without beginning to climb up the walls and going stir crazy will seem totally unrealistic. But I must confess my response surprised even me!

I have been in self isolation since 6th March, the reason being that on 5th March I was in Bethlehem, Palestine, and that very day 5 cases of Covid-19 were detected in and around the town, and by 1600 hours the town was locked down.

I managed to get out of Bethlehem by 1400 hours, and that night headed back to Nazareth and because of the age of my parents I self-isolated, changed my flight for the following day, and headed home, where I went into in self isolation. By the time I was out of the 14 days self-isolation, the UK had gone into lockdown.

I must say it has been a precious time to learn new things, to do ministry differently, and to spend more time with Father God, my family, myself and garden. Knowing my personality and behaviour pattern, I realised that, in order to remain sane, I had to keep myself active in body, mind and spirit, so I had to be intentional about what I did and how I did it. Below I'll share with you what I have learned in the hope that it will encourage a few of us to cope with the continuing lockdown and especially those who will be self-shielding for a prolonged time.

I had to be intentional in keeping my mind busy; when our minds are not busy, we get into all sorts of trouble, so I chose books that I wanted to read, or reread, and this fed both my mind and my spirit. My choice of books covered spirituality and theology, so I read about when heaven invades earth, Birthing the Miraculous, leadership development and modern ministry, as well as re-reading a couple of golden oldies.

I had to be intentional about my prayer time. Although we had all day to sit down to pray, we purposefully kept to the original time that we always prayed together, early in the morning, reading scripture and worshipping together. We also made sure that, at least three times a week, we participated in online worship, feeding on teaching and reflections from around the world.

I had to be intentional about what I ate. This sounds strange, even to me as I write it down, but one of my biggest downfalls is a love of food, so we had to make sure we ate healthy, well-balanced meals at appointed times of the day, minimising alcohol and high comfort food (Oh the agony, but oh the benefit!).

I had to be intentional about fun and the introduction of creative time, so I spent time in the garden, playing with the dog, watching uplifting, light or challenging programmes with my

wife, and searching internet sites in pursuit of the things that interest me: comedy, photography, food, mystery, sci-fi and, of course, the news.

I had to be intentional about exercise. For a long, long time I have been threatening to up the level of my exercise. I even bought, and have had, the equipment for years, but it was all in the basement gathering dust and when the desire set in and we brought them up into the house, we just hung our clothes on them at the end of the day. Yet, somehow, I knew that at this time of life I have to keep my body active to such a level that it will protect my health for the moment and for the future, so I made sure I started with little baby steps and have increased that over the last ten weeks. And so, instead of both mental and physical health deteriorating, both remained strong and increased in fitness.

I had to be intentional about keeping in touch with others, phoning people regularly and not just waiting to be contacted by others, and, where possible, relying on online technology, using video conferencing and calls on Zoom, Facebook, Skype and the like.

Above are the seven things that I have found helpful in coping, and even flourishing, throughout the lockdown. I do hope that I will be able to keep them well balanced within my life as we begin to come to terms with the 'new normal' and the experiences that lie ahead.