

Methodist Recorder article by James Jenkins, Rep to the British Youth Council

LOCKDOWN, TRAINING AND BEING A CHRISTIAN

THOUGHTS ON LOCKDOWN

Of the many opportunities I had to go on several trips overseas when I was at school, one was particularly memorable.

We went to Holland to visit Otto Frank's work place. He was the father of Anne Frank, the girl who wrote a diary about her years shut away in a couple of rooms so that the Nazis wouldn't kill them. They lived effectively in lockdown.

Sound familiar? It is only now, since we too have "lived" in lockdown, that I have begun to understand what it was like for Anne, a German Jew writing her diary, fearing the Nazis, just as we live in lockdown fearing the Covid 19 virus.

For Anne, though, it was a little different. She was in a confined space for two years, hiding in a couple of rooms behind a book case. For us it isn't quite the same. Although we have to 'socially isolate', many of us live in comfortable homes with gardens, listen to birds singing and enjoy daily exercise. Some of us live in a flat or a bedsit without a private outside space. We all, however, are not like Anne. We are not in prison - we can go out, we can have fresh air and we can talk to others outside our immediate family.

One thing we do share with Anne, however, is the fact that, for some of us, living in lockdown is having a huge impact on the mental health and well-being of a number of people. As a rep to the British Youth Council my job at the moment, first and foremost, is to try and help young people suffering in this way.

TRAINING

How do I acquire the skills needed? Well one of the things I do is attend training courses and meetings.

A recent one in London had the theme of "Getting your voice heard". An amazing number of reps gathered from all over the country and we had to look at several particular areas. We discussed what skills people should have learned by the time they leave education, what kinds of skills youth work should provide and what kind

of support young people feel they need when it comes to learning and developing their skills.

We eventually agreed that, as youth workers, we should attempt to provide holistic care, looking after young people's physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. They should always know they have a "safe place."

I found this training day incredibly thought-provoking and it has empowered me to want to help young people to get their voices heard.

WHAT BEING A CHRISTIAN MEANS TO ME

Being a Christian is not always easy, it can be very challenging - more so when you are young. If I am honest, there have been some of my contemporaries who I just wouldn't tell that I was a Christian. I don't think I would have denied it, but it was something that they couldn't tease me for.

I come from a church-going family. However, I have never been forced to go. I think over the last few weeks my faith has come alive and I have been Zooming around a lot. Although college came to an abrupt end in March, our Christian Union Group has continued to meet each week, the discipleship group that I lead has continued, and the house group that I am part of continues to flourish.

My Christian journey has been influenced by people who live their lives in a God-focused way, whilst acknowledging that illness and financial deprivation are part of daily life. I have learnt from some of the multi-faith get togethers that we are all "singing from the same hymn sheet" so to speak and, if we weren't in lockdown, we would soon be celebrating Ramadan with our Muslim friends.

I feel close to God when I am listening to Christian worship songs in my garden, just letting the wind flow through my hair and feeling peace surrounding me. I take this opportunity to look for something to hold; usually it's a pebble from the water feature.

THINGS THAT INFLUENCE ME

An activity that has had a significant influence on me is 3Generate - an opportunity to meet with other young people exploring their Christian Faith in a fun way. Another of our get togethers is called Cliff Fest, where we can meet and worship together in a way that we can't when we are back in our own churches.

Music also plays a significant part in my life. I get pleasure both from playing musical instruments and listening to the message behind the lyrics of hymns and worship songs. For me, I really feel God when I hear "Cast your cares" by Guvna B. This song helps me to acknowledge how Christ came to earth as a helpless baby, suffered our sins, was crucified but rose again.

In the last verse of "In Christ Alone", Stuart Townend sings:

No guilt in life, no fear in death,

This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.
Always.

These words, I feel, sum up our Christian journey.

It is one that I am proud to be part of.