

The response today is a little different to usual. Firstly the children here will respond and then we would welcome you, the congregation, to echo their response. The response is: *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

*In our thoughts; in our prayers. (with congregation echo)*

Let us hold in mind the community of the world: its people, its governments, its leaders. In these days, often overshadowed as they are by conflict, rivalry and uncertainty, let each and every one of us – irrespective of belief, political or economic affiliation – recognise the simple truth in Christ’s command to love your neighbour as yourself. In so doing, let us work together in a spirit of love and tolerance of all, certain that prejudice of any kind can be forgotten, conflict will give way to peace and rivalry to co-operation. And so we keep the world *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

As our world struggles across the shifting sands of political and economic upheaval, let us keep in mind the Middle East – a place and source of conflict for thousands of years and, particularly, the people of Syria who have now known chaos and warfare for 5 years, resulting in a humanitarian disaster as great as that suffered by those fleeing conflict during World War Two. As the refugee crisis builds, with 35000 displaced people massing on the Turkish border, and many others risking their lives for a perceived haven in Europe, let each and every one of us remember that – at some point in our lives – we are the outsiders and that the kindness of strangers is really the first meeting of friends. We keep the friends we have and those we are yet to meet *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

Times of crisis are not always the product of human conflict or greed. Sometimes they are the result of natural disasters. As the scourge of HIV-related illness continues to devastate lives across the world, we think in particular of Africa and how it has suffered and give thanks for those – such as Mr Nickolas Kintu at New Brainstorm – who strive to help children orphaned by AIDS in Kampala and elsewhere. In Taiwan, may those desperate for news of the missing be reunited with their loved ones following the recent earthquake. Faced with such disaster, it is easy to think that God has abandoned people. Not so. Everyone who cares – each medic, each rescuer – is not passing by on the other side. Theirs are the faces of God, working small but significant miracles every day. We hold them *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

Let us remember that our local community is the world in microcosm. While there are circles of difference and circles of agreement, we recognise that together we can do great things. For everyone who makes the community of the Cookhams the relatively safe and prosperous place it is, let us give thanks. We are thankful for families, however they are formed, and for the support they bring to their members. To community and volunteer groups, such as the Parish Council, whose members give of themselves generously, to the betterment of the wider community. We think of the elderly and how staff and volunteers at local care homes and Elizabeth House, help them enjoy their twilight years. And we think of our children who, through the work of our local schools, are brought up to be citizens of the world. We hold each and everyone in this community of people *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

We call to mind the Christian church in its widest terms: a church which, to the outsider, can appear a contradiction in terms, where love may seem conditional, apparently fostering intolerance, sectarian divides and adherence to philosophies and standards which secular society often rejects as irrelevant. Let us remember then, that the laws and values of our wider society, whether secular or not, are founded upon those tablets onto which Moses first carved the Ten Commandments and that this common heritage is our society's strength. Let us reflect thoughtfully and prayerfully that diversity need not divide; diversity of people and philosophies can enrich and empower the whole. A body is at its strongest when all its parts – not just some of its parts – work together. May the church and community find unity *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

May the church's national and local representatives, its Bishops and Synods, strive for the betterment of all, encouraging and supporting each person in his or her personal ministry. To this end we give particular thanks for the work undertaken by Father Nick and the rest of the Benefice team and, with them, the PCC and the wider community they support. May the ministry team meet with success in furthering their local Mission during the forthcoming season of Lent and that the Lent course they will be undertaking at that time helps them to greater success still. We keep them *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

In turn we are thankful for the relationships being fostered across the area and beyond by the Cookham Community Social Action Group. Its support of New Brainstorm School through Empower a Child UK, the

disadvantaged in Ethiopia through Partners for Change and its raising awareness of both through the Leap4Africa initiative shows how church and community groups come together, stronger, for the benefit of those in need. We keep them *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

For those who are sick: Toni Ganderton, Jan Pinkney, Geoff Sharpe, Kaye Fotherby, Sheila Sirs, Barbara Walmsley, Mary McGuire, James Hall and Angela Dennis. We keep them *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

For those who have recently passed: Sally Ellis, Jean Gigg and Avril Edge. We give thanks for their lives and pray for their families and friends. They are in *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

And, at this time, we offer up – in a moment of silence – our personal thanks and prayers for the people and concerns dear to us – both near and far; present and departed. +++PAUSE+++ They are forever in *in our thoughts; in our prayers.*

Lastly, as is our tradition at Cookham Rise Primary School, we invite you to take these thoughts and prayers, whatever your traditions, and to make them your own according to your own beliefs and, in that spirit, we ask that: *Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.*