

Dear Parents, Carers, Students & Friends of St John's

Welcome to the December 2020 edition of our school's Newsletter. In a normal year, this would be our opportunity to share with you all of the wonderfully enriching opportunities that our pupils have been involved with since September: the numerous trips, sporting activities, performing arts successes and exciting workshops that our students have enjoyed; however, as I am sure that you can no doubt appreciate, this has been far from a normal year.

Although the pandemic has, unfortunately, somewhat restricted the external opportunities that our pupils so eagerly relish, I must say that I have been incredibly impressed with the way in which our students have approached their schooling since September. They have shown tremendous maturity and resilience, whilst also being extremely adaptable and compliant with regards to abiding by the various new safety systems and protocols that we have needed to put in place to make St John's as safe as possible.

Additionally, I have never been more impressed with the attitude shown by our examination cohorts. They have done everything in their powers to make the most of every single day at the school and I have no doubts that, no matter what their examination experience will be in the summer, they will do themselves proud and achieve the grades that their hard work so rightly deserves.

Whilst I am pleased to say that our number of positive Covid cases since September has been relatively low compared with some of the disruption that we have seen schools experience this Autumn, I do appreciate just how unsettling these isolated cases have been for children and their families. That said, I am extremely grateful for the incredible support that we have received from parents, and for the level of understanding and empathy that you have shown the school. It has been an extremely challenging time for all of the staff at St John's, yet the fact that we know that we have your complete support has meant a great deal to us over these past months and shows what a strong sense of community we have at the school. Please spare a thought for Mr Zeqiri, our Head of Politics, who is currently in hospital as a result of contracting the virus a few weeks ago; I know that he would appreciate your thoughts and prayers at this difficult time.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families all the very best for the Christmas period and let us all hope that the New Year sees the dark cloud of Covid disappear so that we can all get back to our normal lives once more.

God bless and stay safe

Matt Barron
 Headteacher



War Memorial Mosaic

George Batts, MBE, LD'H, a regular visitor to St John's, was presented with a framed copy of the Inter-House Art Super 6 mosaic, featuring the sculpture that will be sited at the new British Normandy Memorial in Ver-sur-Mer, Normandy. The intention was to make the presentation at the school but having waited for 6 months and no likely occasion to do so in the immediate future, it was decided to make the presentation at George's home.

George was the instigator and is currently the Patron of the Trust.

The Super 6 Art competition last year focused on mosaics featuring different war Memorials. George was excited by the project and thrilled to get the framed copy. The original will eventually be created in Ver-sur-Mer when the building project is completed.

Chaplain's Corner

A Christmas reflection

Little children will often demand what they want, especially if another has got it! 'But I NEED it they plead'. The experience of not getting what they want often leads to tears and they genuinely feel deprived. But they learn over time to share, to care and eventually to know that love sometimes means putting others first; sometimes at great cost. To always get what they want would not be a kindness.



On the 3rd Sunday of Advent we hear John the Baptist: 'a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord'. In a sense we might feel that we are all in a wilderness right now with all that is going on, or with our suffering in different ways. But the Baptist also said "there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me." He meant, of course the Christ, whom the Jews were expecting to come.

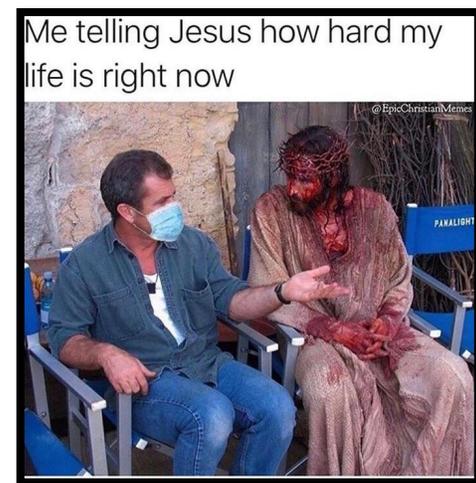
Hang on Deacon Michael, what are you saying here! Don't worry, the two pictures are not the same, but there is a thread of wisdom that is weaved through both. Left to ourselves, and I very much include myself, our paths through life are not straight; we meet all sorts of obstacles, pot holes, wrong turns and backward steps that seem to prevent us getting to where we want to be, and the feelings of loss, anger and stress are understandable, especially as the consequences often involve genuine hardship and suffering.

But what if the suffering we experience is a kind of 'John the Baptist', path God knows we need to find to reach a destination that is amazing than we can imagine at this time. What if this is true but for society in general? And what if there is 'one standing unknown to us – who is that true path'? The Baptist's 'repentance' which means changing direction back to God.

getting us to see the true more beautiful and not just for ourselves among us – message was



you saying this is all what I'm saying is that transform our misery



Deacon Michael, are God's doing!? Actually God has the ability to into something life-giving and new. This is what Christmas is about; a light shining in the darkness making all things new. In fact he enters into our suffering and shoulders it himself; he doesn't just shout it from on high while we experience the pain. I love this picture my wife found on an Instagram feed. I'm not sure if that's Mel Gibson 'Jesus' is talking to but I picture myself there instead.

So how might there be a silver lining to our present clouds? Well, for example, I don't think our young people could experience all this uncertainty and stress without it having an impact on how they see life as they enter their adulthood; on who they are. It may shape many choices they make about family, career, or the meaning of life, as well as their capacity for empathy, sharing and consideration of others. Just maybe, the fruits

down the line may outweigh the damage to their education, or the losses they experience. We see them in school taking more interest in life's questions than before and redoubling their appreciation of their education.



This is very much half an answer I know. But I think the key point is that yes we must all be careful and responsible in how we manage the crisis as best we can, but lift the rest up to God, praying that God will indeed bring light out of our darkness, hope from despair, and love in society as a whole. This is our prayer, and I invite you to join us in that.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus; not just his physical birth as God made flesh, but his birth in our heart and soul, that he may grow in us and that we might become like him in our nature.

Jesus is unconditionally loving. This means that he loves us even when we don't deserve it; even when we are against him he does not abandon us; his love has no ifs or buts, no conditions attached. He comes to us because he loves us and reveals to us a revolutionary understanding of what real love is. A mother knows what it means to love their child even when they are so tired from sleepless nights when the children are babies, or getting attitude when they are older; this is truly caring about them even when it comes at great cost. But Jesus goes even further, loving even his enemies and those that are currently flat against him, forgiving, turning lost lives around! This is

hard, but he gives us the grace to become like him.

A challenge ... How can I find the silver lining to this clouded COVID Christmas? What can we do that lightens darkness, builds bridges, opens up relationships, establishes new ways of showing we care and are there for each other? How can we reach out to the physically needy and the spiritually poor? What can we do, as the Baptist said, to welcome into our hearts the 'one standing among us – unknown to us – Jesus who is that true path' so that we can truly become what God created us to be? These are the precious gifts we can place before his crib.



I'll leave you with a prayer from St Columba:

Be, Lord Jesus, a bright flame before me,
a guiding star above me,
a smooth path below me,
a kindly shepherd behind me:
today, tonight, and forever.
AMEN



Stay blessed

Deacon Michael

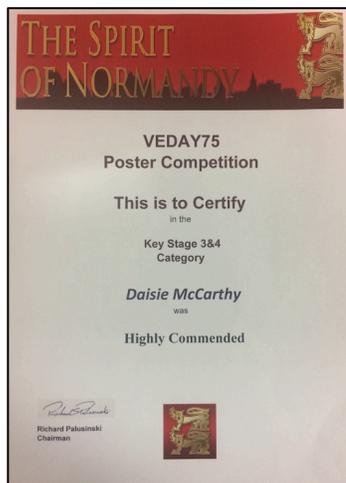
Chaplain

Young Historians National Award 2020

The five entries from St John's were all commended for their efforts and received certificates to acknowledge this achievement.

Katie P (KS5) was nominated for an essay on the relevance of the Dambusters Raid in 1943, where she argued whether it was more of a psychological blow rather than having any great effect on the German war effort.

Further down the school and into KS3/KS4 the other commendations went to Connor B, Mark B, Lena B, and Ruby D.



Spirit of Normandy Trust VE Day Poster Competition

The following students have received certificates commending them for their work which commemorated VE Day. The competition was run by the Spirit of Normandy Trust who were impressed by the work received from students at St John's. The following were the winners - Connor B, Mark B, Daisie M [highly commended], Olivia N, Skye P, Alicja S, Danni T (Year 8), and Matas P (Year 9)

The Woodland Trust

The School is delighted to be advised that it has been successful in applying for a 'Tree pack' from the Woodland Trust. This will take the form of a quantity of trees and bushes which will be planted on the School Grounds and in particular the Remembrance Garden. The 'pack' will come in March and the planning regarding planting will form one of the Inter-House events, with students from each of the three Houses involved in the planning, preparation and planting. The work will be part of the environmental awareness that is being planned.

Annual Service of Remembrance – Denton



For the past five years the annual service of Remembrance at the Denton parish memorial has been organised by St John's School. This year the service was very much reduced and restricted - no Mayor, no large number of guests and no representatives from the other schools in the Parish.

The Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Mrs Dymond, Parade Marshall, Mr Green, standard bearer, Mr Hakins were our guests. Six students laid the wreaths: one on behalf of the school, and one on behalf of the schools of the parish.

Mr C Murphy. *Head of History*

John Downton Awards

The Art Department is delighted to announce the applicants that have been successful in the shortlisting process for this years' John Downton Awards. These students are :

Luiza A. (Year 13 in 2019/20)
Madeline C. (Year 12)
David N. (Year 9)
Jack M. (Year 11)
Patricia G. (Year 13)

This year's presentation ceremony took place online on 3rd December, 2020, and all of our students were praised on the quality and creativity of their work.

Mrs D Lal. *Art and Design Technician*



Gravesham Food Bank

Form groups are currently collecting donations for the Gravesham Foodbank. We appreciate any donations you are able to make. Collection buckets have been placed in all three House Areas.

If making a donation, please be mindful to ensure the item is long life and non-perishable please.

Thank you in anticipation for your support. Your generosity is always humbling!



- Cereal
- Rice
- Soup
- Tinned tomatoes/pasta sauce
- Lentils, beans and pulses
- Tinned meat
- Tinned vegetables
- Tea/coffee
- Tinned fruit
- Biscuits
- Pasta
- UHT milk
- Fruit juice

- Deodorant,
- Toilet paper,
- Shower gel,
- Shaving gel,
- Shampoo,
- Soap,
- Toothbrushes,
- Tooth paste,
- Hand wipes



Christmas Treats!



Mrs S Gibbons. *Assistant Chaplain.*

Literary Legends

The English Department are hugely proud of this outstanding piece of creative writing, produced by Kieran C. in Year 11. It was inspired by the ethereal image of a frozen waterfall (included below). I think you will agree that Kieran has a true talent for descriptive writing!

The windy wasteland had a certain beauty, with its icy blue ridges and frozen falls. The sun, a fiery ball of flame, glared on the windswept land showing its true natural beauty. The waterfall was a fortress of ice keeping its kinsmen safe from the profound glare of the sun's mighty wrath. The immovable layers of ice and snow dripping away like a tap that had been running previously. The stream was flecked with frozen life, the kind of matter you see in a forensics' laboratory. The falls stood proud like the walls of a prison in an almost threatening way; it stood with the elegance of a somewhat powerful woman. The surrounding areas reflected the grace of heaven, white in nature and a stronghold in vigour, however, there wasn't the radiant hope that came by Christ, and in fact it was a denuded, desolate and delicate desert of ice and snow.

The trees stood dominant and naked over the abandoned site; it was like they had no power over the icy King of winter. The birds cooed their mournful song and were silenced by the howling of the wind. The taste of the cold reminded me of frostbite and the coldness seeped in. The sight of the falls was breathtakingly spectacular, but



the feelings of dismay and remoteness overcame the overwhelming beauty. Slowly, a small buck emerged from the hedges and crossed in front of the falls. It stared at me in such a way that promptly said "There's still hope" then it darted across the lake slipping as it went and in such a way that reminded me of childhood and failures. The sudden appearance of the buck, what did it mean? Was it a sign from God that I'm never alone? Or was it all in my head? The pleasant sensation soon passed, and the sky was greyed as bundles of clouds surpassed the blazing sun and

brilliant blue sky. The clouds were a stony grey and all signs of hope had disappeared. The gorge of the falls was lined with leafless trees that were charcoal in colour. A pair of crows danced overhead in the dreary sky. The crows were like vultures revolving around me, cooing the songs of hopelessness and death. The cold ripped my skin, and I was frozen rigid by the constant exposure, it was like radiation at a nuclear power plant leakage.

The imminent feeling of something or someone watching me from the surrounding frost-covered hedges (that danced in the distance as the wind brushed the leaves) did not disappear. The sky ripped open and flurries of snow, almost like the ashes at a coronation, came glittering down in their flocks... One by one, the blinding flakes of snow dropped in a meander-like fashion, tickling my skin as a brother playing with his siblings. Streams of snow layered upon the frozen palace (the waterfall) making the falls glisten like three suns at midday, however, no warmth resided in these frozen walls. The snow had the beauty of a swan but lacked the warmth and tranquility.



To be honest, you don't know what to feel, except the overwhelming wrath of the winter's God. The birds that resided in the trees were overcome by the mighty icy glaze and had all vanished in land towards the exiled flame.

Hope in all seemed dreary and abolished by the winter's grasp, it was like these icy hands of death stretched out along the lands vacuuming the heat and with that came the joy of the world. The icy hands were the gateway to this void where all heat remained, defeated and broken. The falls would hope for a saviour, but the question was would it come to end the exile of heat? And if so, when? The winter's snow boasted silently as it swept the lands, casting out the sun's kinsmen. The small stream that had escaped the winter's grasp was no more, it rested underneath a fortress of the winter's creation, layered in heaps of ice and snow, further blinding whoever caught its superior gaze.

Student Welfare

Dear parents/carers,

I do hope that you are all safe and well in these current times.

Below are some articles regarding online social media platforms that you may find useful.

- WhatsApp launches new disappearing messages option

During November, WhatsApp will be rolling out 'disappearing messages' functionality. The feature will allow WhatsApp users to enable disappearing messages on chat conversations between friends, to automatically delete messages after seven days. Wiping will also apply to videos and photos. Whilst WhatsApp's minimum user age is 16, many children and young people have accounts. Auto-deleting entries could increase the risk to younger users as evidence of any issues may not be available.

- TikTok - more parental controls

With TikTok surging in popularity, including children deliberately increasing their followers to 1,000 so that they can go live, it's good to see TikTok making more controls available for parents. The features, which are available via Family Pairing, include the ability to prevent the child searching and preventing strangers from seeing the child's post.

With lockdown still in place the following articles are focusing on our mental and emotional wellbeing.

Ten top tips for staying mentally well

- Have a daily structure
- Get regular daily exercise, preferably outside
- Maintain your sleep routines
- Try to eat a healthy diet and get support if you are in financial crisis
- Keep in contact with friends, family and loved ones online or on the telephone, where possible
- Make time for enjoyable activities, relaxation, and self-care
- Restrict media and social media that increases a sense of despair and helplessness
- Cultivating an attitude of gratitude can help improve mental health and may be even more important during times of significant challenge as a result of Covid-19.
- Have hope: it will not solve our problems or make them go away, but it can give us the motivation to keep going when times are difficult
- Contact helplines to get support if you need it



You can't pour
from an empty
cup.

SELF-CARE ISN'T SELFISH. IT'S NECESSARY.

Taken from: <https://charliewaller.org/information/coronavirus-mental-health/new-lockdown-looking-after-our-mental-health>

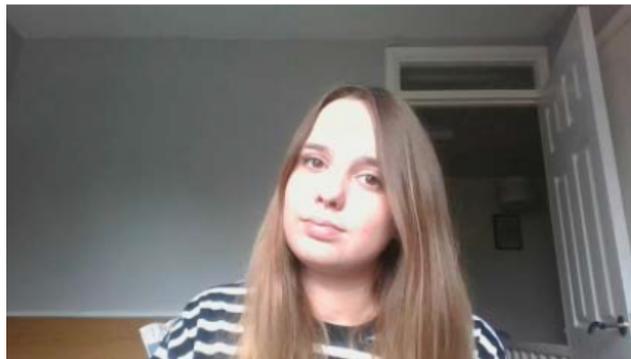
There are also some great resources on the Kent resilience hub - <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/>

Take care and stay safe

Mrs Kelham

YOUNG PEOPLE AND CO PRODUCTION

Hello, My name is Zoe Burns and I am an Emotional Wellbeing Participation worker for Kent. I am commissioned by the CCG and work within KCC to gather the views and voices of young people within the county about mental health services which are being offered.



What Co-Production can Achieve.

On the 10th October, to celebrate World Mental Health day, the Mental Health Campaign Group from Kent Youth Voice worked alongside their participation workers to produce a question and answer session. The session was brought to life by the young people involved. They chose to invite people along who could answer their questions, and help to make the changes to services in the future. Questions were collected by the group and additional questions were sought after to ensure that the whole of KYV was engaged with the discussion. Those that came and took part thoroughly enjoyed themselves, asking for more opportunities to become involved. If you would like to see the questions and answers from the session please email: zoe.burns@kent.gov.uk

What is Co-Production?

When talking to young people about Co-Production and what it is to them, I have received the following definition:
"Coproduction is all about how young people's voices help to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of service offered. Children and young peoples wishes and feelings should be at the heart of all the services they are offered."

It allows for service providers to acknowledge that those using their service have knowledge and experiences which help them improve their services not only for the users but also others that need them. It can help us to build relationships between users and provides which allows for all to feel valued and supported.

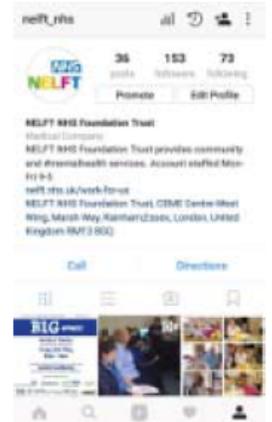




The North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) recently launched an Instagram channel. The idea for this originally came from talking with the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service team and some of the NELFT youth ambassadors around using social media to interact with younger service users.

To provide the best service to patients and service users across the NELFT patch, the Trust needed to ensure that they were engaging with them on all of online platforms. Young people can access the account by searching for [nelft_nhs](#) on Instagram or clicking on the link in their Twitter bio.

It will focus on sharing advice and support around taking care of your mental and physical health. This will be tailored to the younger demographic, while signposting them to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and physical health services. Updates around recruitment and photos from events will also be shared. They will also help to support national awareness campaigns.



DRAW YOUR OWN SOLUTION.COM



Calling all parents in Kent! Free parents resilience webinar available now!

As part of the Draw Your Own Solution campaign, which aims to increase awareness and understanding of resilience, HeadStart Kent have released a free pre-recorded webinar for parents.

The webinar will enable parents to learn what resilience is, how to support their child to build resilience and how to become a resilient parent. Broken down into eight short videos, the webinar covers a range of topics related to resilience.

You can watch the webinar on the [Draw Your Own Solution](#) website page

If you have any questions related to the webinar, please email HeadStart@kent.gov.uk