

22nd July 2021
6.30pm



IN REMEMBRANCE,
REFLECTION AND HOPE

HELD IN HONOUR OF VICTIMS
AND THEIR FAMILIES, OF THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

THAMES VALLEY MULTI-FAITH SERVICE

Dorney Lake, Off Court Lane, Dorney, Windsor, SL4 6QP

An initiative of the High Sheriffs of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire
and Oxfordshire; delivered in partnership with The Lord-
Lieutenants of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire



Mr. James Puxley, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire

The Countess Howe, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire

Mr. Tim Stevenson OBE, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire

Welcome to Dorney Lake for this Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. It is unusual for three Lord Lieutenants to be able to share an event together and it is wonderful to see so many representatives from our diverse communities. We are so grateful to Eton College who are generously hosting this event, and our thanks go to all those involved at Dorney Lake for making it possible.

This opportunity to build bridges between our communities, and to collaborate with a shared voice is a powerful expression of our collective response to the current global crisis. The world is in turmoil because of the ravages of the pandemic, but human nature has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. Covid 19 hasn't impacted just one of our religious communities or just one type of religious observance; it has literally turned the lives of all of us upside down.

Our Interfaith Community comes together because of our shared values for the dignity of human life, and a common purpose to care for and support the most vulnerable in our society. We gather today in faith, committed to grieving, honouring and looking to the future. Despite the fear and anxiety we have all faced, this is now a time to express our gratitude and appreciation for the selfless and courageous acts of so many and to look forward with hope and compassion as we rebuild our communities.

George Anson, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire

Willie Hartley Russell, High Sheriff of The Royal County of Berkshire

Imam Monwar Hussain, High Sheriff of Oxfordshire



This past year has revealed much about ourselves, our society, and the world we live in; and how we react to these challenging times. All of us have suffered in some way from the pandemic – whether it is an enforced absence from loved ones because of the lockdowns, or the effects of loneliness or isolation, or even tragically the loss of a family member or friend. What keeps us going however is our deep-rooted belief in God and how that belief can sustain us through these periods of adversity.

To embrace this belief, the High Sheriffs of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire, along with the Lord-Lieutenants from each county, are hosting this

Thames Valley Multi-Faith Service in remembrance, reflection and hope for the victims and their families of the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be readings, silent reflection and beautiful music, from all major faiths including a reading from a no faith perspective. We hope that our coming together in unity from across the Thames Valley, as we move into the recovery phase, will strengthen relationships between our diverse communities and that we will confront the inevitable challenges that lie ahead with unity and common purpose.

It is appropriate to share with you the following quotation from Stephen Hawking:

There ought to be something very special about the boundary conditions of the universe - and what can be more special than that there is no boundary? And therefore, there should be no boundary to human endeavour. We are all different. There is no such thing as a standard or run-of-the-mill human being. We are all unique, and we share the same human spirit.

However bad life may seem, there is always something you can do, and succeed at. While there's life, there is hope.

As we gradually emerge from this global pandemic, we should remember those who have died, those suffering from long-Covid and those suffering from mental stress, brought about by isolation and loneliness.

The Thames Valley can look forward to the future with hope and confidence as a result of the effectiveness of the vaccine programme and working together as a community.

**The Rt Hon Lord Waldegrave of North Hill, PC
Provost, Eton College**

Welcome to everyone to Eton's Dorney Lake. We are delighted that so many are coming together here to remember and to offer thanks. It is wonderful to welcome Monawar, Eton's much loved Muslim Faith Tutor, in his distinguished new role.

Everyone has been touched by tragedy during this terrible time, which is not yet over; but everyone has also witnessed outstanding work for the common good, whether it be the extraordinary contribution of our Universities in research; the selfless work of so many in the NHS and the care sector and other front-line services; or the huge surge of voluntary effort by thousands of our fellow citizens. We have much to mourn, but much also for which we should say heartfelt thanks.

THAMES VALLEY MULTI-FAITH SERVICE

In Remembrance, Reflection and Hope

Welcome

The Countess Howe, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire

I would like to welcome you all most warmly to this very special event at Dorney Lake. The representation of so many faiths is particularly poignant this year in view of the adversity we have all faced because of the pandemic and demonstrates our commitment to building bridges between communities.

The challenges of these past months have delivered such cruel blows to so many, and we find ourselves looking to each other for emotional and practical support. We have seen demonstrations of extraordinary kindness and compassion which have heartened our bleakest moments. And we have appreciated the enormous sacrifice which those working in the health sector have made to keep us safe and offer us medical care. For them, a day's work involved literally risking their lives. They have shown great courage. The demands of coping with a never-ending medical emergency will have taken its toll. Our frontline workers need time for rest and recuperation but 'time' they do not have. We can today collectively offer our immense gratitude and appreciation to them.

There has been a tendency to focus on the bad news, it has all been so worrying and frightening, but as we look ahead I find myself refocussing on the positives. We see the extraordinary success of the global research into vaccines and our UK vaccine roll out, and we look at the changed ways of working where we can perhaps rebalance our working lives through the use of digital advances. We can and should plan to build back better and greener with a people centred recovery, investing more in people and their communities.

I find myself reflecting on the lessons I have learned; to value communication in all its forms, both virtually and face to face. I have learned to notice and appreciate the nature around me, and to look more deeply into how we can work more sustainably. I've realised that flexibility and accepting that there are many ways of achieving outcomes is the best way forward rather than looking back at the old ways of doing things. My own physical and mental health has become much more of a priority.

By coming together as one multi faith group, we can have a much stronger voice. We can demonstrate our love for each other as equal members of society. So in welcoming you here today I encourage you to recognise our commitment to improving the lives of

others and to celebrate our shared values so that together we can try to promote a greater understanding and cooperation between people of differing faiths in this country. When we look at the response to Covid 19, so much of it has been spearheaded by the many different faith groups working collaboratively with each other. And surely this is the message we can all take home with us: that, above all, it is the role of faith to draw our society together and to work for the common good.

George Anson, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire

Good evening everyone and thank you for coming to this special service in commemoration, reflection and hope held in honour of those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must go back over 100 years to the Spanish Flu Epidemic in 1918 to begin to find a disease that has had such a devastating impact on the world's population. Back then, nearly 1% of the world's population succumbed to Spanish Flu – nearly 18m people died of this virus.

Today, the world's population is 4 times greater at 7.8 billion people, but still, over 4m people have died globally from COVID-19 in the past 15 months. Which compares to 400,000 deaths globally from flu in a 'normal' year. Thanks to major advances in science and medicine, the number of deaths has not been greater. In the UK, there have been 5.4m confirmed cases of coronavirus, with nearly 130,000 registered deaths since the pandemic began.

Those are the grim statistics, and I don't want to dwell on them too much, because the news is much better after over a year of being under the thumb of this virus. Because as of last week, over 3.6 bn doses of the COVID-19 vaccine (produced by 7 different organisations), have now been administered globally, and predictions are that over 5 bn people will be fully vaccinated globally by the end of September this year. In the UK, as of last week more than 50% of the population was fully vaccinated, and that percentage is well over 70% for adults over the age of 18.

We have all benefited from the expert front-line medical care when it has been needed, and for that we thank you. We are now emerging out of a very dark tunnel, and with Freedom Day held this past Monday, it gives us renewed hope that we can return to some sort of normality very soon.

But I also feel that we will look back on this time in our lives and recognise the life-changing impact it has had on all of us. In years to come, we will all be asked questions

like “Where were you when the lockdown started?”; “Did you get the virus?”; and “Did you know anyone that died of the virus?”

I did. My frail mother-in-law at age 89 succumbed to COVID-19, not helped by pre-existing medical conditions. It’s something that our family will never forget. And that’s why we are here tonight. To make sure that we don’t forget and pay our respects and prayers to those who have suffered throughout this pandemic. Of course there are lessons to be learned but for the sake of humanity let us all remember that we are in this together.

I hope that you find this a memorable and moving occasion.

Thank you.

Thames Valley Multi-Faith Service
Readings, Silent Reflection and Beautiful Music

Opening Address by Imam Monawar Hussain, High Sheriff of Oxfordshire

In the name of God, The Infinitely Good, The Most Merciful

Peace be upon you!

Thank you very much for joining us for this multi-faith service for the Thames Valley. I want to echo what has already been said – huge thanks to Eton College for providing this wonderful venue and the refreshments to come, thank you to my Shrieval counterparts from Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and also Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenants from the three counties. To all our colleagues who've provided the administrative support and to Ella Pickard, who has volunteered for each of the major events I've organised to take the logistical weight off my shoulders for the evening. And of course, thank you to all our contributors through whose kindness this multi-faith service has been made possible.

This evening is about remembering all those who have lost their lives during the Covid-19 pandemic and their families, in the Thames Valley. One of the most difficult aspects of bereavement, during the Covid pandemic, that I have found particularly difficult to come to terms with, has been in relation to the rituals relating to death and dying. The restriction on physical presence at the bedside of a loved one passing away, reading of prayers, the inability to express the most basic human emotions to hold, touch, embrace, kiss, to whisper the Shahadah in the last moments of a loved one's life on earth. Post death, many were buried without the ritual washing of the deceased due to fear of infection, although permissible in religious law because of necessity, nonetheless this will weigh heavily on many souls.

But at our darkest hour, we also witnessed the acts of altruistic kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion and world leading scientific innovation in the development of the Oxford / AstraZeneca vaccine. Our NHS colleagues served and cared for the sick with immense love, dedication, professionalism and compassion. All those serving in our frontline and essential services, our voluntary groups and volunteers, our places of worship and faith groups, our police, Judiciary, our armed services, our world leading universities and scientific research centres, colleges, schools, the list is endless, you all ensured that the wheels of the Thames Valley and our country, remained in motion and that all essential services remained open so that all those vulnerable or self-isolating individuals and families were taken care of. Remember too that at the height of the pandemic, with no vaccine in sight, each one of you, placed yourselves at some degree of personal risk as

you stepped out of your homes – to you all we offer you and your families, our heartfelt thanks and gratitude.

This has and continues to be one of the most challenging periods in our modern history. However, it is also a moment with huge possibilities. What I have been particularly struck by is the flowering of the deep sense of community, of belonging and of caring for one another. Our presence this evening, reflected in our diversity, symbolises for me what community is. It is all of us, people of faith or no faith, of diverse cultures, ethnicities, languages, backgrounds and professions, or areas of diverse interests and specialties. This richness of diversity is our strength in the Thames Valley and our country.

The pandemic has led to greater collaboration at multiple levels too. The reason we've been able to develop the Oxford and many other Covid vaccines, with great speed and effectiveness, has been a result of unparalleled scientific collaboration at the global level. Just as this global collaboration of the very best scientific talent has produced remarkable results and provided us with the hope of an end to this terrible pandemic our collaboration at the local level to support the most needy and vulnerable, has resulted in the building of friendships across faiths and cultures, and in the process the erosion of stereotypes of the other. This seems to be an essential part of building strong cohesive local communities of understanding, mutual respect and trust. We must build on the tremendous work so many of you have done in this significant and important way. Just yesterday, exploring my theme of 'Celebrating Oxfordshire's Heroes', Hadi Nuri, a Syrian refugee, now settled in Oxford, shared his story of mothers thanking his Syrian group for supporting local vulnerable families with essential items of food during the pandemic and in the process, tearing down the stereotypes about refugees. There are many other inspirational stories from across the Thames Valley and I know many of you will have your own stories of inspiration.

I hope that you find this evening's multi-faith service reflective, moving and one of hope but also an expression of our unity across the Thames Valley.

**The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft
Bishop of Oxford**

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
Lord, be with us always.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Gracious God,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom and guidance to those producing and delivering the vaccines.
Strengthen them with your Spirit,
that through their work many will be restored to health;
Lord, be with us always.

And in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Almighty God,
you love everything you have made
and judge us with infinite mercy and justice.
We rejoice in your promises of pardon, joy and peace.
In your mercy turn the darkness of death into the dawn of new life,
and the sorrow of parting into the joy of heaven;
Lord, be with us always.

And in your mercy
Hear our prayer

God of Peace,
help us to come together in unity and respect
to build back better our society after the pandemic.
So that our families, our communities
can flourish in faith and friendship.
Lord, be with us now and forever. Amen.

Sam Foster

Chief Nurse, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

On 31 Dec 2019 Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, reported a “cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province – A novel coronavirus was eventually identified. As the UK looked forward to New Year celebrations – the events in China seemed too far away to have an impact on us. By March 7, 2020, a bartender in a European ski resort tested positive for Covid-19 Tourists were forced to evacuate within hours.

The NHS was mobilised to respond, a “wave of disease” was expected. We were asked to double and double again our capacity to care for intensive care patients. Clinical teams joined international what’s-app groups with colleagues from across Europe – particularly Italy sharing their learning and experience as the “wave” headed towards us in the UK. We prepared as a team for the single mission of caring for patients with Covid-19 who needed us – however with concerns for our patients who also needed us but did not have covid so would have their procedures postponed whilst we responded to those in greater need.

In addition to being part of the Executive team leading my Trust Response to COVID-19 I have a background in critical care nursing – I wanted to join the team on the frontline as much as I could to contribute to care, and to ensure that I understood how we could best enable colleagues to deliver care.

When I entered my I.C.U. (Intensive Care Unit) now full of patients with Covid 19 for the first time, in April 2020, wearing a long-sleeved gown, a plastic apron and hat, two pairs of gloves, rubber boots, and heavy-duty face protection that resembled a gas mask with my name written across my apron as an identifier I was scared – we still knew little of this disease, who was most at risk, what the demand was likely to be, and how we would cope.

The U.K. public was applauding health-care workers every Thursday night at 8pm, but locals around our hospitals learned that the staff didn’t leave until 8:30 and adjusted accordingly. They lined the street, and they were banging their pans and cheering us out – the support from the public and local and hospital charities was outstanding and made such a difference to us all.

That was April 2020. The following months were gruelling and unrelenting. Our hospitals were filled moving from five to twelve critical care areas, large numbers of staff were redeployed to respond- training was constant and clinical leadership more important than ever. We lost several staff to the virus; two colleagues passed away in a single weekend- wellbeing and caring for each other became a real priority.

Then some positive news, we learned that our trust had been selected as one of fifty hospital hubs across the U.K. that would begin dispensing the first doses of the vaccine. We had about seventy-two hours to plan. Nobody slept the night before the vaccine arrived planning this rapid response.

When the vaccine finally arrived, it came in a case that resembled a pizza box. It was like when the Coca-Cola van comes, everybody knew it was here. It was complex, requiring storage in an ultra-cold freezer- our pharmacy colleagues worked around the clock to design safe processes.

On the first vaccination day, we gathered around a vial of the vaccine to learn how to make it ready for patients, about eight or nine of us all looking at this tiny vial like we were all students. When the inaugural patient, arrived, I administered the first dose.

The vaccine gave us hope – we moved between Tier 3 of coronavirus restrictions, closing pubs, restaurants, and theatres, and further limiting in-person gatherings into Tier 4, effectively cancelling Christmas plans for millions. The hospitals were full again and it the country felt extremely sad.

New year 2020 came with the amazing news that our outstanding colleagues in Oxford had developed and had approval for the Astra Zeneca Vaccine – we gathered again to learn how to administer this new vaccine and I had the privilege to administer the first out of trial AZ vaccine in the world – it was a monumental time for us at Oxford.

As I reflect – on the last eighteen months – our thoughts are with all who have lost family, loved ones and colleagues to this dreadful disease. The NHS responded across the country in a truly outstanding manner - we have come together as one team, built relationships across health and social care that will benefit patients for years to come, we have reignited the pride in the country in its NHS, and have led the world in our vaccine delivery. Health and wellbeing of NHS staff continues to be our focus to enable us to recover and restore our services for all who need us. – With thanks to all my NHS family for the utter dedication and determination to deliver care in the most extraordinary times.

HH Judge Heather Norton
Resident Judge – Reading Crown Court

As a judge, I am – sadly – used to taking away someone’s freedom when they have done something wrong.

Since April 2020, all of us have had to relinquish freedoms that we had previously taken for granted; not because we had done anything wrong, but because it was the right thing to do to protect each other from the virus.

Families and friends have been kept locked away from each other; furloughed workers locked out of their jobs; students locked out of schools and colleges; those who suffer with their mental health, locked in with their thoughts.

For many, the lockdowns have been a time of loneliness, suffering and despair. And yet, as the pace of life necessarily slowed, we have been given the opportunity – perhaps never before glimpsed or seized – to look afresh at our lives, and to look forward with hope and gratitude for what is to come.

From my court in Reading, I can see the window of the cell where, in 1897, Oscar Wilde wrote ‘*Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*’ (Letter: In Prison and in Chains), better known as ‘*De Profundis*’ (Out of the Depths) - the opening words of Psalm 130; a psalm which speaks of suffering, but also of faith and hope:

1. *Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord:
Lord, hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.*
2. *If you, Lord, were to mark what is done amiss,
O Lord, who could stand?*
3. *But there is forgiveness with you,
So that you shall be feared.*
4. *I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him;
In his word is my hope.*
5. *My soul waits for the Lord, more than the night watch for the morning;*
6. *O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy;*
7. *With him is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.*

Father, we commend to your faithful love, those who are crying from the depths;

help them to watch and pray through their time of darkness,
in sure hope of the dawn of your forgiveness and redemption;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Wooburn Singers

Conductor: Tom Hammond-Davies

A Celtic Blessing

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face
The rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand

A pause for silence and personal reflection

Rabbi Jonathan Romain

Jewish Community

God of all creation, we stand in awe before You, impelled by visions of human harmony. We are children of many different traditions – inheritors of shared wisdom and tragic misunderstanding, of proud hopes and humble successes. Now it is time for us to meet – in memory and truth, in courage and trust, in love and promise.

In that which we share, let us see the common prayer of humanity; where we differ, let us wonder at human freedom; in our unity and in our differences, let us know the uniqueness that is God.

As we remember the time of fear, illness and death that we endured together, we think of all those we knew who suffered.

We mourn for all that died with those we lost, their goodness and their wisdom, which could have healed so many wounds. The genius and wit that died, the learning and laughter that were lost. The world has become a poorer place and our hearts become cold as we think of the splendour that might have been.

We stand in gratitude for the examples of decency and kindness. They are like candles that shine out from the darkness of that time, and in their light we know what are the values that we most admire.

May such a period never come again, and may we reach out to those still suffering, both in this country and abroad.

May our courage match our convictions, and our integrity match our hope.

May our faith in You bring us closer to each other.

May our meeting with past and present bring us blessing for the future.

Nachamu, Nachamu Nigun

Composed and sung by Alexander Massey, with Matthew Faulk

“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.” Isaiah 40:1. When we suffer a deep loss, sometimes the greatest comfort comes from those who understand that nothing can compensate, diminish or repair that loss; it is total and devastating, and our only salvation is to feel and meet that loss directly. There is a second kind of comfort, a healing, that can come, when we manage to embrace the ever-unfolding new possibilities of life, and accept that new growth and nourishment are within our reach, especially when we are part of community. (Singing a *nigun* draws on the longstanding Jewish mystical practice of chanting a wordless melody, inspired by a sacred verse or intention).

Dr al-Hafidh Kamel Ait-Tahhar

Muslim Community Representative

O Almighty God,

We thank you for the blessings of life,

We thank you for the blessing of love You have for all of us,

We thank you for the blessing of instilling Your Love in our hearts,

We thank you for the blessing of being together with You and with each other,

We thank you for the blessing of giving us the patience and resilience in these times of trials, tribulations and sorrow.

The recent difficult times we have experienced through the Covid pandemic, has brought much sorrow and grief to many individuals and families here in the UK and all over the world. The amount of suffering (physical, mental and spiritual) it has inflicted on millions of people is beyond imagination. This experience has highlighted the need for people to come together in praise of the lord, in recognition of our weaknesses and to ask for guidance and support from Him.

It is in the spirit of togetherness that we are gathering here. The diversity of the communities we represent is testament to our willingness to be together to withstand the difficulties ahead. It is the spirit through which we will transcend the barriers of colour, language, culture and creed.

We pray that the spirit of togetherness will lead us to overcome the pandemic in unity and solidarity.

We pray for those who lost their lives due to the pandemic,

We pray for those who are grieving for the loss of loved ones,

We pray for those who are suffering from the consequences of these trials,

We pray for those who are at the forefront, saving lives and providing relief to the needy,

We pray for the flourishing and well-being of all humanity. Ameen.

Younis Ghulam Nabi

Muslim song/nasheed/na'at

A pause for silence and personal reflection

Dr Gian Gopal

Hindu Community

We pray, O Lord, in sincerity, humility and devotion to pay homage to millions of people who have succumbed to this pernicious disease; a disease that has spared no part of our world. We pray the departed souls find peace in Your Grace and that us, the Survivors, have the physical and mental fortitude to come through this period of pestilence.

1. Om Tapsaa Ye Anaa-Dhri-Shyaasta-Pasaa Ye Svarya-Yuh | Tapo Ye Chakrire Maha-Staan-shi Chade-Va-api Gachha-taat ||

O Lord, May the departed soul never be subdued by fear or sin and may the departed soul enjoy happiness in obedience to You

2. Om Sayo-naa-rame Bhava Prithivya-Nrikshraa Nive-shani | Yachhaa-rame Sharma Saprathaah ||

O Lord, May Mother Earth be kind and a place of restfulness for the departed soul and may this soul find abundant well-being.

3. Om Imau Yunajami Te Vahani Asuni-Taaye Vordve | Taabhyaam Yamasaya Saadnam Saami-Tishachvaa Gachha-taat ||

O Lord, we join the vital entities that will help the departed soul find a just life in noble company by virtue of its acts

As part of this remembrance I would like to express heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all the front-line workers:

- doctors, nurses and hospital staff that worked in dangerous conditions to care of those stricken by Covid; that many could not make it to recovery was no fault of these carers,

- supermarket and food store staff that worked throughout the periods of lockdowns at risk to themselves to ensure that we all had sustenance and
- scientists and pharmaceutical workers that have researched and manufactured the vaccine that are bringing the World out of this period of pestilence.

And finally a mantra for the health and well-being of us all:

Om Trayam-Bakam Yajaa-Mahe Sugandhim Pushti-Vardhanam | Urvaa-Rukmiva Bhandhnaan Mrtyor-Mukshiya Maamritaam |

O Sustainer of the three worlds, Destroyer of illness and supporter of all; as a ripe fruit gets its release from its branch, so free us from disease and grant us long life.

**Dr Stephen Vickers
Baha'i Community**

Contemplating this contribution, the words that kept passing through my mind were “joyful” and “inspirational”. They speak volumes of the human spirit and our ability to pick ourselves up and move on. Not everything will be all right for many of us after the last painful 18 months, and for much of the world the pandemic is not over. We have however learned that only by acting in concert can the human community confront such problems, and that “the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens”, as Baha'u'llah put it. However, we must rejoice in the bounty of God, and His protection for those who have passed on, and I will start with a couple of lines from Bob Marley's Three Little Birds:

“Don't worry about a thing
'Cos every little thing's gonna be all right”

And now a prayer from the Baha'i Writings:

“My remembrance of Thee, O my God, quencheth my thirst, and quieteth my heart.
My soul delighteth in its communication with Thee...
I give thanks to Thee, O my God, that Thou hast suffered me to remember Thee. What else but remembrance of Thee can give delight to my soul or gladness to my heart? Communion with Thee enableth me to dispense with the remembrance of all Thy creatures, and my love for Thee empowereth me to endure the harm...
Send, therefore, unto my loved ones, O my God, what will cheer their hearts, and illumine their faces, and delight their souls. Thou knowest, O my Lord, that their joy is to behold the...glorification of Thy word. Do Thou unveil, therefore, O my God, what

will gladden their eyes, and ordain for them the good of this world and of the world which is to come.

Thou art, verily, the God of power, of strength and of bounty.”

Baha'u'llah

Raghibir Singh Notta
Sikh Community

"Gourree Mehalaa 5" ||

Composed in Measure Gauree, by Fifth Guru:

Aad madh jo ant nibaahai ||

One who would stand with me from the start, midway and to the end.

So saajan meraa man chaahai ||1||

My mind longs for such a Friend, ||1||

Har kee preet sadaa sang chaalai ||

The Lord's Love goes ever with us.

Dae-i-aal purakh pooran pratipaalai ||1|| rehaao ||

The Perfect Merciful Master cherishes all. ||1||Pause||

Binsat naahee chhodd na jaae ||

He shall perish not, and shall never abandon me.

Jeh pekhaa teh rehiaa samaae ||2||

Wherever I look, there I see Him pervading. ||2||

Sundar sugharr chatur jeea daataa ||

Beautiful, All-knowing, and most Clever, is the Giver of life.

Bhaaee poot pitaa prabh maataa ||3||

God is Brother, Son, Father and Mother. ||3||

Jeevan praan adhaar meree raas ||

He is the Support of my life breath; He is my Wealth.

Preet laaee kar ridai nivaas ||4||

Abiding within my heart, The Lord inspires me to enshrine love for Him. ||4||

Maaiaa silak kaattee gopaal ||

The noose of Maya is cut away by the Lord of the World.

Kar apunaa leeno nadar nihaal ||5||

Beholding me with His blessed gracious glance He has made me His own. ||5||

Simar simar kaattae sabh rog ||

By ever remembering Him in contemplation are all diseases healed.

Charan dhiaan sarab sukh bhog ||6||

By focusing on His Feet, are all comforts enjoyed. ||6||

Pooran purakh navatan nit baalaa ||

The Perfect Omnipresent Lord is ever fresh and ever young.

Har antar baahar sang rakhvaalaa ||7||

Within and without is the Lord with me, as my Protector. ||7||
Kahu naanak har har pad cheen ||
Says Nanak, the Lord, God is realized.
Sarbas naam bhagat ko deen ||8||11||
Blessed with all of the Name's treasure is the devote."||8||11|| SGGS||240

Sikh Shabad (Devotional Song)

**Performed by Rajinder Singh (Vocals), Amarjot Kaur (Vocals)
Ranjit Singh (Tabla)**

Ang 1136

ਭੈਰਉ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥ Bhairo Mehalaa 5 ||

ਉਠਤ ਸੁਖੀਆ ਬੈਠਤ ਸੁਖੀਆ ॥ Oothath Sukheea Baithath Sukheea ||

Standing up, I am at peace; sitting down, I am at peace.

When someone understands that the Creator looks after all, that person constantly experiences inner peace, including when standing and sitting.

ਭਉ ਨਹੀ ਲਾਗੈ ਜਾਂ ਐਸੇ ਬੁਝੀਆ ॥੧॥ Bho Nehee Laagai Jaan Aisae Bujheea ||1||

I feel no fear, because this is what I understand. ||1||

That person then feels no fear of anything in life or of death.

ਰਾਖਾ ਏਕੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ Raakhaa Eaek Hamaara Suaamee ||

The One Lord, my Lord and Master, is my Protector.

The Creator looks after all of Creation.

ਸਗਲ ਘਟਾ ਕਾ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ Sagal Ghattaa Kaa Antharajaamee ||1|| Rehaao ||

He is the Inner-knower, the Searcher of Hearts. ||1||Pause||

You can't hide the contents of your heart from the Creator (so don't even try! Lying to yourself is lying to the Sat so always be true about what you feel and how to deal with this as otherwise you won't feel at peace). Contemplate on this.

ਸੋਇ ਅਚਿੰਤਾ ਜਾਗਿ ਅਚਿੰਤਾ ॥ Soe Achintha Jaag Achintha ||

I sleep without worry, and I awake without worry.

When this knowledge is understood and accepted, a person is always without worry, even when awake or asleep. (Or I also see this as saying when a person accepts this then they remain spiritually awake and leave sleep behind.)

ਜਹਾ ਕਹਾਂ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਤੂੰ ਵਰਤੰਤਾ ॥੨॥ Jehaa Kehaan Prabh Thoon Varathanthaa ||2||

You, O God, are pervading everywhere. ||2||

Only when spiritually awakened does a person say (believe) that Waheguru is present everywhere.

ਘਰਿ ਸੁਖਿ ਵਸਿਆ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥ Ghar Sukh Vasiaa Baahar Sukh Paeiaa ||

I dwell in peace in my home, and I am at peace outside.

They feel at peace at home and experience peace outside home too (no matter what happens).

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਿ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਦਿੜਾਇਆ ॥੩॥੨॥ Kahu Naanak Gur Manthra Dhirraaeiaa ||3||2||

Says Nanak, the Guru has implanted His Mantra within me. ||3||2||

Says Nanak, those who are at peace are the ones who accept the truth of the Creator being present everywhere, with the Guru helping to fix this acceptance in them.

Dhamachari Prajnaketu Buddhist Community

In this time of global suffering we remember those we have lost personally, as well as the millions who have suffered beyond the horizons of our own lives. We also recollect the Buddhist aspiration to be of service in all possible ways to the beings who continue to suffer. This 'Awakening-spirit' is described very movingly by the poet-sage Śāntideva in the following words:

May I be medicine for the sick.

May I be their physician and their nurse

Until sickness is no more.

May I be their servant

To give them all that they need.

I would be a protector

For those without protection;

A guide for those who wander;

A boat, a bridge, a causeway

For those who long for the other shore.

For all beings,

I would be a lamp for those needing a lamp;

A bed for those needing a bed;

A servant for those desiring a servant.

Just as the earth and other elements
Are serviceable in many ways
To the infinite number of beings,
Inhabiting limitless space,
So may I become
That which maintains all beings
Situated throughout space,
So long as all have not attained
To peace.

Just as a blind man may find by chance
A priceless jewel in a heap of refuse,
So, somehow, this Awakening-spirit is hidden
Even in me.
It is the elixir of life
Which destroys death, the destroyer of all;
A limitless treasure to destroy all poverty;
The supreme cure for the world's sickness;
It is a tree of rest for the wearied world,
Wandering on the road of being.
It is a bridge for all travellers
Passing over the waters of suffering;
It is the heart's waxing moon,
Cooling the heat of passion;
It is a great sun
Dispelling the darkness of the world's ignorance.

For the caravan of famished beings
Blundering on the road of existence,
It is a banquet of joy,
Which refreshes completely
All who hunger for happiness.
Today, I invite the world to Buddhahood,
And to all the happiness of the Dharma.
May gods, titans and all rejoice!

Oxford Triratna Buddhist Community

Will chant the *Maitreya mantra* - a traditional chant evoking universal loving-kindness.

Professor Graham Upton
A Person of No Faith

As we move into what we all hope is the beginning of the end of the pandemic and the vaccines do their work, I would like to pay tribute to three groups of people – the scientists, the medical and health care workers and family and friends who have suffered the loss of loved ones.

To the scientist I hope this year has shown people the potential of science to make the world a better place, and the researchers who have worked tirelessly to keep us all safe. Truly, they are mostly the unsung heroes of all this. Some of the leading scientists in the UK were honoured for their part in this in the Queen's honours list last month but to all the other unknown vaccine researchers out there. To them, I say: thank you.

To the doctors and nurses, the paramedics and all the other health care professions including those in care homes as well as hospitals and in the community, I would also like to say thank you for your commitment and determination in what must have at times been close to unbearable circumstances.

My thanks to them for being truly heroic.

Finally, to those who have experienced the death of family, friends and colleagues. Over the years one of my inspirations was Leonard Cohen. A favourite song was *Farewell Marianne* in which he wrote of the end of their relationship. Many years later as Marianne lay dying Cohen wrote a letter to her and said:

*Well Marianne, it's come to this time when we are really so old and our bodies are falling apart and I think I will follow you very soon. Know that I am so close behind you that if you stretch out your hand, I think you can reach mine.
And you know that I've always loved you for your beauty and for your wisdom, but I don't need to say anything more about that because you know all about that. But now, I just want to wish you a very good journey.
Goodbye old friend. Endless love, see you down the road.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Willie Hartley Russell, High Sheriff of the Royal County of Berkshire

On behalf of the Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, which make up this great Thames Valley, I would like to thank those of you who have contributed to this multi-faith service and, to all of you, who have come this evening.

The High Sheriffs of our three counties have come together to create this multi-faith service because we are passionate about our respective communities and we wanted to celebrate how they have come together in so many different and wonderful ways in the service of others and, in the many acts of kindness that have been so clearly demonstrated over the last 18 months.

It is a great achievement to have brought so many different faiths together, and those of no faith at all, for this service of remembrance, reflection and hope.

There are no fewer than eight different religions here this evening.

The Covid pandemic has challenged us in so many ways and there has been much sadness caused by the deaths, illness, isolation, mental-stress and loneliness. So, it is absolutely right that we have paused to reflect and remember those who have died and those who have suffered.

What has struck us about the pandemic has been the wonderful response from individuals, charities, voluntary organisations, the NHS and the emergency services to serve our communities and the innumerable acts of compassion and kindness. It has been a shared experience and one that has transcended religious, ethnic and cultural ties.

We have also been struck by the flourishing development of our inter-faith relationships; the unifying love of god and the love for our neighbours. Irrespective of faith, it is about living out that vocation, it's about our shared values and beliefs for the common good. The common denominator is that God's love is at the core of all religions

The Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of our three counties very much hope that we can continue to grow and develop this inter-faith dialogue and connectivity into the future for the mutual benefit of our communities.

On a personal note, I could not conclude without thanking Monawar Hussain, the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, whose initiative this is. Monawar is the Muslim chaplain at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust and is the Imam at Eton. He has been at the vanguard of the multi faith movement and has done so much to promote this cause. Some of you may have read in the programme that Lord Waldegrave, the Provost of Eton, describes Monawar as “Eton’s much loved Muslim Faith Tutor”. I think that describes him perfectly.

He is so clearly respected and admired by the communities that he serves and that is reflected in the fact that he has seven High Sheriff chaplains from seven different faiths which is a true reflection of how he is regarded. For Monawar, and for many of us, it is about the love of God and the living out of our vocation.

On behalf of the Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs, we would like to thank the Provost of Eton for letting us use this very special Olympic venue and also for providing the refreshments following the service.

Thank you all for coming this evening.

A PLEDGE FOR PEACE

Led by

Her Majesty’s Lord-Lieutenants Cadet

[All stand]

We have come together today as citizens of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

We pledge to stand united
against those who propagate hate and violence towards others.

We pledge to stand united
against all forms of violent extremism.

We pledge to live by the values that are inherent within our traditions –
values of compassion for the needy, love for the neighbour
and respect for one another.

We pledge to do all we can
To promote understanding, respect and mutual love for all.

[Please move to the Food Hall for refreshments and conversation]

MESSAGES OF SUPPORT AND PRAYERS

**The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft
Bishop of Oxford**

The Covid-19 pandemic has and continues to take a huge toll across Britain and around the world. Whilst many of us are beginning to enjoy the new freedoms of the steps away from lockdown and the greater safety that vaccination affords, we are painfully aware of the cost and grief for those suffering presently, those suffering long-term effects, and those who are grieving loved ones whose lives have been cruelly cut short.

My grateful thanks therefore to the High Sheriffs of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire in partnership with The Lord-Lieutenants of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire for this initiative.

The holding of grief, loss and remembrance alongside or even held and grounded in hope and indeed joy, is at the heart of the Christian faith. Again and again we read in the Hebrew Scriptures that pain, loss and seeming abandonment by God is not in fact the end of story. In the most famous of the Psalms, read often at funerals, we hear that though our dark valleys cannot be avoided, they give way to celebrations and new life (Psalm 23). The New Testament Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, lead inextricably to his suffering and an awful death, and yet each year we remember this particular Friday as 'Good'. It is the Easter knowledge of the good news of his resurrection and new life that gives us the strength, courage and hope to walk through our dark valleys, whether that be suffering or death itself.

Our personal 'Good Fridays' are not the end of our story, our shared Good Fridays of this pandemic are giving way to freedom and life, hugs with loved ones and celebratory meals together. For those who grieve, I would like you to know that the darkness of your Good Friday and that of your departed loved ones does not hold the final word,

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

Psalm 23: 4-6

Rabbi Jonathan Romain
Maidenhead Synagogue

The things we take for granted

Let me recount it very briefly, as befits a text. After a long illness, I was permitted for the first time to step out-of-doors. As I crossed the threshold sunlight greeted me.

This is my experience - all there is to it. And yet, so long as I live, I shall never forget that moment. It was mid-January - a time of cold and storm up North, but in Texas, where I happened to be, a season much like our spring. The sky overhead was very blue, very clear, and very, very high. Not, I thought, the *shamayim*, heaven, but *shemei shamayim*, a heaven of heavens. A faint wind blew from off the western plains, cool and yet somehow tinged with warmth - like a dry, chilled wine. And everywhere in the firmament above me, in the great vault between the earth and sky, on the pavements, the buildings - the golden glow of the sunlight. It touched me, too, with friendship, with warmth, with blessing. And as I basked in its glory there ran through my mind those wonderful words of the prophet about the sun which someday shall rise with healing on its wings.

In that instant I looked about me to see whether anyone else showed on his face the joy, almost the beatitude, I felt. But no, there they walked - men and women and children, in the glory of the golden flood, and so far as I could detect, there was none to give it heed. And then I remembered how often I, too, had been indifferent to sunlight, how often, preoccupied with petty and sometimes mean concerns, I had disregarded it. And I said to myself, How precious is the sunlight but alas, how careless of it are men. How precious - how careless. This has been a refrain sounding in me ever since.

Milton Steinberg

Councillor John Howson, JP
Chair, Oxfordshire County Council

The past eighteen months of the pandemic has produced a set of mixed emotions. Sorrow for the many that have died because of covid or covid affected conditions and for their families and friends. Help for those with long-covid and others whose lives have been affected in many ways by the consequences of the pandemic, whether through its effects on the economy; on our cultural and sporting life or on education, health and other services provided by the State.

On the positive side there has been the enormous outpouring of support, ranging from everyone in the early days turning out to clap for the NHS, to the significant numbers of volunteers turning their hands to many new tasks. We learnt during the Olympics that Britain could be a nation of volunteers. The pandemic has once again shown that willingness to turn up to help others with no thought save that there is a job that needs doing. Whether standing in a car park on a cold morning marshalling a queue, delivering prescriptions to self-isolating families or one of many other tasks undertaken by volunteers of all ages, we celebrate and offer up thanks for your willingness to serve others without thought for yourself.

John Campbell QPM
Chief Constable , Thames Valley Police

The policing of the community during the pandemic brought unique challenges for Thames Valley Police. We are a service that people rely on, often at critical times for them and their loved ones, and we knew that we needed to maintain our normal response to such matters in abnormal times. We were also given the challenge of encouraging, and sometimes requiring, the community to abide by significant restrictions on their lives for the common good. We knew the significant impact of this on the community and its relationship with the Police. We approached those duties with great care and thought. Moreover whilst others were told to remain at home to protect themselves from the virus, my staff were required to do the exact opposite. Every one of the thousands of interactions with the public presented a risk to my officers and staff and to their families, when they returned home at the end of their shifts. The officers and staff of Thames Valley Police are not remote from their communities. They are your brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, friends and neighbours, and as Chief Constable I am proud of what they did and how they did, it in extraordinary times. I hope you are too. However, I am also very proud of the way that the public supported TVP, through words and deeds during these terrible times. That support made a difficult job a little easier and will not be forgotten. My thanks to you all.

Professor Sir Jonathan Montgomery
Chair, Oxford University Hospitals NHSFT

Covid has tested us all and it has reminded us how much we rely on the dedication and skill of those who work in the National Health Service. I have been deeply moved by the accounts patients have shared with us of the ways in which staff have gone beyond the call of duty to save lives and support families in distress. We have seen how our research has helped us care to better for those we serve and built a robust platform for the global response to the pandemic. We owe our colleagues so much and it is right that we pay tribute to their compassion, celebrate their contributions, and show them how proud we are to be associated with them.

Revd Helen Arnold
Lead Chaplain, Thames Valley Police

Many have been touched by the trauma of the pandemic, a plague of modern times with a wide reach.

May we give thanks for our great fortune in being cared for by our emergency services, hospitals and our Government. For those who have lost loved ones and unable to say farewells as they would have done in different times, we offer our sympathy and patience.

May we look to a brighter future with our resilience and compassion transformed.

Sue Sibany-King
Manager, Slough Foodbank

At Slough Foodbank we have seen first-hand the wonderful outpouring of generosity from our local community and other communities around the country. In the spirit of true faith-led desire to help and basic human kindness we have been overwhelmed with donations of both food and funds. These have allowed us to continue to serve the people of Slough and the surrounding areas throughout the difficult times we have all faced.

David Seward
CEO, Berkshire Youth

Berkshire Youth remember all of those that have lost a loved one through Covid-19 and we all pay tribute to the NHS teams, Teachers, Youth workers, Care workers and all

communities who have come together to support each other during the pandemic, we encourage all of us to keep thinking of each other and being kind.

**The Worshipful the Mayor of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Councillor John Story**

2020/21 will be remembered as a troubled period in the history of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead as we dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic which tragically took so many lives. Throughout the emergency, frontline workers supported our communities in numerous ways from providing medical help in our hospitals to delivering our post and groceries. It was comforting to see our communities pulling together with residents helping each other and support hubs being set up.

Although the pandemic has affected us all, some have suffered greatly and to those and those left behind we offer our deepest sympathy. As we anticipate better times we also offer our sincere thanks to those who have helped and supported so much during the pandemic.

Professor Alistair Fitt, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University

Few people imagined what would follow when we first heard of Covid-19 - the pandemic has shaped all of our lives over the past 18 months, hugely changing how we live and work. It has also left many families devastated by the loss of loved ones.

Today, we honour and remember those who have died, and show our ongoing support for their families, friends, and for those who continue to be affected by Covid-19. I want to offer them my heartfelt sympathies, on behalf of the whole Oxford Brookes University community.

As we unite in tribute and remembrance, we can also start to look towards the future and gather strength from the remarkable resilience that our communities have shown. I'm proud that many of our researchers at the University were able to turn their focus to the pandemic. From developing a vaccine to investigating the impact of lockdowns on child development, their dedication to supporting the Covid-19 recovery has been heartening to witness.

Beyond this work, many of our staff and students have supported our local communities - through volunteering, reaching out to neighbours, and returning to the front line of the NHS. At a time of national crisis, we truly saw the best in people.

So whilst the challenge of Covid-19 is not yet over, and the impact will be felt for many years to come, it is this sense of community, this spirit and generosity that gives me

hope. Although the clouds of Covid-19 remain, I hope that we can soon start to see a brighter future, together.

Bede Gerrard
Founding Chair, Oxford Council of Faiths

During the past 14 months we have all been separated from each other, unable to meet except on line. This has not lessened the determination of those who foster interfaith relationships. Each community has been restricted in their public worship which is only now slowly getting back to normal. The provision of opportunities for public worship have been reduced to on-line services or events. We have much to be thankful for to those who have made this possible. Coming together for this event has given us the chance to renew our friendships and work together once again, face to face.

Mary Durman
Chief Executive Officer, Promise Inclusion Ltd

Reflecting on the past year we remember those of our members who died or suffered in some other way especially through social isolation, loneliness and increased anxiety. However we also build on the strengths that we developed during this time including stronger and closer links with our members and other organisations and greater adaptability as we carefully come out of lock down and look forward to the future.

Dr Anna Thomas-Betts MBE

In the autumn of 2019 I happened to read *The Second Sleep* by Robert Harris: a very disturbing novel about the re-emergence of society after the destruction of civilisation by a pandemic, or a global breakdown of (internet) communication or some other unknown cause. So when the pandemic emerged in early 2020, I was in a silent turmoil of panic, which I didn't share with anyone to avoid plunging them into panic mode as well.

As things worked out, I was always profoundly grateful that society didn't descend into chaos and anarchy, thanks to excellent planning at many levels and many agencies: of adequate food supplies and extensive home deliveries and essential services from policing to garbage-clearing, not to mention dealing with medical emergencies. As for the NHS, what more can be said that hasn't already been said by everyone!

The lockdown, with self-isolation, was disorienting rather than unbearable to me, as an introvert. But a feeling of guilt has been lurking in my mind all along: guilt at being able

to self-isolate when others around the world could not, and others like NHS and care staff had to work to make that possible; guilt at receiving the vaccine at an early stage when others more exposed to the virus like public sector workers weren't; indeed of being alive while millions have died from Covid-19 around the world.

We know that the pandemic has highlighted the stark inequalities in our society, as well as the world at large. Maybe we'll learn that reducing the levels of inequality is essential for the peace of the world as well as our own wellbeing and find the inner strength to work for it.

Karnail Pannu MBE

Chair, Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum

People made sacrifices to help us get through the testing times. There has been a positive side. There are many inspiring stories of our community heroes. These people donate money and time, helping others.

These champions provided food, medicine, and care to vulnerable members. This year demonstrated our strong sense of Oneness. My tribute to care workers, doctors and nurses, who looked after the patients. Voluntary workers supported the bereaved. Hoping soon we will be returning to our normal life. Meanwhile we must continue to act and maintain the Hands, Face, Space, guidance.

Colonel (Retired) P T Crowley, DL

Chief Executive, South East Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association

Our thoughts go to all those who have suffered during this terrible pandemic. Medical staff and carers have been brilliant and we owe them a great deal. Let us also thank the Armed Forces, both regular and reservists, for their support to the vaccination process, testing, logistic and planning support.

Jacqui Gitau

Co-Founding Director, African Families in the UK (AFiUK) CIC

I find strength and encouragement in the bible teaching and illustration of us people being like sheep and God as our shepherd. Like David wrote in Psalm 23, "With God being my shepherd! I don't suffer any lack that He cannot provide. I look to him and he guides me in lush meadows, he finds me quiet pools to drink from; this keeps my spirit refreshed and nourished."

“As a good shepherd He uses his staff to send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through dark and difficult times, and loved ones are sick and even die, He is always by my side to give me peace and hope.”

Sister Frances Dominica, OBE DL FRCN

Monawar Hussain works tirelessly to unite people of all faiths in a common endeavour to achieve understanding and respect for one another. We travel by different paths to the mountain top but when we reach the summit I believe that we will recognise the one God in whom we believe.

Revd Andy Ferguson

Trust chaplain, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow are words from a popular hymn which could be a prayer for us all in these unusual times.

In our hospitals we need to give thanks for the dedication of our health professionals who have frequently gone the extra mile to deliver excellent, compassionate care to covid and non-covid patients.

**Councillor Mohammed Nazir, Mayor of Slough and
Councillor Dilbagh Singh Parmar, Deputy Mayor of Slough**

The last year has been like no other. We have lost family, friends and colleagues and not been able to pay our respects in the usual way.

Despite this, the Slough communities stepped up to support the elderly, the vulnerable and those less fortunate to provide much needed support in whatever way they could.

I would therefore like to thank everyone who has worked tirelessly over the year in difficult conditions. These include our partners, the volunteers, health, the hospital staff, police, voluntary sector etc – a thank you to our whole town who has stepped up and worked together to support those who have needed it most.

The Revd Sally Lynch

Vicar, St Luke's Church, Windsor and Maidenhead Deanery

From the very start of the pandemic we have been clear that, whatever befalls us, God, however we understand God, is so much bigger than all that the world can throw at us. This belief has kept my own congregation going and now inspires us for the future. The

world has an opportunity to re-set and re-think our values, and to demonstrate a renewed care for people and creation. My prayer is that we embrace this opportunity and make it a reality.

Josie Reed

Chair, Age Concern Newbury and District CIO

The worst of times has brought out the best in people. In Newbury people have been generous with their time volunteering to help in many different ways, sharing their knowledge and showing their compassion for the elderly and vulnerable. And the elderly and vulnerable have in turn been brave and remained cheerful throughout. Working in this community at this difficult time has been inspiring and uplifting.

Sarah Green, MP

Member of Parliament for Chesham and Amersham

I am glad we are coming together today to pause, remember and honour the lives of those taken by this pandemic. May it bring comfort to their families and those who held them dear to know they are not forgotten.

The Very Revd Bob Wilkes

Chair, Restore

It has come home to us, in meeting the challenges of the past year, how crucial it is that we nurture our sense of community. What strength we all gain by looking each other in the eye with openness and respect. The way of hope is that we are members one of another.

Monsignor Sean Healy

Vicar General, Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton

I am pleased to take part in this multi-faith service which remembers those who have died in the Covid-19 pandemic, but which also prays for those who mourn and gives thanks to God for all those who have given so much over the last few months in terms of comfort, support and healing. May the dead rest in peace and the living be renewed in hope and confidence.

Michael Gammage
Secretary, Maidenhead Bahá'í community

The coronavirus pandemic has brought heart-breaking tragedy to individuals and families. It has plunged societies into crisis with waves of suffering and sorrow breaking over one place after another.

We in these corners of this green and pleasant land have been in many ways fortunate. We have avoided the experience of many countries where the virtual collapse of even basic health systems, the absence of vaccination programmes, and the impact of economic crisis have led to dire consequences for their long-suffering citizens. But from this torment and affliction we can advance. The pandemic has inspired outpourings of compassion and loving-kindness, of practical help and companionship for neighbours near and far. It has shed new light on inequalities that we had too often overlooked. It has strengthened our resolve to think more creatively, and sacrificially, about finding together the paths to a more just society.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote that “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established”. That none of us are safe until all of us are vaccinated is just one example of how we are in truth one human family. In health, as in every challenge facing humanity, society’s collective strength is dependent on the unity it can manifest in action, from the international stage to the grassroots.

Religion has a pivotal role in nurturing that unity. Its very purpose, wrote Bahá'u'lláh “is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world”. Because it is concerned with the ennobling of character and the harmonizing of relationships, religion has served throughout history as the ultimate authority in giving meaning to life. It reaches to the roots of motivation. It has awakened in whole populations capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good and to discipline the impulses of animal instinct. In the recognition that we are all the subjects of one God, deriving inspiration from one heavenly Source, lies our true and enduring unity.

Councillor Liz Leffman
Leader, Oxfordshire County Council

I am pleased to have been invited to participate in this service, which gives us an opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary events of the past eighteen months. For many, this has been a time of loss, grief, isolation and loneliness, and I offer my condolences to all who have lost or been separated from their friends and loved

ones. But as well as causing so much distress, this pandemic has taught us the importance of community, and shown us all how a simple gesture of support can make a huge difference. As we emerge from the pandemic in this country, I hope that we can apply what we have learned to assist communities across the globe, so that we can build a better, more resilient future for everyone.

Councillor Nick Leverton
Mayor of Carterton

“Grief never fades, but memories warm your heart forever”.

The Rt Revd Olivia Graham
Bishop of Reading

The extraordinary events of these past 18 months have brought to the communities of the Thames Valley shock, grief, loss, deprivation and real hardship. They have also borne witness to the flame of the human spirit in courage, generosity, selflessness, solidarity and optimism. We have learnt many things: that we are not always in control; that we can live more simply and enjoy it; that we are ingenious in our ability to adapt and create; that we have real inequalities in our society; that it's OK not to be OK.

Today is about pausing to reflect, to remember those whose lives have been lost, to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who grieve and those who continue to suffer and to assert together that Love is stronger than Death. We stand together in gratitude for all those who have given sacrificially to care for, treat and support us. And we give thanks to God for being with us in and through these months of darkness as we dare to believe that the dawn is breaking.

God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

1 John 4:16

Graham Powell
Chair, The Wokingham Volunteer Centre

We remember all those who have suffered during this pandemic. We give thanks for the remarkable and selfless work of all the volunteers who have done so much to lighten the burdens of so many. We hope that the rekindled spirit of community will be maintained and continue to grow.

Councillor Les Sibley
Vice Chairman, Cherwell District Council

From Cherwell District Council: we remember at this time all those who have been lost, those who are grieving and those still affected by this dreadful pandemic. We also give

thanks to all NHS staff, care workers, key workers and to all those valued volunteers from within our own community who have worked so tirelessly in so many different ways to help. We now look to a brighter future, still with much to be done, but with the hope that we build on the lessons learned and the good values adopted throughout the past 16 months.

Rabbi Neil Janes
South Bucks Jewish Community

We at SBJC - South Bucks Jewish Community weep in sorrow for the lives lost to COVID-19 and extend our condolences to those who mourn and pray for strength for those still suffering. The monumental efforts of all the NHS workers, emergency workers, essential workers, volunteers, faith groups and hardworking people have been a daily reminder of our shared humanity and deserving of our deepest gratitude. The psalmist calls us to "Hope in the Eternal God; be strong and of good courage! and hope in the Eternal God!" (Psalm 27:14) On this verse, Rabbi Hama, in the 3rd century CE, remarks that this double exhortation to hope means "One should turn to God with hope, and if necessary turn to God again with hope." As Jews, we join together in this service of shared humanity and together we look to the future, conscious of the resilience of the human spirit, and turn once again to hope and resolve to make that hope manifest in the world.

Rob Butler, MP
Member of Parliament for Aylesbury

It is a privilege to represent Aylesbury at the Thames Valley multifaith service. Faith and community groups help enrich the tapestry of life in towns and villages across the whole constituency; many such faith groups have helped enormously during the pandemic and their support will not be forgotten.

Penny Faust
High Sheriff of Oxfordshire's Jewish Chaplain

This memorial service gives us the opportunity to remember the victims of Covid 19 and those who mourn for them. We hope that the bereaved find consolation in the many memories that they have of their loved ones, and that they receive strength and support from their families, friends and communities as they grieve.

And we pray to God that faith too can revive and sustain their spirits:

Eternal God, You are with us at all times; in joy and in sorrow, in light and in darkness, in life and in death. Open our hearts that we may feel Your presence even at this time

of bereavement. Let the knowledge that You are near soothe our spirits and heal our wounds.

Teach us to trust You and give us the faith to declare:
God gives and God takes away. Praised be the name of our God.

Father Philip Ritchie
High Sheriff of Oxfordshire's Anglican Chaplain

It has been a year like no other, so it is wonderful to be able to come together in prayer, reflection and thanksgiving for all those who have found themselves on the front line during this pandemic. In the midst of all the horror of pain and bereavement we have seen unparalleled acts of kindness and generosity. It has been deeply moving to see people coming together to do what they can to support those in need. It's lovely for us to have this opportunity to just pause and say thank you for the blessing of others' gifts and kindnesses.

Sarah Griffin
Chair, Reading Interfaith Group

In this terrible time of challenge

we have come to appreciate the gift of time even more -

Time to think, to fully appreciate each moment of life, to see nature in greater depth and beauty

and be grateful.

Time to try to be humble as we live and are maintained through the sacrifice of others

and be grateful

Time to trust the worth and expertise of others, swallow our pride, let go

and be grateful

Time to see our neighbour, to remember all that we like about them, to clap

and be grateful

Time to treasure those we already love, to miss them, to zoom about a bit

and be grateful

Time to remember the lonely, the stranger in our midst, to chat

and be grateful.

Time to take that extra step on life's journey to become more alive, more fully human
In friendship and loving greetings to you all from Reading Interfaith Group.

Rt Revd Abbot Geoffrey Scott OSB

Let us pray

Almighty and eternal God,
our refuge in every danger,
to whom we turn in our distress;
in faith we pray
look with compassion on the afflicted,
grant eternal rest to the dead,
comfort to mourners,
healing to the sick,
peace to the dying,
strength to healthcare workers,
wisdom to our leaders
and the courage to reach out to all in love,
so that together we may give glory to your holy name.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Dr al-Hafidh Kamel Ait-Tahar
High Sheriff of Oxfordshire's Muslim Chaplain

Our gathering today represents the best testament for the human ability to withstand difficulties and resist failure. It is a reflection of the human resilience to face up to the challenges of life. Throughout history, humans were able to withstand difficult challenges: wars, epidemics and pandemics and many other challenges. The human race has always shown its capacity to survive. The ingredients for survival reside in our ability to come together and help each other.

Over the last eighteen months, the human family has gone through one of the most difficult times in living memory. The amount of suffering the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted on the world has been beyond imagination. Millions of people (almost four million) lost their lives, and many more are still suffering the pandemic consequences at various levels: health, psychology, financial, family stability, to name but few aspects. The ravages of the pandemic will still be felt for years to come.

We are here to pay tribute to the many among us, who stood together and faced up to these challenges. We send our deepest gratitude to the NHS doctors, nurses and health

professionals who, through their heroic efforts, were able to save the lives of millions of patients, here in the UK and elsewhere. Their ongoing efforts can only be remembered as acts of great valour and courage. Saving one life amounts to saving the whole of humanity. Our tribute extends to the scientific community and particularly those who worked tirelessly to develop the tools (vaccines, screening tests and other therapies) through which we will face up to the challenges the covid virus poses. The list of those who have been at the forefront, can extend to many sectors of the human activity. They all deserve our respect and praise.

We pray that this scourge is lifted off. We should always remember that our efforts, resilience and love for each other are the ingredients through which we will prevail.

Councillor Martin McBride
Chairman, West Oxfordshire District Council

Despite the many tragic results of the pandemic we have seen tremendous community spirit develop through voluntary groups which has transcended any religious differences.

Abdul Dayan
Head of Chaplaincy, HMYOI, Aylesbury

Our Worldly life has been shaken by an invisible organism. The fragility and unpredictability of life could not have been more apparent than in our age. A suffering of people across the globe became a reality for us all and the Human race collectively endeavoured to create for it a solution. Confusion also found its way to unsettle a vast majority of us.

Humans are a resilient race and have always come back from the brink of destruction, stronger in strength and greater in positive intent.

Though, tragically, through this phase, many lives of our dear friends and family have been lost to this invisible enemy, in their memory, we must continue to work together in improving life conditions for each and every one of us on this planet. May the Lord grant an acceptance to all the endeavours of all the people who tried to alleviate the suffering of others in every field of Human life.

Unfortunately, people have been suffering since time immemorial, long before this virus and sadly it appears that there will always be a suffering for many. From indiscriminate killing of civilians in conflicts across the globe to poverty stricken peasants; from easily curable diseases to those for which cures are being sought. I pray the Lord grant the

Human Race an understanding of their true potential and the wisdom to commit their resources so the suffering of many more can be alleviated.

Our Lord forgive our Living and our dead, our present and the absent, our young and our aged, our men and our women. Our Lord, whomsoever you make to live, let live on Submission, and whomsoever you make to die, let die on Faith.

Mrs Charlie Powell
Co-Founder, Lindengate, Mental Health Charity

Grief is the price we pay for love and like wildflowers we must allow ourselves to grow in all the places people thought we never would. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature, giving the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter. We at Lindengate, wish all those affected by the pandemic, better health and wellbeing through nature.

Ramesh Kukar
CEO, Slough CVS

The pandemic has shown us, when we come together in a crisis - we care for our neighbours, we connect with our communities, and we give our time to support those who need our help. Even as the virus forced us apart, volunteers came together and showed up for their communities across Berkshire. The most vulnerable have been the hardest hit. No one is safe from COVID-19 until everyone is safe. Now we must work together to recover better and build a world where everyone thrives.

Mrs Geraldine Lejeune, OBE DL
Chief Executive, Berkshire Community Foundation

I am delighted and thrilled to be able to attend this service in celebration of the amazing work that has been carried out across the Thames Valley and I would like to thank all 3 High Sheriffs for the invitation to join you.

Professor Robert Van de Noort
Vice-Chancellor, University of Reading

There cannot be anyone in the world who has not been affected in some way by the coronavirus pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been cut short. Millions have been bereaved. Today we take this important opportunity to come together to express our collective grief, show our support to those who have lost loved ones, and reinforce our hopes for a brighter future.

Reflecting on the past 18 months, I am proud of the way in which our community has pulled together to support each other. I was already aware of the deep sense of community across the Thames Valley before the pandemic, but the way we have faced this challenge together has only strengthened our bonds.

At the University of Reading, life has been very different for everyone. Yet our students are still learning, growing and achieving academically. I could not be more proud of them, or my colleagues, who have gone the extra mile to continue delivering superb teaching and research. The pandemic has forced us to adapt how we operate, with a mixture of online lectures and face-to-face teaching in Covid-secure classrooms and laboratories. We have continued with our high-quality research programmes, helping to improve people's lives around the world, despite the challenging circumstances. And most importantly, we have played our part in supporting our local community. We have provided skilled volunteers, equipment and supplies for the NHS, set up test centres on our campuses, and worked with charities to provide help to our neighbours who are most in need.

As we look ahead, it gives me great comfort to know that we are just one of many organisations, faith and community groups who have made a difference to people in the most difficult of all circumstances. By striving to support each other within our communities, we will face an uncertain future with confidence and renewed hope.

Councillor Mocky Khan
Mayor of Didcot

There is more that unites us than divides us. This has become more important now during this pandemic than ever before and for the future. We must collaborate, work together and build closer communities that look out for each and without exclusion of any background, community, culture, group, race or religion. We must welcome those that do not follow any faith, we must accommodate and help all. Remember, together, we are stronger.

Priscilla Dorrance
Chair, Milton Keynes & District Reform Synagogue

The Covid pandemic has caused so much heartache and affected all of our lives.

We pray for everyone who has lost loved ones, colleagues and friends over the past 18 months. We pray for everyone who has been ill, especially those who are still suffering. We pray for everyone who has had to cope with the stress of not being in control of their

livelihoods and those whose education has been disrupted. We pray for everyone whose mental health has suffered as a result of the pandemic.

Yet, even in these dark times, there have been signs of hope. While the doors to our building had to shut, I was heartened by how people stepped forward to ensure that our community remained open and grew together. New skills were quickly learned, ensuring that our religious services and education and social activities could all take place online. When we couldn't see each other in person, it became a great comfort to be able to see other's faces on our computer screens. Others volunteered their time, ensuring members and friends, especially those living alone, had the support they needed.

Looking more widely, we all owe a huge debt to NHS workers, teachers, delivery drivers and all other essential workers.

Thanks to the amazing roll-out of the vaccine, there is light at the end of the tunnel. I hope the spirit of altruism and care for others that has been shown during the pandemic continues. As we slowly open up our doors and start to return to a normal life, I'd like to end with this blessing from Deuteronomy (28:6):

Blessed shall you be when you come in,
And blessed shall you be when you go out.

Group Captain Emily Flynn, OBE
Station Commander, Royal Air Force, Brize Norton

This multi-faith ceremony is a fitting way to commemorate those who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which has turned all of our lives upside down since March 2020. So many lives have been lost and the impact on our wider society and economy is significant. By coming together in this way we transcend religious and political divides and reflect in unity and grief. As we learn to live with the ongoing effects of COVID-19 we will not forget those who have lost loved ones and those who have given so much during the pandemic. Royal Air Force Brize Norton has been intimately involved in the efforts to combat COVID-19, transporting vaccines, PPE and oxygen across the globe as well as deploying many who are based here in direct support of our marvellous NHS; a contribution we are proud of. On behalf of all personnel at RAF Brize Norton, I salute those who have given so much in combating and containing the virus and offer my heartfelt condolences to those who have lost their loved ones.

Councillor Keith Baker
Wokingham Borough Mayor

On behalf of Wokingham Borough Council, we would like to express our deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones to Covid-19. We will remember those who have passed away and hope that those suffering from long-Covid and anxiety brought on by the pandemic get better soon. Thank you to all who have provided support to victims, we appreciate your hard work and dedication in giving those who have passed the vital care needed.

Jacqueline Roberts, FRSA
SV2G - St.Vincent & the Grenadines 2nd Generation

Covid-19 has taken its toll on us all but we have all witnessed the rays of hope and highlights as many of us have found ourselves supporting and at times helping amplify the voices of communities which often experience marginalisation. SV2G wishes to thank community partners, the emergency services and other public services for keeping us all safe during the most challenging periods.

“Whatever our future brings, our faith will see us through, may peace reign from shore to shore and God Bless and keep us true” - Taken from the National Anthem of St. Vincent & the Grenadines (Phyllis Joyce McClean Punnett).

PACT (Parents And Children Together)

The global pandemic has presented the world with a multitude of challenges and difficulties. It is tragic that so many people have been affected by the coronavirus in a variety of complex ways. Some have lost their lives, many have lost loved ones, challenging social situations have been exacerbated by lockdowns, closures of schools, loss of income and jobs, difficult relationships and more.

But the world responded and it has been heart-warming and reassuring to see people and communities working together, helping each other, doing what they can, and businesses, charities and community groups stepping up where they could to keep going and support those in need.

From all at PACT (Parents And Children Together) we send warmth to those that have been impacted, in any way, by the pandemic and we will continue to play our part in contributing positively to society.

Councillor Ash Merry
Mayor of Bracknell Forest

For more than a year, we have faced restrictions to the normal freedoms which we have previously enjoyed and, perhaps, taken for granted.

As we gradually get used to a 'new different', in some ways the treasures of darkness have helped us manage the challenges.

'Neighbourliness' and 'selflessness' have been a beacon of light to many individuals. Huge numbers of people have become volunteers using their time, expertise and, indeed, hearts to support others. From manning test and vaccine centres, to collecting shopping and prescriptions, so many have played a vital part. With all our hearts we thank you.

For those who have suffered the loss of a loved one, or whose physical and mental wellbeing is still impacted by Covid, our thoughts are with you.

Councillor Paul Cowell
Mayor of Thame

As Mayor of Thame I am delighted to attend the Thames Valley Multi-faith Service at Dorney Lake. It is an opportunity for us all to reflect on the global pandemic which has cost so many lives and the tremendous community spirit that has been achieved.

Rev Anthony Buckley
City Rector of Oxford

We remember with honour, thanksgiving and prayer those who have died and those who mourn. We remember those who are ill in body, mind or spirit. May the peace and strength of God be with them, now and always.

Mrs J K Wright, DStJ
Chairman, St John Priory Group

Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone who has been affected by Covid, especially those who have lost loved ones. May we all move forward together towards a brighter future.

Elisabeth Salisbury and John Gould
Oxford Quakers

Oxford Quakers are delighted to take part in this ecumenical and interfaith service. At this difficult time in our national life it is more important than ever for all people of faith to demonstrate our love and respect for each other.

Ranjit Singh
Philanthropy Director, Milton Keynes Community Foundation

May we move forward as one united in our grief strengthened by our resolve. Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mark Arkwell
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service

Over the last year, we have all been inspired by the resourcefulness, humbling attitude and dedication shown by so many across the UK. The sacrifices that have been made have been challenging, but whatever our faith or philosophy may be, it is important that we take a moment together to remember those who have been lost and to give thanks for their lives.

While difficult, it has brought together people from all backgrounds, communities, and all parts of the UK – strengthening community bonds and ties – and while the catalyst for this unity may have been a terrible disease, it is one that has truly strengthened the relationships and value we place on the people in our lives.

As we begin to emerge from the restrictions, we believe that the compassion shown will ensure that we emerge from this crisis as an even stronger and more united community across the Thames Valley.

Sarah Roberts, BDS MBA DipM MCIM
Chair, Thames Valley Air Ambulance

The last year has presented unique challenges to all of us. Whether we have been affected by loss, isolation, or instability – we all need to heal and to process what has passed before we can move forward.

As Chair of a charity that is entirely community funded, I have seen first-hand the positivity and power that comes from people getting behind a cause they believe in. Thames Valley Air Ambulance has been overwhelmed by the community's ingenuity

and generosity, even during the toughest of times. Thanks to your support, our crews have remained on the frontline of saving lives, protecting the community every day.

So, as restrictions ease and we look forward to all the freedoms that follow, let's not lose the sense of community spirit, joint purpose, and solidarity that we have built since the beginning of 2020. Together, we have faced this challenge and together, we will face the future.

Kathy Shock and Joel Kaye
Co-Presidents (2021), Oxford Jewish Congregation

The Oxford Jewish Congregation feels very fortunate in that we have so far been relatively little touched by the tragedies we see around us and around the world. It has pulled together and set up resources to support anyone who needed it and kept a real community spirit going with so much online whilst we had to be in lockdown. In fact, in many ways, we have felt more connected to the wider Jewish community resources, when often they are more centrally based in London or the bigger cities. We have learned a good deal about effective ways to communicate and tried hard to keep in touch with the most isolated of members.

But the OJC fully support the wish to honour the countless men and women who have valiantly worked from the beginning of the Covid pandemic to heal and sooth the thousands of patients they have been faced with. We are only too aware of the immense personal risks they were running for many months, but in spite of this they doggedly persevered in helping the sick in every possible way. Watching their own colleagues become ill or even die as they carried the incessant load of patients who could not be comforted by their own families has been a burden that few in our lifetime have had to bear. We all owe them praise beyond words and support wherever possible in thanks for their total commitment. Ancillary workers, those working on public transport or in shops have had to face an unremitting strain and in the early days, major risks to their own health and they too deserve our wholehearted appreciation and thanks.

Younis Ghulam-Nabi Haqqani

The last 18 months have been nothing short of a Hollywood movie. A world pandemic that brought so much fear, so many questions, so many restrictions, and so many lives lost and so many lives changed forever. Not a single person on this planet unaffected in one way or another.

But darkness does not remain forever. The sun rises each day, bringing with it another chance, a new hope, a new day. There are many things in this world we cannot control

and others that we can. Though we cannot replace what we lost due to this pandemic, we can however, stop it from stealing from us further. As we stand together looking back at the dark months behind us, let's not forget to look forward at the beautiful sunrise. Let's stand tall and strong in the face of Covid-19, our hearts full of hope, our minds determined to succeed.

As Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an: "Do not lose heart nor fall into despair! You shall triumph if you are believers. (Qur'an 3:139)."

Nick Harborne
CEO, Reading Refugee Support Group

Our thoughts are with the families, friends, and colleagues of all those who have lost their lives or suffered during this pandemic.

Our thanks go to all the front-line workers who have cared for, supported and helped people, selflessly and with compassion, during this pandemic.

Our hopes are that we all work together to build our society back up to better respond to and eradicate the marginalisation, inequality, exclusion and poverty that this pandemic has exposed within our communities.

Nirmal Singh
Sikh Youth Leader

Nurture, nourish and protect those you hold dear
Live in the moment without worry or fear
As you travel on this journey of life together
Be aware that they will not, remain here forever

Don't lose a moment to convey your devotion
To say that I love you with intent and emotion
When those that remain will think about you
It needs to be loving, with reason and true

Answer your calling, whatever the cause
Sing out aloud, forget your flaws
You are in control of how you feel
Don't let others dictate and make this unreal

Spiritually connect with yourself and others

Your parents, friends, sisters and brothers
With your offspring and this whole creation
Don't have any conditions or any expectation

Vivienne Centala
Site Manager, Aylesbury Vale Crematorium

After a very dark 18 months working our hardest to give grieving families comfort and support, the light at the end of the tunnel is now beginning to shine brighter as each day passes. We have all been changed by the pandemic, we were forced to stop, standstill and reflect on ourselves, our lives and what really mattered the most...our loved ones. We have all been touched by loss, be it within our own families, our friends, neighbours or even work colleagues. To now have the reassurance that the very worst is behind us allows us to confidently step forward to a better tomorrow.

**Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Joint-Chair of the World Congress of Faiths and
Co-Founder of the Faith and Belief Forum**

Mary and I are very disappointed that we are unable to attend the Thames Valley Multi-Faith service on July 22nd and assure you of our prayers and best wishes for this significant and timely event. Our society, especially at this time, needs to hear again the message that people of all faiths and beliefs should help to heal the divisions in society and ensure the dignity and welfare of all people - not just in this country but throughout the world. As King Abdullah II of Jordan has said "Every global challenge in this 21st century demands that we resist hatred and exclusion ... Economic growth, peace-making, protecting the environment, global security, inclusive opportunity — all these critical goals require that people of faith cooperate and combine our strengths to our common benefit."

Sadat Khan
President, Madina Mosque, Oxford

In these tough times my prayers are with all our communities and the world, may Allah bring a quick end to this test, heal the sick, protect the vulnerable, and restore life as it was.

Councillor Zahir Mohammed
Chairman, Buckinghamshire Council

As Chairman of Buckinghamshire Council I am humbled to be part of this Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving to honour all those affected by COVID-19. On behalf

of Buckinghamshire Council, I welcome this celebration of the service that you all, as one community, gave to the residents of Buckinghamshire and beyond. For that we remain sincerely grateful and thankful; your duty and sacrifice will forever be remembered.

Councillor Mark Lygo
Lord Mayor of Oxford

All in Oxford City will remember all those that have lost loved one's during this pandemic and we all truly feel that sorrow across the world. We thank and pay tribute to all the great NHS teams that have put their lives on hold to keep us safe, as well as all the volunteers that have given up their time to help those in need. We encourage all of us to keep thinking of each other and continue being kind.

Anouar Kassim, MBE
Founder & Director MKIAC

In Milton Keynes hope through this pandemic in the community has been difficult and challenging. We remember it was in isolation **in Prison** that Prophet Yusuf found his way after many years of hardship but did so through holding onto hope. We must be patient knowing that after all these difficulties, of pain and loss, that through the aid of faith and prayer, we will get through this. God (Allah) promises us an immense reward for patiently enduring the difficulties and hardships of life.

Within our diverse communities, we have seen our loved ones passing away and left us empty and seeking some comfort through hope and solace. We have reached out and supported the most vulnerable and needy through sharing food and also providing a phone call service to reassure individual members of our diverse communities and loved ones.

Sometimes the best way to get through to people is indirect communication. Videos, stories, movies, books are all indirect. But we must not abandon what truly matters, that is unity and through us all sharing grief and offering kind words of support. Our journey with the pandemic is not over but full of uncertainty with new variants on horizon, only with hope we shall overcome together as a society and learn one day we shall meet God. All belongs to Him and to Him is our return: Inna Lillahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un.

The Contributors



The High Sheriffs



From left to right:
George Anson, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire
Imam Monawar Hussain, High Sheriff of Oxfordshire
Willie Hartley Russell, High Sheriff of the Royal County of Berkshire

Post Multi-Faith Service Feedback

“Just a personal note, both to send best wishes for Eid and to thank you for yet another remarkable evening at Dorney Lake last night. You have such a gift for bringing the best of humanity together and creating moments that will be long-remembered by all who were there. I wanted to thank you for enabling me to be with you and wish all success to every new endeavour.”

“Whilst there have been interfaith meetings before, there has never been one which has brought people from different faiths together in such a comprehensive, and all-encompassing way. ...Both your invitation letter and closing remarks summed up the spirit of the event: remembering those who have gone, our present strength in faith, and bright hope for the future.”

“Just a short note to say what an amazing event it was on the 22nd July.”

“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend this great event.”

“It was a wonderful occasion on such a lovely summer’s evening at Eton Dorney. It was good of you to pull all these groups of people together and I enjoyed the chance to meet. I hope we can continue to build on these relationships in these challenging times.”

“Congratulations on such a wonderful event. It was an honour to be part of it, and I really enjoyed meeting so many people and hearing so many musical traditions.”

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All the Contributors

All volunteers and support staff