

Dear Friends,

I doubt any of us could have anticipated a year ago, when our last letter for the church anniversary and thank offering was sent, that the months ahead would have been so remarkable! 2020 has been a year unlike any other, with significant challenges, but with glimpses of hope, and regular reminders of the faithfulness of our God. Although very different to previous years, this moment provides a great opportunity for us to take stock, look back, and give thanks to God once again. Over this past year we have seen some losses, but God has been at work in many glorious ways.

Back in March we suddenly faced the challenge that much of what we did and valued as a church was unsafe to continue. In the space of a few days we had to completely rethink how we might be church, responding to guidelines, whilst remaining sensitive to the Holy Spirits leading. I personally want to honour our leadership team, who from day one met weekly online, at times battling with technology, so we could prayerfully and wisely move forward. It has been said that society has experienced ten years worth of change, in the space of weeks, and the church has not been immune from that. The ongoing interpretation of new guidelines, the embracing of new technology, the care of church family in phone calls and food deliveries, and the embracing of online church. I give thanks for the Diaconate we have, 'for such a time as this', who have have led so faithfully. And of course, all of this is true for our wider church family. These past eight months have shown a resilience, graciousness and love which we have known to be there, but have experienced in more profound ways. Thank You.

As we have taken our services and activities online, we notice the opportunities of such a public ministry as many people beyond our usual church family engage with the services each week on social media and through the website. For all these new opportunities, we also miss the fellowship of gathering in person, and are hopeful some of this can be resumed in the coming weeks.

Although life has felt very different, in many ways it has carried on as normal. Our children have started new schools, students returned to universities and new grandchildren safely arrived. But with this has also been the pain of loss as we remember fondly members of our church family, Harry Pickett and Derek Finney, who have passed away this year. They were true men of God, key members of our church family, who will be greatly missed. We continue to pray for their families at this time.

Over the past months our community work as a church under Capstone has adjusted and grown. Since the beginning of March nearly 1000 people have been fed through our FoodBank hub, and 400 children fed through Make Lunch over the Summer and October

school holidays. We give thanks for the incredible team of volunteers who come out and help every session so that families and individuals in our community are blessed, and encounter something of the love of Jesus.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that logically, our current circumstances could have stretched our church finances significantly. With our building closed we have lost the income from hiring out the hall and without our gathered Sunday services, we could have lost income from the offering. However, thanks to your sacrificial generosity through continuing regular giving and one off donations, the church finances are currently healthy. Although it is true that giving this year is slightly down on last year, it is in no way as drastic as we anticipated it might have been back in March. At the time of writing this letter, our income this year has exceeded our expenditure, and for this we give thanks.

Although we do not know what lies ahead, and there will no doubt be further decisions to be made as we remerge and reimagine what it means to be church, we know who holds the future, that Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, and we serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Whilst we celebrate our church anniversary, we also have our annual thank offering. We acknowledge that for some in our church family, these are uncertain times, and so we offer this letter to you aware of that, and assurance of our continued prayers and support. We also recognise the importance of the thank offering for our church finances each year, both in the support of our local mission and ministry, and in the way we support Home Mission and BMS World Mission with giving 25% of the offering to each. Therefore I am asking every member and friend of SHBC to pause, to pray, and prepare before God what you might be able to give.

Enclosed is a special Thank Offering envelope for this purpose. Remember this thank offering is over and above our regular tithes and offering. You may give your Thank Offering any time throughout the month of November.

Yours in His service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Haines', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Tim Haines