

FOCUS ON FRIENDS IN THE CRISIS

Gina Onyekwere - is 23 years old, and has been at St Thomas' for 18 months now. She joined after making a New Years Resolution to learn more about her faith and start committing herself to God. As soon as she came she found a very warm welcome and she's thoroughly enjoyed coming to church every week since! She currently works in finance Monday to Friday, and spends most of her weekends catching up with friends and finding new great spots to dine in - Gina is a self confessed big foodie! Luckily her job isn't too stressful and working from home through this pandemic has given her a great amount of time to focus on herself and explore her journey with Christ.

Rick Newman – has been worshipping at St Luke', since 1982 and was married there a year later. A social worker by training, he retired from his role as safeguarding team leader last year after 37 years working for Greenwich Children's Services. He is currently Churchwarden, Safeguarding and Electoral Roll Officer, Vice Chair of St Luke's Almshouses, Lay Chair of Charlton Deanery and actively involved in Charlton Together. In his leisure time Rick is a retro music geek, enjoys reading and likes a quiz.

Gina and ***Rick*** were asked these questions about lockdown:

1. What are you most grateful for at this time?

Gina - I'm most grateful for my family and lovely friends. I have a very strong support system and I realise at this time not everyone is as privileged to live with a loving family and have people to go through these tough times with.

Rick – There is so much for which I am grateful. Impending grandparenthood. Clear skies. Bird song. Clearer air. The weather! Country walks. Time to cycle. Time to read. 'Killing Eve' (BBC3). The benefice whatsapp groups (aka "comedy gold"). Zoom. The benefice quickly developing such a positive on-line presence at the same time as maintaining connections with the isolated and vulnerable. The memory of John Chipperfield. Regarding the development of Charlton Riverside, I'm relieved and delighted that the Secretary of State agreed with concerns raised by local community groups, of which the benefice is part. The appeal by Rockwell (developers for the first stages of Charlton Riverside) has been rejected. I am also very grateful for the many people who have gone out of their way to make a positive difference, appreciating one another – especially the marginalised – and looking to support one another, often at such great personal cost.

2. What have you learned about yourself?

Gina - I've learnt that I take a lot of things for granted. I spend too much time focusing on things like work and my job rather than enjoying time with friends, travelling and exploring the world. I've learnt to appreciate the little things and take care of myself physically and emotionally; as ultimately health is wealth.

Rick – I'm recently retired from paid employment and need to plan for retirement. Suddenly everyone else is also at home and I'm just as busy as ever. I need to let go of things in order to focus more on being rather than doing, and to deepen my sense of faith. The commandment to love our neighbour requires by extension that we be open to our neighbours showing love for us, which requires that we recognise that we are all children of the God who loves us unconditionally and gives our lives meaning. God's love must be rooted in all that I am as well as all that I do. Something else that I have learned is that I am tend to withdraw into myself or deflect things away. Have I answered the question? Probably not.

3. What would you like to share with others?

Gina - To always take the positives out of any situation. As we slowly go back to our busy lives again to remember all the little things we took for granted when they weren't accessible.

Rick - Like many others, I have been struck by an overwhelming sense that the COVID pandemic has to be seen as a wake up call. By all means we need a public enquiry to address the UK response but only if this helps us all to have a better understanding of the world and our place in it as guests. This pandemic has had such an impact on all of us and all the more so as it serves to highlight the inequality and injustice that for too many blights their lives daily. The churches may have been closed as buildings but have been open and thriving as the Body of Christ. There is much to share.

Thank you both for sharing!