

"FINDING WAYS OF BEING GOD'S GATHERED PEOPLE - WITHOUT RELYING ON OUR PREMISES"

Luciana Damascena and Hazel Sherman on life at
West Worthing Baptist Church



Photo: West Worthing Baptist Church

Here at West Worthing Baptist Church, like in all of your churches, we are trying to discover what lessons Covid teaches us about being a gathered people, and even about what gathering will or should look like in the future.

We found a new proximity to our people during lockdown, as we phoned around regularly and had longer conversations with those who didn't have much else to do or places to be. We discovered that some of our people who didn't 'do' internet actually can be taught to interact with others online. We discovered that we had a greater reliance on structured gatherings in the building in order to do the missional work of the church than we thought. We have brought our two distinct services into a blended one for the time being and discovered that our people can adapt more than we gave them credit for, and we have stopped most of our outreach programmes, which we never thought we could be church without.

It used to be that we relied on all the things our building allowed us to do. We shared the gospel, because we had a building that helped us do it: our coffee bar, the groups that came into the premises, our luncheon club, toddlers group and all the other programmes which brought in people for us to meet and care for. Now we are asking ourselves how to continue to be open and welcoming to the local community when we cannot rely on the premises to do so for us. We are wondering, how do we welcome visitors and neighbours, some of whom are not interested in faith, and help fill their need for a safe space for conversation and friendship when so many are lonely and anxious, without offering them a seat and a cup of tea?

We haven't yet arrived at a conclusion, but we do know that the first step is to recognise how much the building did the work for us. After reaching this realisation, we hope that now we can embark on a journey of discovering

new, and perhaps simpler, ways of being here for people. After all, our members have discovered that they were not as averse to change and adaptation as they thought they were, now that the majority is happy with a new way of worshipping and fellowship, brought on them quite suddenly. I wonder if they can adapt to a new way of Sunday worship; if they can learn to Zoom and discover ways to connect previously thought inconceivable to most; if they can obtain new skills and get accustomed to phoning around to and calling at the door of people they never did before, surely this is good news. Surely, together, we can find ways of being God's gathered people, who bring others along, without relying on all the ways the building has helped us achieve this.

And now we are asking what this all means, like I'm sure you are, too. We have questions such as, how can we make living as church more meaningful going forward? Certainly, most churches reading this will find they are exactly the same. And isn't it wonderful, in a strange sort of way, that in this wide breadth of styles, sizes, and demographics that make up this Baptist family of churches, we are now all asking the same questions at the same time?

We gladly take this opportunity to be featured to say we are praying for all of you and your churches, and we trust you are praying for us, too.

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[This reflection originally appeared in a South Eastern Baptist Association newsletter and has been adapted for *Baptists Together* magazine](#)