

St John's Lindow

IN TOUCH

Autumn 2020



Longing for
a 'new' normal?

*If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!*

2 Corinthians 5:17

www.saint-johns.org.uk

SIMON'S SCRAWL

by Simon Gales

There's been a lot of talk about the 'new normal' – what life will be like when we finally emerge from Covid 19.

There's no doubt many things will be 'new' – will we ever get back to shaking hands, or socialising as we did? No doubt many more people will be working from home and shopping online. Perhaps (for a time at least) pollution will be less, with less commuting and fewer flights as businesses use video conferencing and holiday makers stay at home. Sadly, some aspects of the 'new' won't be so good – many pushed into poverty as the global economy stalls, and those marriages which did not survive lockdown won't be restored.

Some are hoping for a more radical 'new'. During lockdown there was a welcome outbreak of neighbourliness, a greater appreciation of key workers, and less pressure to 'perform', but will that last? The Bible would question any hope of lasting moral change brought about by a pandemic! Job's comforter is painfully realistic when he says 'Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward' (Job 5:7). The psalmist says 'The Lord looks down from heaven to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside... there is no-one who does good, not even one.' (Psalm 14:2,3) As human beings we are naturally self-centred, self-orientated, and a pandemic won't change that. But that is what the gospel of Jesus brings! Long before God had promised: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in

you; I will remove from you a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.'



(Ezekiel 36:26,27) And so the New Testament rejoices: 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:17,18) Here is the real 'new'!

But how much is new? After all the Christian continues to live in a broken, groaning world, and to be at war with the old nature?

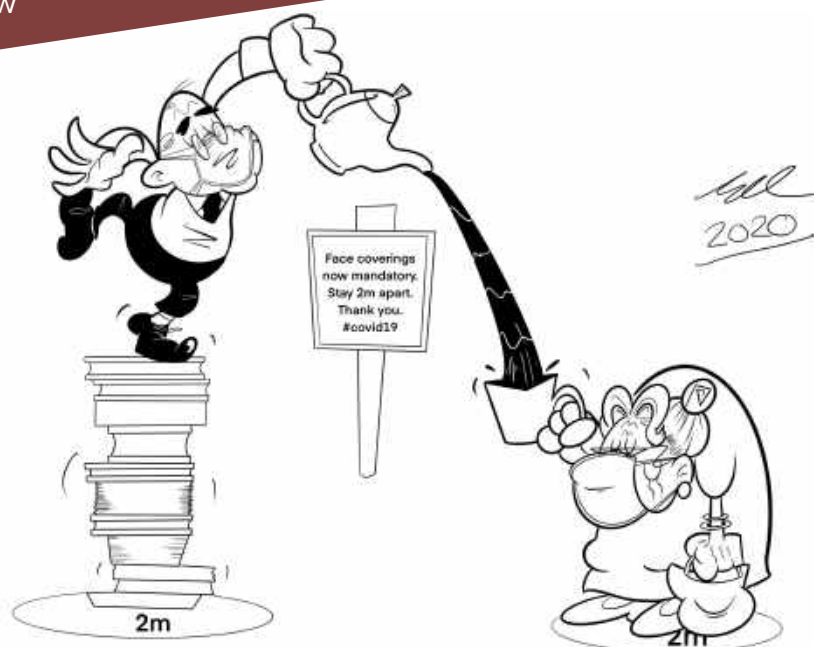
On pages 6&7 you'll find a guide to right expectations for the Christian life, and in the Theology Corner (p11) David Russell, vicar of Woodford has written a helpful article on 'Now and Not Yet' – the newness that we enjoy now, and the full 'newness' of the new Creation that very Christian eagerly waits for, when Jesus returns. For all who belong to him that will be a glorious 'new normal'!

Yours
Simon

SKETCHY THEOLOGY

BY BEN HOLLINSHEAD

"PLEASE STAY TWO METRES APART..."



VIEW FROM THE PEW

Liz Kelly

Marc: So Liz, tell us a little about yourself.

Liz: I married my husband in 1970 and had a very happy marriage with three boys and now four grandchildren. I'm now sadly widowed and none of my family live near me (my son Philip is in Australia), though I get to see them as much as possible.

Marc: What brought you to church?

Liz: I was brought up in a loving Christian home. My parents were 'high church' and I resented 'boring' Sundays. It was at beach missions on our yearly caravan holidays that I first found out about Jesus.

Marc: Sounds like quite the turnaround!

Liz: Well in 1980 I actually thought I had everything I needed once I had my third child. However, I didn't feel right with God and I prayed that I would really get to know him.

The very next day my friend Ann invited me to her prayer group. I found another Christian friend who took me to St John's where after a few weeks I gave my life to Jesus. Jim Tabern was the vicar then. We enjoyed wonderful Wednesday evenings at the vicarage where we all sang loudly!

Marc: So how did you come to teach the Bible when you joined St John's?

Liz: I helped at Mums & Tots and eventually ran the Scramblers group in Sunday Clubs. I had a teaching background and on retirement was involved in pre-school work for many years. I wanted the children to really love coming so I had them act, sing and craft just like a pre-school. Most of all I wanted them to pray and learn about Jesus so they could learn to love him.

Marc: How would you say you found that experience of Sunday clubs?

Liz: I did really love it, but I retired from it back in



1997. It wasn't until Gareth came to St John's that I returned to doing it before retiring again around the time he left.

Marc: It's amazing and encouraging that you did it for so long. How are you living out your faith now?

Liz: I can't do as much now as I used to, but I go to ladies Bible study and sometimes lead a few sessions. I'm part of the pastoral care group run by Didge, too. Freddie is also my prayer partner and we meet up weekly to pray. The things I do as a result of my faith give me joy! I wouldn't ever want to go back to where I was before Jesus.

Marc: I couldn't agree more with that! So during these crazy last few months, how has your faith helped you throughout lockdown?

Liz: I think it's helped a great deal at a time like this. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He's shaking up the world! I've always felt comfortable in my own faith. It helps me to be calm in many situations and he answers prayers in ways we wouldn't have ever thought of.

Marc: That really is wonderful to hear Liz. I think encouraging words about God's grace is what we really need to hear in these strange times. Thank you for taking the time to share some of your own story with us.

MISSION UPDATE

Doris & Alejandro Mesco

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

Greetings to everyone in the congregation. I am very grateful for your prayers.

These are very difficult and sad days for many people, the spread of the Covid 19 has grown a lot and the government has decreed a quarantine for Arequipa. There have now been 500,000 cases and more than 26,000 deaths in Peru and the curve is still rising sharply.



The main hospital in Arequipa has collapsed and patients are outside the hospital in tents with makeshift oxygen tanks, being cared for by their relatives. Thank God they have set up three temporary hospitals in three places in Arequipa to serve about 400 people. Patients suspected or with mild symptoms of Coronavirus receive anti-viral drugs, called the 'saving bag'.



The Government is doing everything possible to help. Unfortunately there have been some riots from those who have lost their jobs. We hope that all this calms down with God's help and we return to our routine work.



Peruvians have developed a technological initiative to help, adapting a geo-location map to connect people needing help with those who are offering it.



The white flags and banners indicate hunger

Thank you so much for your prayers, especially for the affected families.

Very sincerely,

Doris and Alejandro Mesco



REFLECTIONS ON LOCKDOWN

Andrea McConchie

How swiftly life has changed. Some of us are key workers who have continued to serve our country, others have had to juggle home schooling and work. Yet more have either been self-isolating or caring for those that have. Whatever our circumstances, our daily lives have been radically altered and for us Christians in particular, it remains a time of reflection. What does fruitfulness for Jesus look like during COVID-19? How has the presence of God transformed our responses to the collective and personal pressures? How might we best align ourselves with God's purposes through us? How do we learn to 'sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Psalm 137.4). These are just some of the questions that Simon, Leonie and James have helped us grapple with since March, with preaching delivered to our living rooms thanks to the joys (and frustrations) of video-conferencing.

Several weeks ago the Leadership Team asked for feedback on our new virtual church life and it was such a blessing to hear that so many felt it was helping us achieve our continued goal of loving God more, loving each other more and loving our neighbours more. In particular, many of you appreciated the warm and intimate feel of seeing everyone's faces (rather than backs of heads), and the chance to connect with our mission partners and former ministry trainees. Some found the opportunity to take notes or use Bible Gateway

during the sermon helpful. Lots of us mentioned how enjoyable the breakout sessions have been, even if this format has pushed us out of our comfort zone. Developing these new relationships, especially between those who worshiped at separate times on a Sunday, has made us feel more inclusive as a church and given us the opportunity 'to encourage one another and build each other up' (1 Thess 5:11). A sentiment expressed by one applies to many: 'The small group format enabled me to break the ice and I have spoken to so many people I didn't even know before.'

The breakout sessions have also revealed some hidden talents among us! Upcycling furniture, garden make overs, setting up production of masks and cards, to name a few. Since March, some have also welcomed a new baby or grandchild to their families.

Of course, another first has been that at the end of July, Keswick came to Wilmslow! We had the opportunity to meet together to watch the Convention sessions throughout the week and enjoy great bible teaching. These podcasts are still available if you missed them, via the keswickministries.org website.

Whatever our personal 'new normal', I look forward to seeing you in person, or virtually, on Sunday!

WHAT DOES THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE LOOK LIKE?

There's a lot of uncertainty about what 'the new normal' will be like! But what should we expect 'normal life' to be like for the Christian? Thankfully there are some things we can be sure about because the Bible tells us! Sadly Christians have sometimes given

an over-cooked version of the Christian life (perfect joy, peace and victory each step of the way – which sounds very 'spiritual' but leaves many dispirited and discouraged) or alternatively an under-cooked version of the Christian life (the 'God' of so-called

'liberal' Christianity - remote, vague and powerless, a pale imitation of the real thing). Here are some right expectations (all taken from 1 & 2 Peter for ease of reference, though the rest of the NT gives the same picture):

BAD NEWS

1. Much Opposition

'Now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials' 1P1:6 More specifically opposition for living as a Christian: 'If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called' 1P2:20 'They (pagans) think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you' 1P4:4

'Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you' 1P4:12 It isn't strange, it is to be expected, it is normal to be insulted & to suffer (v13-16).

2. A Personal Battle

'abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul' 1P2:11 Every Christian lives in a perpetual state of civil war. We have received the Holy Spirit, he gives us new desires, new motivations but there is a constant battle with temptation, and it doesn't get any easier. The attractions might change as we get older but their seductive power does not. It is a wearisome fight, but don't lose heart – it's not unusual.

3. Hard Work

'Prepare your minds for action; be self controlled' 1P1:13

The picture behind those words is getting ready for some strenuous activity. The Christian life will involve some hard thinking, tough choices, using the minds God has given us. This is not 'Let go and let God'!!

'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the hope that you have' 1P3:15 There's careful preparation to be done, reading Christian books etc. 'Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge, self control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness' 2P1:5,6 No Christian drifts into maturity. The most frequent NT description of the Christian life is 'walking' – plodding on in the same direction. That's not a lower level of Christian existence – it's normal!

MIXED NEWS

1. Some Knowledge of Christ

Jesus is our friend but he is also the Lord of Glory, so no over-familiarity. 'Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him' 1P1:8 The Lord Jesus is very precious to us, but we don't see him, our knowledge of Jesus is incomplete. We don't yet have a face to face relationship with him as we do with one another – it's more like the relationship with an overseas pen-pal. He speaks to us in Scripture, we speak to him in prayer.

2. Some Understanding of the Bible

'You have been born again . . . through the imperishable word of God' 1P1:23 God's Word has brought us to life but 'like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation' 1P2:2 There's lots of growing up still to happen, through the Scriptures.

'He (Paul) writes the same way in all his letters, speaking of things that are hard to understand' 2P3:16 Peter struggled to understand Paul's letters! As we go on in the Christian life the central things will become increasingly clear but there will be other things that we will never understand, secret things which belong to God alone.

3. Some Answers to Prayer

We begin to pray but we soon discover we don't get everything we ask for so Peter says 'The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray' 1P4:7 This suggests prayer won't always be easy, answers won't always be immediate.

'Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives . . . so that nothing will hinder your prayers' 1P3:7 How we treat others can make praying more difficult. There are some great unanswered prayers in the Bible (e.g 2Cor 12:8,9) God answers our prayers as is best for us (and it's his definition of 'best', not ours!) like asking a human parent for something.

GOOD NEWS

1. Full Forgiveness

'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' 1P2:24 'For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous' 1P3:18 The death of Jesus is that once & for all payment so that all our sins are dealt with. That is great good news. God hasn't simply forgotten about our sins – the penalty has been paid and they've been removed from the record!

2. A Specific Task

'To God's elect . . . who have been chosen . . . for obedience to Jesus Christ' 1P1:1,2 We've been chosen for obedience to Jesus and that specific task has specific content to it (e.g. vs14-16) God has called us to holiness – we're not drifting through life, pointless & rudderless. What great news to have a clear purpose & direction – growing in obedience to Jesus. He's given each of us specific gifts to use 'Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others . . . If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ' 1P4:10,11 We've been called to live for the glory of God – there is no higher calling!

3. A Certain Hope

'In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you' 1P1:3,4 A glorious future of perfect peace and happiness. A certain hope, secured for us by Jesus' resurrection. No wonder Peter says 'In this you greatly rejoice' 1P1:6 Christians are the most privileged people in the universe! The best is yet to come!

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

News & updates from the
St John's church family!



Virtual Keswick



Abbie & David Land

**Socially distanced
families together**



Natasha & Chris Fisk



Alfie Shawcross



Music practice outdoors

As we move to a 'new normal', we can grow and adapt our church life in several ways: **Inclusive mission** – Zoom has enabled those living away and the less mobile, to be part of our church life and I hope we grow to be even more inclusive and diverse. **New engagement with Church life** – Entering a new church can be daunting; some sneak in and watch for a few weeks, while others quickly get involved. We can't predict how people will feel, so now that our doors are open, whether we are in church, on Zoom or elsewhere, let's look for new opportunities to engage with people. **Worldly issues** – The current situation seems pretty bleak, yet while I alone am powerless to fix things, none of this is outside of God's reach! We need to keep praying for radical change of these big worldly issues.

Lottie Behardien

We have a church mission statement which says that we desire to love God more, love each other more and love our neighbourhood more. That seems pretty biblical to me. So, under Gods sustaining power how do we do that? I guess that means really working on loving each other more and uniting around the glorious task of making Jesus known in our neighbourhood. Encouraging one another daily and talking about Jesus should be as natural as breathing. Enjoying God's word & putting into effect should be what we do because we love doing it.

So maybe we can use the lessons of lock down to meet more regularly both formally and informally, both in person and virtually (or as it used to be known – by phone) not just on Sundays. One small thing that would help me – name badges!!

George Perrin

OUR HOPES FOR THE NEW NORMAL

THOUGHTS & HOPES ABOUT THE FUTURE FROM OUR CHURCH FAMILY

I anticipate we will be glad to make maximum but wise use of permitted freedoms for gathered worship, church & community activities & outreach. In our church buildings we will safely accommodate the full congregation, with participatory communion. Baptisms will again be permitted. Unless connecting online, thoughtful reading of psalms, hymns & spiritual songs, will replace singing. (Eph 5.19).

Homegroups will meet in gardens or indoors and those shielding will continue to meet online. Youngsters will have instinctive respect for others' space & thoughtful anticipation of the possible consequences of their actions on others. The concept of family formation will be more significant & consciously a life-risking commitment. Youth & community activities will adapt to meet on site. Many indications of our one world connectedness will be relevant, stimulating greater interest, persistence, sympathy & grace in the struggles of the church overseas.

Martin Haywood

Covid-19 has forced seismic change on our habits and assumptions about Church and Worship. Perhaps not a bad thing; we needed to change and that has been decreed. I'm excited about the proposed changes to the church to allow for more flexible, dynamic and inclusive use. Hopefully we can be gracious and sensitive about change, remembering in whose service we work.

As a church family we are practised, if not always confident, in Zooming, and hopefully a place for these skills will continue. Internet connection in church will open up a world of resources for sharing our faith. I'm mindful that the need to physically be together has affected us differently. A return to church for some might be slow and uncertain, yet others will be positively hammering on the door to get in. Not quite sure which group I'm in, but I'm certainly looking forward to the day.

Jean Thomas

NEW FACES

SAY HI TO SOME OF THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF ST JOHN'S

Lindsey Wild

I used to be a primary school teacher until diagnoses of epilepsy and a brain tumor led me to take early retirement. My early life was filled with music, both in and out of the local Methodist church where my mum used to type the weekly newsletter and run the playgroup. I now live in Wilmslow with my husband Ashley. Throughout all this, God has always been there, not always prominently, but certainly through some challenging times recently. So I am on a learning curve – I am finding my place in life and God's place in my life each day.



Marie McGrath

I was born in Manchester but have lived in Wilmslow for 52 years. I was married and brought up my family here, my four children all attended local schools. My husband died suddenly in 2010 and that was when I first became involved with St. John's. Simon and Anne Elliott both gave me so much support when I really needed it. I was introduced to the "Evergreens" lunches and really enjoy the company. I enjoy the bible study group with Simon at the Vicarage. St. John's church family have made me very welcome.

BOOK REVIEW

Enjoying God by Tim Chester

Of the two books Simon offered to me for review, I chose this one (despite it being the longer one) because of its title and the author. Tim Chester has a great ability to bridge between Biblical understanding and real life and this book is no exception. It's immensely practical and helpfully illustrated (with examples that is, not pictures). Of course, this can be challenging can't it? Sometimes it's easier to stick with getting our minds around understanding the Bible than getting it to impact the way we live, but the title of this book draws us to go with him – don't all Christians want to 'enjoy' God more? The book is very readable and broken up into short chapters which stand on their own, so you don't

need a big block of time to get going. At the end of each chapter there are a few practical suggestions to apply during the week all geared towards a living relationship with God - engaging our thinking, our emotions, our decisions and our relationships with one another. Simon gave me plenty of time to read this book but of course I started reading it too close to the deadline, so I need to go back to the beginning and take it slowly – I'm sure there was something there to help with my procrastination problem.

Phil Edgington



THEOLOGY CORNER

THE NOW AND NOT YET

David Russell

The 'now and not yet.'

It's a phrase that Bible teachers use to talk about which of God's promises relate to our lives now, and which of them relate to the future and our life after this life. And, for the Christian, it is a wonderful future – Heaven and then, at Christ's return to earth, a New Heaven and a New Earth – us living with God for ever.

We read this in Revelation 21:

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

(Revelation 21:4)

That is a wonderful 'not yet' for the future.

As I've been thinking about the 'now and not yet,' I've been drawn to John 11 and Jesus' raising Lazarus back to life. When Jesus arrived at Lazarus' tomb He said to Martha (Lazarus' sister) 'Your brother will rise again' (John 11:23). Martha replied 'I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day' (11:24). Martha was convinced that there would be a 'last day' – a day of God's return bringing with Him resurrection, healing, justice and re-creation. She believed in a 'not yet' in the future.

Jesus replied to her 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11:25). Jesus roots that future reality in Himself – the future, and everything about that wonderful 'not yet' is rooted in Him – particularly the conquering of death. Then Jesus demonstrated that He has the power to bring about that new world (described in Revelation 21) by raising Lazarus to life. And that was just a preview of what would happen in the future.

What we are called upon to see is that what links 'the now and the not yet' is Jesus – His identity, His power and authority, and of course, what He actually did. Yes, Jesus raised Lazarus to life but

Lazarus would die again, but Jesus, through His own resurrection has shown that He has the power to give unbreakable, unending eternal life. He is 'the resurrection and the life.'



One day Jesus will return to earth in power and great glory ('the last day') and He will bring with Him the perfect new world for all who have trusted in Him – that's the 'not yet.' Until that day we live in the challenges of the 'now' with its distress and brokenness. But as we live in the 'now,' not only can we look towards a glorious future (which Jesus, through His death and resurrection has secured for His people), we have Him with us through His Holy Spirit.

A few chapters later in John (in John 14) Jesus, speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, says 'I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you' (14:18). As we live through the 'now,' including the 'now' of Covid 19, we must lift our eyes, and fix them on the future and the 'not yet' and allow the knowledge of that to comfort and cheer our souls. But, most of all, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, and take deeply to heart the fact that He is with us:

'I am with you always, to the end of the age'

(Matthew 28:20)

Now, and always, we fix our eyes on Jesus.

**David Russell is the vicar at
Christ Church in Woodford**

AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME

Sundays

10am

Lord's Supper on third Sunday

6.30pm

Lord's Supper on first Sunday

Homegroups

6th Sept	Learning from Jesus True Riches Luke 12:13-21
13th Sept	What to run after Luke 12:22-34
20th Sept	Getting Ready Luke 12:35-48
27th Sept	Division - Good & Bad Luke 12:49 - 13:9
4th Oct	Breaking the rules! Luke 13:10-17
11th Oct	Harvest Thanksgiving - All Age Spectacular Growth Luke 13:18-21
18th Oct	Entering the Kingdom Luke 13:22-35
25th Oct	Unlikely guests Luke 14:1-24
1st Nov	Counting the Cost Luke 14:25-35
8th Nov	Remembrance- All Age Looking for the Lost (1) Luke 15:1-10
15th Nov	Looking for the Lost (2) Luke 15:11-32
22nd Nov	No time to waste! Luke 16:1-15
29th Nov	Advent: What kind of hope? A better hope Hebrews 7:11-28
6th Dec	Christ-Centred Hope Ephesians 1:1-14

13th Dec	Waiting for Hope Matthew 25:1-30	Traditional Carol Service
20th Dec	Nativity Presentation	Christmas Special
24th Dec	Kids Carols (4pm)	Midnight Communion (11pm)
25th Dec	Communion (8am) Family Carols (10am)	

We are looking forward to meeting together again in the church building from Sunday 6th September for our 10am morning service. There will be sufficient capacity (socially distanced) for all who are likely to want to come, with the Zoom option continuing for those unable to do so. Age-related groups for 3-14 year olds will also recommence then.

Please check our website at www.saint-johns.org.uk for more details.

Meeting on Wednesdays, Thursdays & Fridays, afternoons and evenings, to study God's work and encourage one another.

Learning from Jesus: Luke 12-16

During the autumn our homegroups are linked to our Sunday series.

Meeting weekly via Zoom (at least initially) the groups begin on 10th Sept and finish on 26th Nov.

Dates given are Thursdays but some groups meet at other times (full details on weekly noticesheet).

One week each half term will be a Prayer Evening. In addition a women's bible study meets 9.45am Wednesdays, and a men's bible study 6.30am Fridays.

Monthly Prayer Events (Zoom or church rooms)

5th Sept - Prayer Breakfast
15th Oct - Prayer Evening
7th Nov - Prayer Breakfast
3rd Dec - Prayer Evening

Special Events

At the time of writing, the restart of events such as Evergreens, Who Let the Dads Out?, Men's Breakfast, the visit of the International Students and the youth weekend away are all uncertain.

Please see the website and weekly noticesheet for the latest update.

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