

Lockdown Story 5 (Pat and Ged Downey)

Well, we never thought that the word “*lockdown*” would ever apply to us but on 16th March 2020 that is what happened in the UK. Suddenly our lives were completely changed as we had to adapt to a new way of continuing as normally as possible whilst also keeping safe from Covid-19 and obeying the rules set down by the government.

As a retired couple, all of the work that we did was for various charities or voluntary work and it all had to stop. We could no longer do the healing ministry in the city centre, provide music ministry for mass at HMP Northumberland, hold a Sunday service at the local hospice, help out at the Mercy Hub and be part of the music ministry at our parish Sunday evening Mass as these places were banned to us particularly because we were over 70 and were therefore put into the vulnerable bracket. It was as though life came to a stop. The biggest blow, however, was not being able to hug the grandchildren. Their parents would bring them to the bottom of the drive whilst we stood in the front doorway and it was really hurtful to see them being told to hold back when they made a move towards us. It also meant that we could not have our family Sunday lunches, varying in number from 2 to 12 and all points in between. We also had to postpone/abandon plans for three holidays. These were the downsides.

We believe that it is essential for a healthy mind (and body) to also stay positive and we began to enjoy the rest, having two regular walks daily, greeting people and their dogs (from a distance) and taking part in family gatherings via zoom. The onset of online mass was a great boon making us feel connected to priest and other participants. We also reverted to on-line shopping for our groceries, sometimes having to stay up until 1.00am in order to get a Tesco delivery slot. We built up our expertise in Zoom, initially to take part in family quizzes but then to join prayer groups and even being able to pray with people on-line. As with a lot of households, our garden benefited from the extra attention enabled by the lockdown.

Having been turned down as volunteers by North Tyneside council because of our age and not being called upon by Newcastle because they were overwhelmed by the number of volunteers, eventually a new door was opened to us when we were invited by Age UK in Gateshead to become telephone buddies for people who were already struggling with life in general, thus making the lockdown especially difficult. This has been a very humbling experience since our friends, as they now see themselves, have established a trust by which we can seek out help for problems that they come against and where they do not have the ability to help themselves.

Our main concern continues to be that the family stays safe and that we will soon be able to be all together for a grand reunion.