***Helping hands: EK Old Parish Church in action in response to the coronavirus epidemic***

Our response group **Helping Hands** began by offering a range of services to people who were self-isolating and unable to get out due to lockdown.

It was established on 23rd March 2020, and after providing appropriate information, training and ID badges (to keep both volunteer responders and service users safe), we alerted Church members to the services available using a variety of channels.

We went live on 30th March with 26 volunteers who have provided practical assistance, such as grocery shopping, prescription collection, delivering the church magazine, posting mail, as well as pastoral telephone support to the congregation and the community.

Response group co-ordinator, Iain, who ‘matches’ volunteers to those requiring help, has been delighted with the service uptake and feedback received, which he described as ‘overwhelming’:

“It’s sometimes too easy to be negative and despair when times are hard, but this initiative shows that hope and love are stronger. This is indeed a GOOD NEWS story where the local community are working together to care for each other. It’s incredibly inspiring and rewarding to discover that there are so many people who are willing to give their time, energy and love to help others in need.”

Those who have benefitted from the service are incredibly pleased to know that people care. One elderly gentleman said, “I don’t know what I would have done without the help”, and another family said they were “so grateful for the friendly, prompt and efficient service in their time of need”.

The volunteers are delighted to participate, describing their joy and feelings of purpose at being able to help. One said “It’s great being able to make a real difference in such a simple way” and another added that it has helped her meet new people, albeit through a telephone call, or outside someone’s door”.

The volunteers continue to support many isolated, lonely and vulnerable people across East Kilbride, and everyone, church, community members and volunteers all are gaining in their different ways.

*Postscript:*

*Despite the easing of restrictions, the group is still active and are willing to offer help to more local residents in the EK Village area: Contact the Church Office by phoning 01355 279004 or by emailing* [*ekopc.office@btconnect.com*](mailto:ekopc.office@btconnect.com)*.*

*Alternatively, we have a Church Facebook page at EKOLDPC, and also we can be contacted via the church website ‘Contact Us’ at www.ekopc.org.uk .*

*Note: Messages to the above are regularly monitored and updated daily.*

*For more information, contact:*

*Iain Shaw, Children, Youth and Families Worker, East Kilbride Old Parish Church*

*07912295943*