

Responding in Challenging Times:

Minister's East Kilbride News Message No 6 – Friends and Family

I wonder if you're old enough to remember the days of landline telephones when a household would have one phone for the whole family. Ours was in the hall on a designated phone table, which also stored the phone book and yellow pages directories. If you are, then you may remember the different call packages which BT could offer. We had one called "Friends and Family" which meant that we got a 10% reduction on calls to designated phone numbers of our chosen friends and family.

That thought came to me when I read an article in the news about the possibility of the current lockdown being lifted in small stages and one of the ideas being considered was to allow more social interaction by creating "bubbles" whereby people could socialise with up to ten of their closest family and friends. The big question is, "If you could only socialise with up to ten people, who would you choose?" It's like going back to choosing who your favourite friends and family phone numbers are.

During this difficult period, we are all missing the social interaction with friends and family, and we're all learning how to do things differently with our social media and virtual meetings, but it's not the same as physically being with people, is it? The possibility of being able to be with our ten most cherished loved ones, in the same room, sitting round the same table is something we long for. The very simple act of sharing a meal with someone has become so important to us.

But here lies the problem. If I were to choose my ten most cherished people, this plan would only work if they were also to choose me in return, and the thought did cross my mind that maybe I wasn't the priority for either of my sons to socialise with, maybe they would rather be with their friends who they might have more fun with than their mother. I haven't dared ask them, for fear of their response.

I am convinced that none of us will ever forget this period of time in isolation. I also think that in years to come, sociologists and psychologists will write endless theses on the impact this situation has had on everyone involved, from the children missing their education, to families being separated, and even to us in the church who have had to do things in new ways that none of us would have imagined.

Above all, I think that this period in time like no other, has made us realise just how much we need each other. In the future books, will be written about how people came together and about how simple acts of kindness changed lives. We need to use this time to re-evaluate our lives and decide what people are really important to us. So, who would your ten people be, and the big question is, would they choose you to be in their ten?