

On the vine

"I was lucky to be vaccinated"

Lay Chaplain Graham Turner, a former BBC correspondent, reflects on receiving the coronavirus vaccine at Salisbury Cathedral last weekend. Our thanks to the Daily Telegraph, where this piece [originally appeared](#).

I was lucky to be vaccinated, and especially in a radiant cathedral

The beauty of the site and the chance to mingle with other people again made the process feel more like a treat than an appointment.

As a lay chaplain at Salisbury Cathedral, let me tell you there is plenty to commend it. An original copy of Magna Carta, for a start; the astonishing spire, which once made the cathedral the tallest building in England; and the beautiful music, played on an organ 140 years old. All have attracted visitors from far and wide for centuries. Today, though, there is a new attraction bringing people streaming through the doors – the cathedral's reinvention as a site for administering coronavirus vaccines.

Early on Saturday morning, preparing for a Matins like no other, I walked the short distance from my home to the cathedral to have the jab. What I found there could hardly have been more different from the sterile doctors' surgeries where we normally go to be prodded, poked or pricked in the arm.

Everyone involved was wonderfully kind, and it wasn't just the NHS staff deployed to give out vaccines who were there. We were greeted as we went in by the Dean of the cathedral, whose presence was an early signal that the church authorities hadn't simply given over the space to be re-clad in white perspex and turned into a pretend surgery – they had done everything they could to ensure the aura of the church played a part, too.

The stations where the jabs were given out were open rather than enclosed. Watching the sunlight streaming through the stained glass, reading the many plaques and commemorations adorning the walls or sitting back and enjoying the stunning organ music must have made a marvellous distraction.

Listening to music such as Handel's Largo soaring through the nave was, for many attendees, their first chance to hear the cathedral's famous Father Willis organ since it was restored. It was completely dismantled in 2019 to be cleaned and repaired, a process that was finished in February 2020, just in time for the beginning of the first lockdown.

For those of us who haven't been to the cathedral for a while, and whose most recent memories are of the bizarre, socially-distanced services over the summer, being back felt like coming home.

That said, I certainly don't think one had to be a believer or a regular worshipper to have welcomed the unusual setting for a jab. The beauty of the cathedral and the chance, while distancing of course, to mingle with other people again made the process feel more like a treat or a jolly outing

than an appointment. We left feeling uplifted, not just because of the treatment and the hope that we may be one step closer to normality, but because visiting the cathedral was such a marvellous occasion.

In the past year, the country has suffered an immense spiritual and emotional crisis. I may be a lay chaplain, but I have not been a tremendous fan of everything the Church of England has done during the pandemic. It is a desperate shame that it was not possible to keep in-person services going. It does seem curiously appropriate now, though, to be using cathedrals and churches to help stall the pandemic and bring back normal life, and I'm pleased that Salisbury is far from alone in taking part. The sooner we can use pews for our usual worship again, the better.

Wherever and whenever you are offered a job, I'd urge you take it. If it happens to be in your local church or cathedral, then count yourself lucky.