

Dear Friends,

Central to the Christian faith is the idea of communion, closeness to God and fellowship with each other. Emmanuel is God with us. It is a massive paradigm shift, to not visit family or have physical contact. Parents are being told not to use the grandparents as childminders. Grandparents are faced with upwards of 3 months without being able to hug their grandchildren. It is a loss felt keenly by each generation. Yet, there still are many reasons to be happy, and technology and telephony can raise our morale, and keep strong the connections with church, family and friends. We might limit ourselves to one dose of news a day, make a list of things we are grateful for (a gratitude list) and plan things to do and people to see when things change. But for now, it is a kindness to practise social distancing and even social isolation. A member of the circuit said something insightful to me: even if one person may is not overconcerned about catching the virus, their carelessness could lead to them occupying a hospital bed, maybe even an intensive care bed, that someone else desperately needs for a serious illness they could not prevent. Social responsibility is both a Christian and a human imperative. For this reason, we cannot even open our buildings for private prayer until further notice.

This week I received phone calls from members of previous circuits. How lovely to hear from old friends, when often we are all far too busy with church “stuff” to maintain relationships. Here is a challenge for you. Why not “*phone a friend a day*”. If we were all to do that on average each person would speak to at least 2 people every day.

It has taken time for it to sink in, but yes, I am as vulnerable as most other people. Perhaps you, like me think that to see yourself as being in a vulnerable group is yet another “paradigm shift”. But we all owe it to others to heed the advice. Yes, the dogs still need a walk, we still need to buy food and fetch medicines. We have all to plan how we are going to get through this difficult time. Let’s all watch over one another in love.

A business guru once claimed that inside every challenge there is an opportunity. Some people are suggesting that church life may never be the same again. We have been kick started into harnessing new technology that seemed to be, well, just too much trouble to become familiar with. Video conferencing now seems preferable to negotiating the M25 when it is busy. Business meetings, fellowship groups and pastoral care can all be enhanced using social media and technology. I would be interested to know which platforms you would find most convenient – WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom etc? The old maxim “*by all means save some*” has never been more apt. We can use the current lockdown to use different ways to communicate God’s saving love to even more people, and to each other. As Sue Howson has already shared with you, there is now even a virtual Methodist Church Choir that you can join (<http://nmcgb.org>) .

Like me, you may be pinching yourself. Is this all a bad dream? It is certainly like the plot of a Hollywood movie. But it is real. Many of us have lived through the Cuban crisis, the Cold War, the Falklands War, 9/11 and two Gulf Wars. Somehow the present pandemic is affecting daily life of nations and continents more than we would have believed just six

months ago. But the humanity expressed in the love of families, the support of friends and the prayers of the faithful can be a great source of encouragement.

SABBATICAL: *Hours before new guidance on Sabbaticals were issued on the Methodist website by the Connexion, the District Chair and the District Sabbaticals Committee agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 744, that my sabbatical due to begin 3rd April could be postponed. That remains the position as I write, notwithstanding further clarification from Ruth Gee, Assistant Secretary of Conference. I was motivated in asking for the postponement by a desire to continue to “be there” for our people during this crisis.*

Please pray: for everyone working in medicine, nursing, healthcare and social care at this time of crisis. Especially remember those managing the scarce human and other resources of Action for Children and Methodist Homes (MHA). They must be under massive stress as they pull out all the stops to support others. Please also pray for people in our circuit and communities who are unwell either with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 and other unrelated issues. Especially pray for people who are anxiously waiting for much needed treatment for serious conditions but are finding that the pressures on the NHS are slowing all administrative processes down.

The following prayer from the Methodist Worship Book may help you, as it does me:

Grant us O God, In all our duties your help,
In all our perplexities guidance,
In all our dangers your protection,
And in all our sorrows your peace.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Every blessing,

Keith

Rev Keith C. Beckingham.

PLEASE ASSIST ME BY FORWARDING OR GIVING PRINTED COPIES OF THIS EMAIL TO PEOPLE WHO MAY HAVE NOT RECEIVED IT.

FURTHER RESOURCES ARE BELOW

PRACTICAL HELP AND INFORMATION:

Virtual church choir. You can register at:

<http://nmcgb.org/login>

Methodist Church Guidance on Coronavirus:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus/>

Churches Together resources and information:

https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/568755/Home/News/Latest_news/Coronavirus_guidance.aspx

Resources from the Methodist Learning Network:

<https://learningnetsi.org.uk/coronavirus#pastoral-care-resources>

The NHS Volunteer campaign is a new initiative which looks to help the 1.5 million Britons with underlying medical conditions who have been asked to stay at home for the next 12 weeks. It is also designed as a support structure to reduce pressure on the NHS and its staff.

What will an NHS Volunteer do?

NHS Volunteers will be carrying out "simple but vital" roles.

Community Response volunteer: This role involves collecting shopping, medication or other essential supplies for someone who is self-isolating and delivering these supplies to their home.

Patient Transport volunteer: This role supports the NHS by providing transport to patients who are medically fit for discharge, and ensuring that they are settled safely back in to their home.

NHS Transport volunteer: This role involves transporting equipment, supplies and/or medication between NHS services and sites, it may also involve assisting pharmacies with medication delivery.

Check-in and Chat volunteer: This role provides short-term telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation.

Once you have registered and checks are complete you will be provided a log-in to the [GoodSAM Responder app](#). Switch the app to 'on duty', and you'll see live and local volunteer tasks to pick from nearby

If you do become ill, you can pause your volunteering.

How many NHS Volunteers are required?

The Government are looking for 250,000 people to help with the effort.

Why does this matter?

Dr Nikki Kanani, GP and NHS Director of Primary Care, said: "Coronavirus is the biggest challenge we have ever faced, which is why we're rallying the troops and telling the public: your NHS needs you.

"This is one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments where a single action from one person can be the difference between life and death for another, and simple acts of kindness are going to make all the difference in keeping some of the most vulnerable people well and out of hospital."

How do I sign up?

You can sign up to become an NHS Volunteer Responder at goodsmapp.org/NHS

FURTHER RESOURCES ARE ON THE NEXT PAGE

Resources to nurture your soul

A Worship at home service sheet for 29th March

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16456/29-march-worship-if-you-are-unable-to-attend-church.docx>

A Worship at Home Sheet for 5th April:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16454/5-april-worship-if-you-are-unable-to-attend-church.docx>

A worship at home sheet for 12th April

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16455/12-april-worship-if-you-are-unable-to-attend-church.docx>

(All are also available on the Circuit website as is The Vine at Home for 29th March)

Roots resources

During the pandemic ROOTS is offering **free** resources to use at home every week on the ROOTS website. See www.rootsontheweb.com/

Live-streamed services

Wesley's Chapel in London will continue to live-stream worship, adapted for no physical congregation.

Service times

Wednesday 12:45

Thursday 12:45

Sunday 9:45 and 11:00.

All these services will be available

at: www.youtube.com/channel/UCUAUqhmhevz5sqhh72LIMxA

Swan Bank Methodist Church in Burslem will also live-stream worship

Service Time Sunday 10:30

The service will be available

at www.youtube.com/user/SwanBank and www.facebook.com/swanbank/

And finally, an interesting take on the current situation:

The Duchess of York uploaded a snapshot of a cherry blossom tree in full bloom, as she contemplated nature's role in the ongoing crisis. She wrote: "Mother Nature has sent us to our rooms... Like the spoilt children we are. She gave us time and she gave us warnings. She was so patient with us. She gave us fire and floods, she tried to warn us but in the end she took back control. She has sent us to our rooms and when she is finished clearing up our mess. She will let us out to play again. How will we use this time? Xxxx."