

Dear Friends,

I am sure that none of us can be unaware of the events in this country and “*across the pond*” arising from the death of George Floyd. A statement was made on 8th June by the United Methodist Church bishops in the USA. They called “*on all United Methodists to act now by using their voices, pens, feet and hearts to end racism*” and asked Methodists to renew their baptismal vows, “*to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves*”. They asked their flock to pray at 8.46 am and 8.46 pm for the next 30 days, remembering the 8 minutes 46 seconds during which George Floyd struggled to breath, with a knee constricting his throat.

Since 1978 the policy of the Methodist Church in Great Britain has been:

“Racism is a sin and contrary to the imperatives of the Gospel...As Christian people we believe that with the coming of Jesus Christ a new relationship was initiated between people of different origins”. The Methodist Church website contains the EDI Toolkit to help individuals and groups study equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The Methodist website also has a statement dated 9th June, by Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of Conference which includes these words: *“The brutal killing of George Floyd, who died at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis, has prompted a wave of anger and revulsion around the world. As Christian people, we are appalled that someone could die in such a fashion and appalled also at the continued injustice which many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people experience in many parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, and in many institutions, including, shamefully, the Methodist Church in Britain”*.

As part of the response of the University of Surrey Chaplaincy team to #blacklivesmatter, I interviewed Rev Sonia Hicks by Zoom, and a recording of this conversation is on our circuit website. I hope that you take a look at it. Sonia is a Superintendent Minister in our District and speaks powerfully about her personal experience of racism as someone who was born and raised in London.

Another important matter relates to Methodist Homes. A circuit officer wrote to me: *“Some people will no doubt have watched the harrowing report on BBC2 Newsnight on Wednesday charting MHA’s journey over the last three months,*

with a number of telling contributions from Sam Monaghan. MHA need our prayers and financial help more than ever!" June 14th is designated as MHA Sunday, and normally our churches would have had special collections, which they sorely need at this time. Please consider your response.

<https://www.mha.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/mha-sunday/>

The UK Government has begun to slowly loosen the lockdown. At present no change in Methodist Connexional guidelines are expected until after Methodist Conference (25 June – 2 July). I must ask trustees to be aware that to choose not to follow the Methodist Connexion guidelines is to risk personal liability on the part of trustees in the event of legal action resulting from illness or injury of people on Methodist premises. I am aware that some other Christian churches in England will be opening for private prayer prior to 2nd July, but I would strongly advise trustees to follow Methodist guidelines at all times. These can be found in the Methodist Church website.

Finally, I wonder what has been sustaining you spiritually during this difficult time. I often find that the words of much-loved hymns come to mind and can be very comforting. One well known hymn was written by John Newton who was pressganged into the Navy and was involved in the slave trade. His conversion came about when he called on God's mercy during a violent storm off the coast of County Donegal in 1748. He later became involved in the struggle against slavery. His hymn was a real means of grace in the Second Great Awakening, especially in the southern states of America, in the 19th Century. Amazingly, given John Newton's background, it was especially popular amongst the descendants of those people who were forcibly removed from Africa and forced into slavery in America.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

May God's amazing grace sustain you and be your guide.

God bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.