

Dear Friends,

I wonder if you watched the Festival of Remembrance from the Royal Albert Hall, and the Remembrance Sunday commemoration at the Cenotaph this year. Both events were conducted with the clinical precision and deep emotion that we have come to expect, and the organisers deserve our thanks for their skill and diligence. Nevertheless, there was something hauntingly sad about the reduced attendance. I was also profoundly moved by a TV interview of a centenarian veteran who spoke recently about his experiences as a 19 year old conscript and the unforgettable sights he witnessed on D Day on the beaches of Normandy where he followed the advice of his father, who was himself a veteran, and kept his head down. That wise advice enabled him to survive and return home in due course. I was especially touched by the enduring feeling of camaraderie which he and his fellows have shared through the decades that have followed. There is something about the shared experience of people who have been through the heat of battle that makes being a veteran a way of life for many ex-service men and women. I was privileged to experience something of this whilst minister of St Johns Methodist Church Bloxwich where the 'Normandy Vets' kept a book of remembrance and attended our Remembrance services. They regarded me as their padre and presented me with an embroidered badge for my preaching scarf. I feel honoured to wear it and am grateful for having been invited to share something of their way of life.

I have heard it said that Christianity at its best is not so much a religion as a way of life. It saddens me when the term 'religion' is viewed negatively because without the outward structures of religion I wonder who would pass on the faith of Jesus Christ. I do understand that religion has been wrongly used by some people for coercion and control. Nevertheless, I agree that our faith should inspire a distinctive way of life. I am pleased that we are all being challenged by the President of the Methodist Conference to reflect on our Methodist Way of Life. Revd Richard Teal has condensed this into a succinct format, and it is being distributed with class tickets this year. It is based on the Our Calling document which previously has been mainly applied to local churches. This new step forward attempts to apply the same Our Calling principles to individual Methodist Christians in our daily lives.

On the reverse of the card you will find prompts for personal prayer and reflection and also discussion with others. This makes the card useful for fellowship groups and membership/confirmation classes. There are 4

questions for each section – worship, learning & caring, service and evangelism, making 16 questions in all. I would encourage each local church to find a way of using these cards during this connexional year, and for us each to make the Methodist Way of Life a subject for personal prayer and thinking.

I would expect that we cannot each do everything but together we can ‘respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and live out its discipleship in worship and mission’. Individually, it would be wonderful if this new emphasis inspires us to use the year of prayer 2020/21 to go deeper in our spiritual experience so that ‘we may be a blessing within and beyond God’s Church, for the transformation for the world’.

In having a shared Way of Life, plus a shared tradition of prayer and also mutual pastoral care and support through fellowship groups, we can build a deeper sense of community and belonging and be inspired to reach out in proclamation and service to the wider community.

This email comes with my very best wishes and prayers, especially for those people who are finding this 2nd lockdown most challenging, and anyone who is affected personally by Covid-19 or who has a family member or friend who has tested positive or is working with affected patients.

God bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.