

Dear Friends,

“He’s back!” As I return from Sabbatical, I take the opportunity of this pastoral email to greet friends across the circuit. I do hope that you are keeping well and that your churches are at least “ticking over”. I especially want to thank Rev Faulkner for his great work as acting Superintendent, which has been greatly appreciated. I also sincerely thank everyone who has stepped up in my absence and have served the circuit admirably. Especially Sue Howson, Linda Weedon and all church and circuit officers. I am very conscious that what was to me a blessing created extra burdens for others.

We live in unprecedented times, and we are reminded that what to one person is a blessing may create a burden to our neighbour, who we are called upon by Jesus to love. One person’s freedom may adversely affect someone else. It seems that the euphoria of a week ago when we all keenly anticipated Freedom Day has become much more muted as data continues to show that the pandemic is not yet over. Rather as we learnt not to celebrate victory two minutes into a football match, so we are coming to realise the folly of throwing off all restraint and all precautions too soon when a virus is still circulating. Once again, our hopes have been raised and then modified as realism has reasserted itself. I do encourage managing trustees to exercise their duty of care with wisdom and taking account of the best advice. Masks, handwashing, social distancing, and ventilation are still the order of the day! Please keep abreast of any updated Connexional guidance.

This all places a great burden on managing trustees and we might ask how to manage change. I have produced a brief paper on Managing Change which is on the circuit website. I am by no means an expert on this subject, but John Kotter & Holger Rathgeber are, as is Dr Spencer Johnson and I have “bovrilised” some of their writing.

Our need to appoint suitable circuit officers early in the approaching connexional year is becoming more apparent. There are personnel changes approaching and this is a matter for prayer.

I get daily and weekly emails from the (American) United Methodist Church, some of which make sobering reading, and some contain inspiration. One slogan they have used encourages us not just to reopen, but to relaunch. I think that is what we must do. Mission remains a priority, and part of that mission is pastoral care of the “whole people of God”. New opportunities are

presenting themselves. We should especially pray for the people who have moved to our area from Hong Kong which has such deep historical, economic, and cultural ties to the UK. May God guide us as we seek new ways of being available to support them as they settle in a hugely different country.

I have been surprised by news that sectors from hospitals to hospitality have been affected by staff shortages. There are reports that some restaurants are limiting their opening times in order to cope with this. I would ask church stewards to be realistic in making plan requests. As we reopen (or relaunch) we should ask questions about how we can provide traditional services whilst also continuing to provide new online worship without putting unsustainable pressures on our volunteers, including local preachers and worship leaders. Mature conversations may need to take place on this topic.

I do thank all those who so helpfully provide timely information, not least including plan requests and articles for Wey Forward. This is a great boon to those who rely on your prompt response and saves a great deal of unnecessary work in chasing people up. Please put the deadlines in your calendar, and hold the necessary local discussions well in advance, for after all we all do know well in advance that the plan has to be made every quarter without fail!

In the post Covid world I suspect that our reliance of volunteers in the church will grow. Maybe we need to remember that we are not just a church but also a society essentially run by its members within the Connexional constitution. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4: “<sup>12</sup> His purpose was to equip God’s people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ <sup>13</sup> until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son. God’s goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.”

I started writing weekly pastoral emails when we were originally locked down for what we thought would be two weeks! I wonder if these weekly emails have now run their course. I think next week’s email may be the last. Please let me know your thoughts.

Every blessing

Keith.

Keith C. Beckingham