

Dear Friends,

I wanted to write to members of the circuit in this rapidly changing situation to communicate my understanding that this is a very difficult time for all of us, as churches and individuals. We believe in a gospel of hope and our faith is a great source of strength. None of us wanted to see church services suspended and it causes great pain, not least to those called to lead worship and preach. There is guidance below on how churches can maintain a prayerful ministry which is vital at this time.

I hope to communicate with the circuit with periodic updates and pastoral letters to allay uncertainty and express the concern I share with you all. My prayers are with all whose jobs are affected or whose loved ones may be showing symptoms.

My personal thanks go to all those in the circuit who are doing the right thing and following Connexional and Government recommendations, and to those who are being good neighbours by phoning elderly, vulnerable or isolated members of the church and wider community. We each have a responsibility to keep one another's morale high at a time of unprecedented challenge.

I recently attended a meeting online via the Zoom app and have learnt that the app has strengths and weaknesses. Acoustics and simply getting used to it are issues. Despite this, Zoom and similar apps may assist with small meetings or even Bible study, fellowship and prayer groups. Rev David Faulkner is leading the way of how we can use technology in the life of our churches and will no doubt have more information to share.

The Zoom meeting I attended was multifaith and concerned the University. Please include in your prayers the overseas students who are left on campus when others are able to go home to their families. I learnt that the sort of response recommended by the Methodist Church is also being seen in synagogues, mosques and temples. All religions are taking their responsibilities seriously. Festivals such as Ramadan, Passover and Easter weigh heavily on all our minds. Friday prayers (Muslim) are not happening this week even though the guidelines say they could meet for one last week. This reflects a sense of civic and social duty. Prayer buddies are being organised at the University.

Those Methodists who wish to join with prayer partners by phone, WhatsApp, Skype etc are encouraged to do so, and I hope they will be assisted by their

local church pastoral teams. Those who have a Methodist Worship Book or Prayer Manual already have resources for their own worship. Methodists have always found solace in reading the Bible and reflecting on the hymn book.

I myself was blessed by the prayer written by the President of Conference. May I suggest that you join with me in saying this prayer each evening at around 7pm.

A Prayer by the President of the Conference:

Loving God
If we are ill, strengthen us
If we are tired
Fortify our spirits
If we are anxious
Help us to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.
Help us not to stockpile treasures from supermarkets in the barns of our larders!
Don't let fear cause us to overlook the needs of others more vulnerable than ourselves
Fix our eyes on your story
And our hearts on your grace
Help us always to hold fast to the good and see the good in others.
And remember there is just one world, one hope,
One everlasting love, with baskets of bread for everyone.
In Jesus we make our prayer,
The one who suffered, died and was raised to new life,
In whom we trust, these days and all days. Amen

I believe that the BBC will be broadcasting a service each Sunday morning, initially led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. You may also find this helpful, in addition to the resources listed on the Methodist Church website and our own Circuit website.

My prayers are with you all.
May God bless you,

Keith C. Beckingham
Superintendent Minister.