

Dear Friends,

As I have been thinking about writing this week's pastoral email in these uncertain times, I have reflected on how there seems to be more uncertainty in the air as we move on from the clear certainties of lockdown to the grey areas of gradual lifting of the lockdown, with all the ambiguities, inconsistencies, risks and unanswered questions involved with this. In some ways the challenges around how to restore things to some semblance of normality are greater than the challenges of imposing the lockdown. A dim memory from my early childhood bubbled into my mind. It relates to a short and scary car ride I had with an uncle circa 1960, when a real 'pea-souper' fog had descended, and he could not see far beyond his windscreen whilst attempting to drive. I think the journey was probably abandoned quite quickly, though walking home on the pavement was probably just as fraught with danger because we could not even see the curb.

St Paul writes, *"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"* 1 Cor 13:12. Life always has its uncertainties and risks, but perhaps it is when we do not recognise our vulnerability that we are most at risk. As we prepare to eventually open our churches (when it is permitted), let us exercise due caution and be careful to follow the current guidelines, which seem to be updated very regularly. It may seem odd to you that, as other commentators have noted, we are allowed to browse a car showroom or visit a busy supermarket but currently we are forbidden from praying alone in church. However, trustees must act responsibly, remembering their public duty of care, and regularly check the guidance on the Methodist Church website before re-opening our properties. Please remember that our actions can result in personal liability if we do not follow the Methodist guidelines.

The CLT have been giving careful consideration to arrangements for our summer Circuit Meeting. As you can imagine this revealed many areas of uncertainty and after a long discussion, we have arrived at what we think will be a reasonable way of proceeding and details will be sent to circuit trustees. I am pleased to note that things have moved on at Godalming and Cranleigh and the Circuit Meeting will be duly informed. New challenges have emerged at other parts of the circuit, and again, the Circuit Meeting will receive appropriate reports.

It would be very remiss of me not to mention the protests that are going on in the USA. Methodist values include justice; the equality of all people regardless of race; doing to others as we would be done by and recognising that all people are created by the one Creator. We are called to do good to "all the people we can" regardless of race. The sight of a law officer kneeling on the neck of George Floyd and ignoring the desperate pleas of witnesses to stop squeezing the life out of him and while Mr Floyd repeatedly told the officers present that he could not breathe, appals all right-thinking people everywhere. Across the world and in the UK many people, especially those within minority ethnic groups who identify most closely with the victim, are experiencing understandable anger and outrage. I hope that within the church there may be safe spaces to express this anger and that together we will work for justice for all. Racism is never excusable and we as Methodists are committed to combatting it in our quest for justice. Part of our spiritual journey is self-examination in order to ask God to cleanse us of all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Finally, perhaps the poem written by Minnie Louise Haskins, beloved of the late Queen Mother and quoted by George VI is appropriate for us in at the present time. It reminds us that amongst all the uncertainty, our faith in God anchors us to eternal and universal values and that in God we find our true security.

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way."

May God richly bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister