



8th May 2020

Dear friends,

In many ways it feels as though the world is standing still at the moment and our Churches have closed down, we now have posters up at most of our Churches stating that we are closed and for most of us that is an alien concept when we fight hard normally to keep our Churches open. It is not simply worship that has disappeared for the time being, it is also all the other activities we enjoy, like coffee mornings, Bible studies, fellowship groups and even business meetings. Many of us will be experiencing lock down and finding that difficult to cope with, because we tend to be a social society and life feels to have changed dramatically and almost instantly. We want you to know that while our Churches may be closed for the moment, the Circuit is most definitely not closed, many of you will remember the war years, when for very different reasons, life looked different for a season and painful as those days were, the nation pulled together and grew stronger because of the experiences people shared. In these days after Easter, we remember how the early church had to respond to fresh challenges and seek God's way through the different situations they were encountering and maybe this year, we can empathise with the early Church and learn from it.

The last week of March felt very disorientating as we suddenly had to start letting people know that worship and events would be ceasing, we felt all at sea as we were forced out of our comfort zones and we found ourselves in places we didn't want to be, we saw the whole situation as being an inconvenience and a temporary measure but as we headed towards Easter, we started to recognise that we needed to do things in new ways. By the end of March we had a new Circuit website up and running thanks to Neil Hepplethwaite, Joan and Adrian Pell and as we turned the corner into April we started to use video conferencing for our meetings, at first it was strange, having people sitting in their homes and talking to computers, but we have become quite adept at this sort of meeting and have met weekly since then. Technology has opened doors to us that we could never have imagined even six weeks ago, but we realised very early on that while we have exciting media opportunities for some, that facility isn't open to all, so we have been trying to establish telephone and letter writing alongside the technical opportunities, so that as many people as possible can be included in.

We are encouraged by all that is happening around the Circuit, we hear about creative initiatives being used in different Churches to ensure that pastoral care is offered to at least the same level as previously and in many places the care is much greater than before. There is a feeling now in the Circuit Leadership Team that instead of simply

trying to keep the Church treading water during these uncertain and rather strange times, we are actually now moving forward and whilst times like this can be challenging for some and depressing for others, they can be times of excitement and growth as day by day we respond to all the opportunities God offers to us. Many years ago, a preacher was heard to say in a sermon that God never causes suffering, but always works through it and we believe that God is at work in the Churches and communities in and around this Circuit.

So, as we reach the end of our sixth week of this experience, the Circuit Leadership team thought that the time had come to share with all the people of the circuit news of what is happening at the moment, we have all been working hard so that whilst our Church buildings might well be closed, God's Church is still open for business as normal. Below is summary of some of the things that are currently happening.

We pray that you will continue to keep well and safe during this period and whilst we might not be able to do what we want to, we might be better able to do what we can do for good of the Kingdom.

With best wishes from

The Ipswich Circuit Leadership Team



Worship:

One of the greatest senses of loss for us since all this began has been worship, which is far more than singing a few hymns, saying a couple of prayers, hearing Bible reading and a sermon, it is about fellowship.

- **Video services** - We are now offering two video services on a Sunday each week from Joan Pell and Capel St Mary. Martin Dawes and Diane Smith are also offering video reflections.
- **Printable services** – for those without internet access, Derek is producing a service each Sunday in printed form, you are welcome to print this off and share with those in your Church who would find it helpful. This kind of ministry is being replicated in a number of our Circuit Churches.
- **Connexional Services** – The Methodist Church are also offering a range of services on the Methodist website methodist.org.uk under the heading “Coronavirus” and “Worship during the pandemic”.

At the time of writing we are all uncertain as to when the “lockdown” will be lifted. What is being said by our government and their scientific advisors is that the lockdown will be lifted gradually. Clearly the most important priority is to keep people safe, especially those who may be particularly vulnerable from this infection. It is likely that church gatherings may “look” different. Even though we may not be able to meet in person, we will all continue to keep in contact by other means, through social media, telephone calls and letters.



Learning and Caring:

- **Online thought for the day** – we now have a thought for the day on the circuit website each day written by people across the Circuit. They vary considerably in style as you would expect and are viewed by significant numbers of people daily. Please read them either on the website or on Facebook and click “like” if you enjoy them or write a comment and most importantly “share” with others you know.
- **Pastoral** – we hear of many different kinds of pastoral work going on in the circuit with letter and cards being sent, telephone calls, flower ministry and the like.
- **Dial-a-prayer** – The Methodist website is offering a free Dial-a-prayer service on 0808 281 2514



Service:

- **Helping hands** – a number of you are offering practical help to those who are self isolating, doing shopping and general caring.
- **Norwood** – Norwood our MHA home in Ipswich continues to function under lockdown rules and to date have kept clear of Covid 19. Please pray for the staff and residents during this time and also for the families of residents, who are finding the whole situation difficult. Also please pray for Ruth Loggie the chaplain who is working as normal, although in a very different way.
- **Prison Chaplaincy** – We do well to remember the work that Stephen Caley is doing in the prison where social distancing is a problem the same as anywhere else and impinges on prisoners social time.
- **Parish Nursing** – the work of our parish nurses continues although in a very different format helping people with both physical and mental health issues. John Gillet, one of our parish nurses in Walton has been very ill with Covid 19, but recovering now.



Evangelism

- **Lay outreach work** – there was a question at the beginning of all of this whether or not we should furlough our Lay Employees. Having met fortnightly they are working harder than ever at the moment and furloughing does not feel to be an option. Following is a list of some of the things that are happening.
 - a) Gainsborough community choir have continued to meet every Thursday evening by coming together on line. Singing across a video conference has had its teething problems but Neil, Elizabeth and Adrian have successfully persevered and the choir are very enthusiastic.

- b) Craft boxes are going out around the Churches in the Circuit, these are particularly helpful to families who are now having to engage with home schooling, we have even started to send baking boxes out in some places (once the shortage of self raising flour was overcome).
 - c) We have creative ideas like Whatsapp groups, Video conferencing groups, virtual reality coffee morning and good old fashioned letter writing including art and poetry. Telephone ministry particularly to those who are now house bound are becoming more frequent.
 - d) A huge amount of work is being done using social media and the website, including mother and toddler groups with story telling, craft sessions and general contact with people.
- **Ecumenical** – we are trying not to duplicate work with the other denominations and to acknowledge that this situation crosses all boundaries. People across the Circuit are engaged in on line prayer meetings.



Administration

- **Buildings** – It is important that we follow Methodist guidelines and our buildings should only open for essential services, like foodbanks, blood donors etc. It is recommended that each church is visited once a week for maintenance checks and to run the water to avoid any risk of Legionnaires disease.
- **Finance** – This is a thorny subject, but our Churches have suddenly been starved of regular streams of income through offertories and room lettings. Giving by Standing Order helps as your treasurer will then be receiving a regular flow of income to meet the routine bills that continue to come in during this period. Please speak to your Church treasurer if this is a possibility for you.

The Ipswich Round:

The Ipswich Round is available on line methodistic.org.uk/category/ipswich-round/. The current restrictions mean that at present we will not be able to provide a printed copy.

The Circuit Preaching Plan:

For the time being the preaching plan is on hold until we have some clear guidance from the government and the Methodist Connexion about when we will be allowed to hold public worship. We will keep you informed as things progress.