

Dear Friends,

You will be aware that we updated the COVID 19 advice on Monday. You can find the advice here <https://www.methodist.org.uk/>

This was followed up by a pastoral letter from the Secretary of Conference <https://www.methodist.org.uk/signpostforministry/>

The advice has raised a few question to which we offer these responses:

Can we gather for prayer?

The current advice states:

It is with sadness that we recommend that worship services in Methodist Churches are suspended for the time being in line with Government guidance.

During this incredibly difficult time when people might want to spend time in prayer in their Methodist Church, local trustees should consider whether it is possible to open up their churches to enable people to come and pray or sit quietly, perhaps offering prayer stations as a point of reflection with precautions around physical distancing.

We have been asked does paragraph two cancel paragraph one? Does it allow us to meet for prayers (at our usual worship time) or maybe even a coffee morning?

To clarify: No public gatherings are recommend. We invite people to prayer in an open building or at home whilst being mindful of social distancing.

Should we use Prayer Stations?

The current advice states:

Local trustees should consider whether it is possible to open up their churches to enable people to come and pray or sit quietly, perhaps offering prayer stations as a point of reflection with precautions around physical distancing.

To clarify: Any prayer stations should be visual – people should not be encouraged to handle items on a prayer station.

We are wanting to offer sacred space during this crisis whether that is physical or virtual. Many people will be feeling frightened and isolated during this period of uncertainty and we, along with many other denominations, are suggesting that, if appropriate, churches might provide a place for people to pray or sit whilst following Government guidelines.

Are we closed for Funerals?

The current advice states:

While funerals may still take place, we would advise that the number of people attending is limited as per the Government's advice.

To clarify: On pastoral grounds, we are not advising churches to close for funerals. However, it needs to be recognised that many local trustees and musicians are in high risk groups so may not

be able to steward or play for such services. If a funeral is conducted the number of people attending should be limited to immediate family we recommend considering using Skype links or recordings as an alternative and holding memorials and wakes at a future date. Guidance should be sought from the local funeral directors.

We have had a number of questions relating to room lettings for worship and other purposes. Whilst we seek guidance from TMCP our usual advice applies: in lines with government guidelines people should be discouraged from gathering.

We continue to update the Methodist Church Website <https://www.methodist.org.uk/> there you will find resources for home worship and links to live streaming. We are happy to receive requests for prayer, prayer and worship resources and details of on line streaming. Please send them to mvw@methodistchurch.org.uk

Worship during coronavirus posters

We have partnered with Christian Publishing & Outreach (CPO) to make available two completely FREE posters to help your Methodist churches inform their local community about worship arrangements during the coronavirus. These posters are available to order as full colour, A2 copies from CPO. One has an editable text space for you to add the details of your church, circuit or district website as appropriate before ordering and printing. Go to: www.cpo.org.uk/MethodistC19

You can also find these posters from the CPO home page under coronavirus resources.

Alternatively, for smaller copies, or while waiting on delivery of the larger posters, you can download both posters from the Methodist Church website in colour or printer-friendly black & white at: www.methodist.org.uk/worship-during-coronavirus/

Please be assured there is no compulsion to open the church for prayer – but for the moment it is an option.

Preparing for the future

It has been a crazy week, and no doubt there are stranger times to come. However, we know that God will see us through this. As we begin to get used to our new norm we need to begin to think how we might travel through this time and be in a good place to build up the body of disciples afterwards. Superintendents many like to start to consider having weekly 1-1 oversight meetings with their colleagues by phone, zoom or skype. When we emerge from this crisis, we will need to renew our efforts to focus on *Our Calling*. We might use this time wisely to think how we might refocus our work on vocation and the evangelism and growth. If you have ideas please share them with us mvw@methodistchurch.org.uk

We continue to hold you in prayer, as we work through the practicalities of the situation and work to produce resources for mission for use at this time and in the future.

The Revd Paul Wood | Interim Director of the Ministries Team

Jude Levermore | Head of Mission