

**Warwick Methodist Church**  
**Keeping in Contact During Covid-19**  
**Number 20 – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020**

Dear Friends,

Last week, I took my quarter days. In case you don't know what those are – every Methodist minister is recommended to take a break of 3 consecutive weekdays each quarter, if possible away from home, in addition to their holiday allowance. I have not always taken them – for example, I had some booked in March and was going to be spending time with my sisters, but as it turned out that was cancelled by lockdown happening, and instead of taking time off, I worked through, more busy than normal, in fact as we tried to get the communication networks set up. A few weeks ago, the Circuit Stewards emailed all the ministers, encouraging us to look after ourselves, to make sure we have holiday in the diary, and meanwhile to take our days off and our quarter days. I had been feeling under quite a bit of strain, so I took the advice.

So, what did I do during my quarter days? Firstly, I disconnected from my email – one flick of a switch, and it no longer came through to my iPad or phone, nagging away at me to “just have a little look”. Immediately, I had a sense of relief. Email is an essential tool of communication in modern life – but it is also unfortunately a potential source of anxiety. When I turned my email back on after three days, I had 66 new emails demanding my attention. I confess I have not yet dealt with them all – nor all of the additional ones that have come in since, or the ones that were still there from before.

For 3 days, I read fiction; did a jigsaw; went for walks; watched nature; read non-fiction; listened to Spanish podcasts; just sat and let my mind wander. It was relaxing, it was restorative, it was enjoyable. I also followed the news, and social media, and listened to and thought about the effect which the pandemic is having on all kinds of people.

This may seem perverse, but I find it comforting to hear so many people say things like “I've been finding it really tough” or “I just can't organise myself or “I'm scared to go outside.” There is a huge variety of responses, positive, negative and neutral – and that's OK. This is a trauma, it's an unknown. As human beings, we are hard-wired to try to make sense of things, to see the patterns; we don't yet know what the overall pattern of this is, so we are disorientated. We also rely heavily on habits and routines – and with most of those no longer accessible to us, we have to make more decisions every day, and that is hard work. Zoom calls are better than phone calls, I think – communication is fuller when you can see people's faces. But they are also much more tiring than face to face meetings.

There is myth to which many people subscribe, which says that we ought to be able to cope. All the time. With everything, and anything. If you are living in this myth, then you

may watch the news snippets of the ITU nurse or the paramedic or the council planner talking about the strain the pandemic is placing on them, the sleepless nights, the recurring images, and be moved with compassion and admiration for them. But when you find yourself distracted, tearful or irritable, you give yourself a telling off. Why are you any less deserving of compassion and understanding than anybody else? You are a precious child of God, the foundations have been rocked, and it's tough. But do you know what? It will pass. And meanwhile, there are sources of love and joy and peace to be found, every moment of every day. Notice them. Cherish them. Give thanks for them.

Things are always changing, and today some will be rejoicing over news of lockdown restrictions easing. Others, particularly those who are more vulnerable because of age or health, may be nervous about taking advantages of the new possibilities.

Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. While the authority to open church buildings (once permitted by law) rests with the Church Council, the strong advice from the Circuit Coronavirus Advice Group is that we do not hold worship in our buildings before September at the very earliest. We could open the church for private prayer – but how many people want to do that? What about worship – if there is no singing, limited duration and no gathering before or afterwards – would you come, or would you wait until we can go back to “normal?”

One key consideration is who is going to do the stewarding necessary for either services or private prayer. This would involve asking people to sanitise their hands on arrival, directing them through a one-way system, wiping down surfaces on a regular basis, and any other such things as are identified by the risk assessment as being necessary. At the moment the advice remains that those aged over 70 and with certain health conditions should be extra vigilant, and the recommendation from the Methodist Church is that such people therefore should NOT be placing themselves at risk by acting as stewards. Do we have sufficient people not in those at-risk groups who are willing to take this on?

We want to know how you feel, so as to inform the decisions of the leadership team and eventually the Church Council. Please contact either Trevor Blades or myself if you would be willing to act as a temporary steward so the building can open, or if you have a strong feeling about attending (or not) either for limited worship, or for private prayer.

Until then – remember that I am on the end of the phone, and God is everywhere.

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.  
Barbara

Phone: 01926 740846 Email: [barbara.greenwood@methodist.org.uk](mailto:barbara.greenwood@methodist.org.uk)