

Warwick Methodist Church
Keeping in Contact During Covid-19
Number 25 – 28th July 2020

Dear Friends,

Do you enjoy Call the Midwife? It's one of my Sunday night treats when it's on. While it started set in the 1950's, more recent series have covered the period in which I was born – and while I recognise some of the fashions from family photos when I was very small, there are many things about the social setup at the time which are completely alien to me. One of these is the frequent scene of the husband running to the phone box to ring for the midwife – or possibly the ambulance. Having a telephone at home was the preserve of the rich – or those for whom it was essential. My father was a GP and did on-calls, therefore we always had a phone at home (although we girls were never allowed to touch it) – even when a few of my school friends still didn't.

Can you imagine anyone in 21st Century Britain not having a phone? If your answer is No, you are probably right. But are you thinking about a landline, or a mobile? It was probably 15 years ago when I first heard someone say that they didn't have a landline, only a mobile. When I asked why, they said that landlines were too expensive. This struck me as absurd, I had always thought of a landline as the cheap way of making and receiving calls, and a mobile as the expensive way – only for emergencies. But as time has gone on, the economics have changed. Increasing numbers of people have a landline solely to support their broadband internet connection, they don't even plug a phone into it, but make and receive any calls on their mobiles. In that respect, I am one of the dinosaurs – I still think of the landline as the "real" phone.

During lockdown, the phone has become a lifeline for many of us. Can you imagine how difficult these past months would have been without it? The internet has also been tremendously important – but I am aware that a significant proportion of our community can't or don't use it.

This morning, I took part in a discussion organised by the Methodist Church's Learning Network for the Birmingham and Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury Districts on the subject of Hybrid Church. It was all about how the Church can have the best of both worlds – physical, face to face activities, and online and other electronic channels. We talked about the opportunities and challenges, the technicalities and pitfalls, and the theology. Here are just a few of the things I took away from it:-

- 1) The internet extends our reach – in the same way that a microphone does, or indeed a telephone. It's not the same as being physically with a person, but it does enable us to reach people we otherwise wouldn't. It's a tool, which can be used for

good or ill, well or badly. It allows us to reach beyond our physical location – the world truly can be our parish.

- 2) The internet allows the inclusion of people who can't be physically present and would otherwise be excluded. The person who is housebound or self-isolating can not only view the service, they could also take part by recording or live-streaming a reading or sermon from their home.
- 3) The enforced physical separation reminds us of something which we always knew, but don't always behave as though it's true: The Church is the people, not the building. The Church is where God's people are, including in their homes, in the local park or at the end of the phone.
- 4) There is a real risk that in embracing and using modern technology, we forget that we are still physical and social beings. We need to see one another, to talk, to read body language. We look forward to the day when we can once again hug our friends without fear. So alongside exploring the possibilities of new technology, we must be aware of the reality of digital exclusion. Quite a few people have acquired new skills during lockdown – does the church have a role to play in extending that still further? Confusion about technology, even fear of it, are understandable. But they are not inevitable.

While we are not yet ready for physical Sunday worship, we are working on plans to open the church building for private prayer a couple of times a week, with several prayer stations set up to aid visitors in their prayers. One of these will focus on thankfulness, including thanks for the things that have sustained us during this time.

So your 'homework' this week is to take a photo, either from your window if you haven't left the house, or out on your walk if you have. Think of a bible verse or line from a hymn which illustrates it or says something about God's goodness, and send them to me. They will form part of one of the prayer stations at church.

And in the best traditions of Hybrid Church, we are replacing the Holiday Club which has been so successful the last three summers, with an online version. Sarah Jones along with Edwyn and Polly are taking the lead – watch the church website and facebook page for updates, and tell the young people in your families about it. Just because they're not in Warwick, doesn't mean they can't be included!

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.
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