

Warwick Methodist Church
Keeping in Contact During Covid-19
Number 55 – 2nd March 2021

Dear Friends,

The Church of Christ in every age
Beset by change, but Spirit-led
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.

Singing the Faith 415

Fred Pratt Green's hymn goes on to explore the Church's calling to challenge injustice, serve the needy and work for a more peaceful world, and ends by saying "to spread his liberating Word." That is the business we are in – sharing, promoting and spreading the Good News of God's love, embodying it in our lives and actions. Lofty ambitions indeed!!

The Methodist movement started as a pathway of discipleship in which personal holiness and compassionate and evangelistic mission were intertwined, like the strands of a cord. You could not have one without the other. In the early class meetings, members would be questioned about all aspects of this: had they read the Scriptures, prayed, and received the sacrament? Had they visited the sick and relieved the needs of the poor? When we became an independent denomination, we developed a system of church governance, with ministers and society stewards and class leaders. And over the years, these structures have gradually changed. There are always some who are keener to embrace change than others – such is human nature!

I think Fred Pratt-Green's words point us to a helpful metaphor. The Church, and each local church, is a living entity. Change and growth are part of its DNA – if we do not change, we stagnate and will eventually die. God of course can raise the dead, if we have left it too long. But better surely to be lively and responsive, and adapt as circumstances around us change. At the same time, we need to continue to be Spirit-led, to hold on to the essence of our identity, and not simply follow the whims and fashions of the time. At our heart, we need Gospel values.

The Covid crisis is unprecedented in the lifetime of many of us – anyone aged under 80 will have no significant memories of the second world war, even if they were born before 1945. It has completely disrupted our life of worship and witness. This has been both a hardship and a source of creativity. As the vaccination programme rolls out and the prospect of reopening is discussed, we need also to consider how the church will rise from not death, exactly, but hibernation.

For the time being, we have the structures which we have. Our General Church Meeting which will be held, God willing, on Sunday 6th June after the morning service, will need to appoint church stewards and church council members. We are keen to appoint two new people as church stewards, to help with the management and day-to-day running of the church. This may not be something you have ever considered, or perhaps you have considered and rejected it for various reasons. A strong team of stewards, which is vital if we are to change and grow, is greater than the sum of its parts. Different perspectives, ideas and priorities, when bathed in the love and grace of the Holy Spirit, can give rise to a creative energy which you would not get if you had a group of people all toeing the party line and trying to keep things going the way they have always been.

Do you want to see change in Warwick Methodist Church? What would it look like? When the profile for my appointment in the Mid Warwickshire circuit was written in the summer of 2015, the membership of Warwick was stated as 132. When I actually started in September 2016, it was 128. When we did the statistics for last year, the membership at 31st October 2020 stood at 101. We have had two more deaths since then, and we know that a number of people have moved or are planning to move away, and in due course will rightly move their membership.

What has happened? People have died, people have moved away, and people have, in the quaint old phrase, "ceased to meet." A recent reduction in numbers is partly the result of contacting people who have not taken any meaningful part in the church's life for a good many years and agreeing that it does not make sense for them to be members.

We have also gained people over this period, through transfers in and from other denominations. But we have gained fewer than we have lost, hence the reduction in numbers. Of course, membership is not the only category of involvement. We have a number of people who (normally) worship with us regularly and contribute to our common life in a variety of ways, but who have opted not to become members. This does not mean they are any less valuable, but it does mean, under our current constitution, that they can't hold certain offices, including that of church steward.

So, what to do. Do you have an idea of how our church life might be revitalised, as we emerge from the torpor of lockdown? What should we do – what **can** we do? What might **you** do? Pray about these things. Ask the Spirit to lead us. We aim for our GCM on 6th June to be forward-looking – celebrating the good things which have happened during the pandemic, and looking to the future. Please be part of it – either in person, or over Zoom. But I very much hope we will share in worship physically before then.

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.

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