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Dear brothers and sisters,

The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted us all in different ways. This has been difficult; we have been restricted to living completely in our homes and there has been a sense of loss and isolation, or we have been part of the critical workforce and faced the risks involved to play our part. As a circuit we have wrestled with technology and used new and old ways to try and keep everyone connected. We are aware that the experience of lockdown has not been the same; some have been grateful for the time to stop and to reflect, others have struggled with the isolation that lockdown has brought. Some are longing for churches to open and worship to take place, others are more cautious.

The staff team and circuit leadership team have been meeting regularly virtually to pray together for the circuit and to reflect upon what church may look like. At a recent virtual Local Preachers' and Worship Leaders' meeting there was an exciting and stimulating conversation about what worship may look like post-lockdown.

As a Circuit Leadership Team we are keen not to miss anything that God may be saying to us at this time and as we move forwards, we discern a call to prayer, a call to seek God. We believe that it is important to have the fundamentals right, before considering the practicalities that are involved. Now is the time to stop, look and listen and be attentive to the call of God. God is still at work, the Holy Spirit is very much active; the church may have left the building, but the body of Christ is still called to be the hands, feet and mouthpiece of Christ in and to the world.

We are aware that some people are asking some important questions and know that we don't have all the answers, but together we can seek God. We therefore invite you to be part of the prayerful conversation. We recognise that in the current climate it is very difficult to have this conversation in the usual way, and therefore will be using technology to facilitate this. If you are concerned about technology please do have a conversation with your minister.

Providing this space for reflection is in-line with the updated advice from the Methodist Church which is asking us to be cautious:

*The Methodist Church's advice remains that churches stay closed, but we recognise that different parts of the British Isles might be at different stages and we appreciate that there may be those who feel their mission depends on their church being open for individual prayer. If Managing Trustees feel they are at a point where they want to open their buildings for individual prayer, ~~this~~ [the published] guidance must be followed.*

*When the Government announced its intention to change the advice it stated that: 'Places of worship still have discretion over when they consider it safe to open and may decide to remain closed or reopen at a slower pace if they wish' and we would like to stress that no-one should feel under any pressure to open buildings for individual prayer.*

*We understand the vital need for prayer at this time and have found that our people have been praying no less because they have not had buildings in which to pray. We know that mission, ministry and church has been happening in new and exciting ways in these times...*

*Above all, we want people to pray and worship safely and as we have already stated, we are committed to doing a full review of our guidance after the Conference.*

We are minded not to rush to open our buildings for private prayer, but would invite you to use the larger spaces provided by our Anglican brothers and sisters if you are seeking some holy space for prayer. We recognise that the ongoing restrictions regarding our church buildings may not be easy and there may be a growing impatience to get back to how things were, but I ask that we make space to listen to what God is saying to us through this.

As the statement from the Methodist Church says, these matters will be under review as Government guidelines change. Realistically it is not going to be before at least September that we can gather physically together in any meaningful way.

At this time when we are invited to stop, look and listen let us be open to the continuing call of God, and to the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, comforting and strengthening us.

Every blessing



**Revd Nathan S Falla | Superintendent Minister**

