

Pastoral Letter #5 | 30th May 2020

After [Paul and Barnabas] had proclaimed the good news to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch. There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, 'It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.'

Acts 14:21-22

Dear

As May comes to a close, we reach the end of the book of Acts – though if you're a little behind (I confess I was at one point) don't be discouraged, keep going.

Reading through Acts, these words from Acts 14 are among some of the ones that have been most impacting and sustaining for me. Reminding me that encouragement can be a great strength in times of anxiety and struggle, such as the persecution in Antioch, and the impact of lockdown on us all. Despite our anxiety and through our struggle the kingdom of God can become more fully known to us.

How can you encourage someone this weekend?

Where is the kingdom of God becoming more fully known to you?

Worship at Home Pack

Enclosed, please find worship resources for June, in booklet form rather than lots of sheets. Please let me know if this is better/worse/makes no difference to you. It's slightly easier for Louise and I in terms of printing and enveloping, but we'll revert back if there is a consensus that separate sheets are easier/better.

Worship on the Phone

Since last writing we've started **Worship on the Phone**, and I think all of us who have gathered each Sunday morning have been surprised just how much we feel that we have gathered as a worshipping community to worship God, despite the fact we remain at home.

We've been able to have different voices from across our congregations participate in leading prayers and readings, have space for questions and conversation and what I have personally found most inspiring is sharing in prayer together. I know the thought of church on the phone feels odd, but I do encourage you to at least give it a try.

Ruth – Finding Home – Finding Hope

June is Bible Month in the Methodist Church, and for 2020 the focus is the book of Ruth. Feedback has been that many have enjoyed reading Acts together, so for June I invite you to read the much shorter story of Ruth. Enclosed you'll find a short guide I've put together, plus information about joining **'Ruth on the Phone'** on Monday mornings.

Finance

The circuit has agreed to bear some of the additional costs ministers incur during lockdown (e.g. stamps, paper, ink), but as local churches we still have significant expenses to continue to pay to maintain our buildings and other financial obligations.

Some of you have already done so, but if you haven't and are able, please consider setting up a standing order to give regularly to the ongoing ministry of our local churches during lockdown. Please contact your church treasurer or me for the details you need. Alternatively, keep a note of what you would have given and when we are able to reopen our buildings for worship and fellowship once more you will be able to give then.

Building Updates

As the government moves the country into phase 2 of the lifting of lockdown, I'm very aware that phase 3 includes beginning phased re-opening of places of worship, which **may** be able to begin in July. As yet we do not know the nature of what a phased re-opening will initially include, but almost undoubtedly any level of re-opening will involve considerable difference to the way we met together pre-COVID, including social distancing.

The connexional team have been working hard to guide local churches at every stage of lockdown and will continue to. I have also begun to consult with key church officers about how best to coordinate and oversee the transition out of lockdown. My utmost concern is the health and wellbeing of you and all those who use our buildings. Our care for all is an expression of our Christian belief that God cares for the health and wellbeing of all people.

Therefore, as much as I want us to be able to physically meet together, we must only do so when we have ensured we have put all measures necessary to keep us and all safe in place and giving due consideration to all risks. I want to emphasise that the implication of this is that when Government give permission for us to open buildings, we will likely need time to respond with wisdom and care, and so may not re-open immediately.

For now our buildings remain closed, until government, connexion and we decide otherwise (with the exception of Foodbank at Bognor and Blackbirds pre-school at Felpham). However, despite that, the church remains very much open!

Invitations for family, friends, neighbours and more!

Remembering the fact that as church we remain open, despite our buildings being closed, I was thinking this week that without our buildings and 'normal' life, we've not had the same opportunities to invite people to 'church' or let our community know we're here.

So in this pack you will find some cards with an invitation to Worship on the Phone on one side, and an invitation to submit a request for prayer on the other.

I've designed them for you to quickly fill in and put through a letter box or pass to a neighbour. I hope you can use them as a way of reaching out in invitation, love and compassion to friends and neighbours. If you need more, please ask me for more and I'll happily send some.

In peace & hope, Rev Dan