

**Pastoral Letter #8 | 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

***Noah opened the window of the ark and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove returned to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.***

***Extracts from Genesis 8:6-11, NRSV***

Dear «**Forenames**» «**Surname**»

Genesis 8 can be seen as a story of emergence. After years of ark-building, days of storm, rain and floods and subsequent weeks of drifting and waiting, the ark comes to rest. But even then, Noah and his floating zoo have to wait for the water to subside before they can emerge from the safety of the ark and explore the post-flood world.

The last few weeks have increasingly seen emergence all around us. After the ‘storm’ of our national lockdown many shops and restaurants have reopened, pupils are about to return to school, cinema’s are screening films again – the country is in the midst of what is likely to be a long period of emergence, testing out what is or is not safe and adjusting course accordingly.

At this point in the story, I wonder whether Noah was certain the rain had stopped, or if he wondered if more rain was yet to come? As we continue in this journey of emergence we live in hope that the worst has past, but we are not fools, the virus is still around us, the threat has not disappeared, and so while we can emerge to explore the post-lockdown world, it is still some time before we will be able to experience a post-covid world.

September marks a significant step on our journey as local Methodist congregations – as we also begin the process of emergence from our homes to using our buildings as gathering places once again.

Just like Noah sending out ravens and doves, this continues to be a time of testing to see how things work. There will likely be things we continue to need to learn, in practical terms about using our buildings, but also about how we are

church – gathered and scattered, in this post-lockdown, mid-pandemic world. Some among us are excited at the prospect of gathering in our buildings, others are very anxious. Some have said they don't feel safe. Emergence will take a different pace for different people, and so as some gather in buildings, others will want to continue gathering at a distance. We are a scattered church, that will be gathering in multiple ways, places & forms.

It is therefore important that we continue and increase the conversations we have with one another, so that we can learn from our ongoing experiences and hear what God may be saying to us. **How can we be church together while both gathered and scattered, close to one another and far away?** If you have ideas or feel you could help establish some of the ideas I shared in last month's letter, please do get in touch.

Below are various updates on how we currently expect the next few weeks to look. These updates will be supplemented with additional congregation-specific details as appropriate.

### **Questionnaire Results**

---

Thank you to the many of you who returned questionnaires or replied online. This has been really helpful and shows that the monthly mailing in particular was valuable to many of you around 60%.

The questionnaire also showed that roughly 50% of congregations feel ready to return to face-to-face worship. It also showed many of you value the pastoral contact through phone/calls emails, and about a third of you noted that you valued reading Acts and Ruth together – especially Ruth. In October I plan to prepare another reading guide in a similar way to what we did for Ruth.

### **Worshipping Together & Worship on the Phone**

---

Enclosed, please find Worshipping Together for September. This is now being produced on a circuit wide basis so has contributions from a wider pool of preachers.

I know how much of a lifeline Worship on the Phone has been for quite a number of you. I'm pleased to say we've managed to work out a way to continue to run this until at least the end of September. It may take a slightly different form on occasion, but will use Worshipping Together as a base. I'm grateful to Felpham for releasing Joyce Stroud to be able to help us continue it, as well as Louise who will host one week for us.

## **Bognor Regis**

---

At Bognor we're planning for face to face worship from **September 6<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am**. On 6<sup>th</sup> September I will lead worship, which I hope will also include sharing communion. Those connected to Bognor will have an additional leaflet within this mailing that will outline how this will happen.

## **Felpham**

---

We had intended gathering for face to face worship from 6<sup>th</sup> September, but unfortunately the toilet renovations have seen some delays which has had a knock on effect to reopening.

We fully expect that face-to-face worship will be from **September 13<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am**. Those connected to Felpham will receive a further mailing in the next few days outlining the measures we will be implementing.

## **Westergate**

---

At Westergate after meeting with some of our key church officers, we felt we could not meet all the regulations and therefore took the difficult decision to not open in September. However, we believe we have overcome some of those hurdles and we therefore hope to put the necessary plans in place to enable **opening from October** onwards. Congregation at Westergate will receive more information in due course.

## **Thanks to you**

---

While the pandemic is not yet over, I want to take this moment to give a heartfelt thank you to all of you for everything you have done to keep our communities going, relationships sustained and the Spirit of God alive in our fellowships. Thanks to those of you who have supported the community, our young people, and engaged in outreach and mission despite all the challenges of lockdown.

## **Circuit Welcome Service**

---

On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September at 6:30pm the Circuit Welcome Service will be held online/via phone. We will be welcoming 3 new ministers into circuit ministry:

- Rev Ian Couchman as a probationer at Shoreham, Lancing and Offington Park;
- Rev Helen Higgin-Botham as minister at Christ Church, Chichester
- Rev John Scriven's as part time Presbyterian at Selsey.

The service will also include the recommissioning of our lay workers and District Chair David Hinchliffe will preach.

**To join the service online**, please join the live stream on our new circuit YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCo-lyusGbXMsZrVxsw0-hNg/live> . You will also be able to find the links and details on the newly designed circuit website [westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk/](https://westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk/).

### **To join by telephone (audio connection only)**

#### **Step 1**

call one of the Dial in by phone numbers:

0203 481 5237

0203 481 5240

0203 901 7895

0131 460 1196

0203 051 2874

#### **Step 2**

Enter the meeting ID.

For the Circuit Welcome Service this is **886 9384 0868** followed by #

#### **Step 3 (Optional)**

You will be offered the opportunity to add a participant ID or you can skip this step by pressing #

#### **Step 4**

Enter the meeting password.

For the Circuit Welcome Service this is **961079** followed by #

*When connecting by phone:*

- *Telephone participants will remain muted throughout the service.*
- *Cost of the call will be charged at standard rate as per your telephone bill.*

---

May you know the assurance of God's love with you in the coming days,

***In peace & hope, Rev Dan***

*Another bit of feedback was that some of you like the photo's I sometimes share. So here's one of a bee on a Dalia (If I remember correctly!) that I took while on annual leave.*

