

“Be kind and compassionate to one another...” Ephesians 4: 32

Dear Friends,

Forgive me that this letter has by necessity a more practical focus to it than many of my previous letters over the past 18 months. There are a number of issues that I need to provide some information on in order to enable the life and mission of our churches and circuit to move forward as smoothly as possible. These issues concern the lifting of covid restrictions by the Government on Monday and how that affects how we choose to work as churches, the roles and responsibilities of Circuit Staff for the coming Connexional Year 2021-22, and the provision of pastoral letters and service sheets for those who are either unable or at this point not ready to return to physical worship.

The eagle-eyed among you will have spotted by now that for the first time in 18 months I have stuck with the same scriptural quotation with which I have started these letters as I used last week. That is very deliberate because those words: “Be kind and compassionate to one another,” express, I think, the attitudes we need to live with and express over the coming weeks.

Covid Restrictions

In many ways, the decision of the Government to lift all restrictions whilst the impact and spread of the virus is growing, has placed us in a more complex and difficult situation than we have thus far faced during the pandemic. There are now no legal requirements upon places of worship with regard to Covid and yet at the same time the Government and the Connexion are asking us to be cautious and considerate, especially towards those classed as being more vulnerable. Because of the age profile of our congregations, that is a request we have to take seriously.

There is also a legal requirement upon employers and organisations to provide a safe context for all those who are affected by the work of the organisation. That legal responsibility sits with our Church Councils. The way to fulfil this legal requirement is to ensure that we have in place up to date healthy and safety risk assessments and that such risk assessments should put in place “reasonable adjustments” to normal practice in order to protect people. As Superintendent Minister I am therefore asking all Church Councils to review their Risk Assessments as a matter of urgency. In theory, I could say that no church will be allowed to lift any restrictions until that risk assessment has been reviewed and approved. However, I feel a more pastoral tone and approach is appropriate at this time and therefore I am inviting church leadership teams to consider, and if possible, implement the following suggestions as appropriate to your local church context:

- That people attending worship in church buildings be asked to wear masks on entry and exit from the buildings and if they are moving around within the building.
- That people are actively given permission to continue to wear masks throughout if they feel the need to do so.
- That we invite people to wear masks when singing to minimise the risk of spreading the virus.

- Whilst social distancing requirements have been lifted we encourage people to leave space between themselves and people of other households, given that in most places we have the space to do so.
- That we continue to give people the opportunity to leave contact details for test and trace purposes.
- That we maintain good ventilation by keeping doors/windows open.
- That where possible, churches continue to project material rather than reverting to hymn/song books and pew Bibles.
- That we continue to take offerings online and/or via a retiring collection plate rather than passing a plate round during a service.
- That for the time being we continue to **not** provide refreshments at the end of a service.
- That we continue to minimise contact with communion elements.
- That we refrain from physical greetings because we do not know how they will be received or the level of anxiety they will create.
- And that we continue to limit the length of a service to about 45mins.

If we work in these ways it will mean that the necessity to book a place at church is lifted and that we are able to engaged in communal singing in as safe a way as possible. The reasons for asking you to work in these ways are out of care and compassion for all of you. We know that there is still a large number of people in society who have not had one vaccination let alone 2 and we also know that the double dose vaccinations are around 85% effective at preventing hospitalisation. That means there is still the possibility for a significant number of people to become seriously ill from Covid, even if they are fully vaccinated. It is also important to note that many of us live with, or come into contact with, people who are not yet vaccinated who we may unwittingly pass the virus to. So I do urge caution and compassion as we seek to move forward.

Circuit Ministerial Staff Roles and Responsibilities

As of September, we shall be working with a reduced Ministerial staffing level through to August of next year. In order to help our churches and circuit thrive it is important both that we have clarity on Ministerial roles and expectations of our Ministers, and that each and every one of us considers what role we have to play in the life and mission of our church and circuit. I can address the first part of that now but only you can address the second part so I urge you as we continue to review the life of our churches as we emerge from Covid to consider what gifts and graces God has equipped you with and how you could use them to further the mission of God in this place.

As to Pastoral Charge, the following arrangements are being put in place:

Rev Tim Perkins: Burley, Menston, Otley, Superintendent.

Rev Shannon Delaureal: Addingham, Ben Rhydding, Hawksworth, Norwood Management Team.

Rev Roger Smith: Bramhope, Guiseley, Pool, Yeadon.

Rev Dr Roberta Topham: Christchurch, Ilkley

As an Authorised Minister, Rev Helem Lambert will continue in her role in Pastoral Charge of Trinity, Rawdon.

Alongside pastoral charge roles there are other resources and ways of working that will be in place as follows:

Deacon Liz Day will continue to work alongside Tim at Burley and alongside Shannon at Addingham and Ben Rhydding. In order to develop a clearer focus and level of understanding, Liz will be the lead Minister for Pastoral concerns at Burley and at Ben Rhydding and Shannon will be the lead Minister for Pastoral concerns at Addingham.

Rev Roberta Topham will be offering preaching appointments to the wider circuit in a more focussed way so that at least some of them are used to lead worship and develop provision

for worship alongside Tim at one of the churches he will hold pastoral charge of. This will probably be Menston.

As with this last year we are developing a small team of preachers to work alongside Tim at Otley and this will include Rev Alistair Newton as he continues to offer support to that congregation.

We are actively working to bring additional lay support into the circuit to work alongside Roger at Bramhope, Guiseley, Pool and Yeadon, in the form of part-time activity coordinator roles.

It is going to be an even more demanding year for the Ministerial Team than the current one has proved to be so please remember those words of St Paul and consider how you can help out.

Pastoral Letters and Service Sheets

Due to staff annual leave over the coming weeks, this will be the final Circuit Pastoral Letter at least until September. However, as a Ministerial Team we are conscious that there are still a significant number of people who either cannot get to services in church or who are not yet ready to, or even, where services are not yet back in place. We want to ensure that everyone receives something that enables them to participate in worship but to do so in a way that doesn't create unnecessary repetition. We have therefore decided that there will be one service sheet distributed across the circuit for each week in August. This will be based on a service created by an organisation called "Twelve Baskets" through "The Vine", their worship at home sheet. It has been adapted to our context. All five weeks will be sent out at the start of next week for ease of distribution to those who need them. The service sheets will also be accessible via the Circuit website: www.wandamethodists.org.uk and Burley's website: www.burleymethodist.org

Alongside the service sheets, Twelve Baskets have created videos of sermons or reflections which can be accessed either via the Circuit website or Burley's Youtube Channel: [Burley Methodist Church Online - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

We hope that these resources, along with the physical services which will be taking place, will enable everyone to participate in worship which they find engaging and which helps to connect them with God.

Circuit Farewell Service

The Circuit Farewell Service for Deacon Jenny Parnell will take place via zoom this Sunday evening at 6pm. The zoom link below will be live from 5.45pm. Please do join us if you are able to as we give thanks for Jenny's ministry amongst us and pray for her as she moves to her new appointment.

<https://zoom.us/j/91404900186>

Meeting ID: 914 0490 0186 (no passcode required)

Every blessing,

Rev Tim