

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

August 2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The other day Jean and I purchased new running shoes from a local running shop – the trip was long overdue as our existing shoes were already three years old and wearing rather thin on the soul(!) Needless to say, the shopping trip was far from normal for it involved queuing outside the shop and then socially distancing within the shop environment by making sure to stand on one of the green circles two metres apart. We then struggled to make ourselves heard through the muffling effect of face masks as we explained what we were looking for and what kind of shoe might best suit our needs. I was rather relieved to finally leave the shop with shoe boxes under our arms and a successful purchase! As I reflected on this somewhat disorientating experience I was reminded once again that emergence from the *lockdown* measures is proving to be so much more complex than perhaps any of us really imagined at the beginning of this crisis.

As I write this letter at the beginning of August I am aware that all across the District churches and circuits are grappling with the guidelines around the safe opening of our buildings and the return to public worship – risk assessments are being completed, COVID secure plans are being drawn up and careful assessments are being made about which places of worship can open safely and securely in the interests of public health. When we do return there will be an element of the *strange* and the *unfamiliar* – we are not allowed congregational singing, refreshments before or after the service are not possible, the celebration of Holy Communion will be different in kind and social interaction should be kept to a minimum. In our obvious desire to return to the pattern of public worship we should not underestimate how disorientating some of this will feel – particularly for those in the Methodist tradition who have been shaped by the practise of public singing, friendly fellowship and a deep cherishing of the sacraments.

The newly appointed President of Conference the Revd. Richard Teal has reminded us that we need to renew our confidence in the faithfulness of God – the covenant God who remains deeply wedded to our well-being in moments of disorientation when all can feel lost and forlorn. The presidential theme for the year is ‘Best of all God is with us!’ and it seems very apt that this challenge will be kept before us in the year when we emerge from the viral pandemic. However disconcerting this period of time proves to be, we are encouraged to entrust ourselves, others and the world around us into the enfolding and enduring presence of God. I end this month with some words from Charles Wesley and I commend them to you for study and prayer:

***Captain of Israel's host, and Guide
Of all seek the land above,
Beneath your shadow we abide,
The cloud of your protecting love:
Our strength, your grace; our rule, your word;
Our end, the glory of the Lord***

With Peace and Blessing, Julian