

Dear Friends

**Preparing to reopen our buildings - remember the church has always been open**

I hope that you continue to keep well and are also managing to keep in touch with one another. I continue to pray for you all. It has been superb to hear how people are talking to each other for far longer than they ever have and that they are finding out more and more about each other. This has been a strange time and we have learnt so much to take us into the future or the new norm as we are hearing it called.

As we think about the new future it is exciting, the new challenges we can explore, and new ways of doing things. We are beginning the process of risk assessments on all of our buildings as we explore whether we are ready to reopen them and what that will look like, it will certainly be very different. We are risk assessing the reopening of our buildings, not our worship. Our church has always been open; we have continued to worship together, it is only the building that has been closed.

We all know that if we go on public transport or into shops we have to wear masks, and they are encouraged to be worn in enclosed public spaces where there are people that you do not normally meet, such as places of worship. The Methodist Church is encouraging everyone to wear a facemask when we do reopen buildings. There will also be many other instructions which we will send out when a church is ready to open.

We hope to begin reopening some churches in the circuit during September, but for now we still have much to get ready. It will be a phased reopening and it may well mean that churches will not be open every week and not all churches in the circuit will initially be open.

Most important to me and the staff is your safety. I know that we like to gather in the building to worship, to glorify God, and to do that together, however, even if a church is open it does not mean you must come to church. We can worship wherever we are; separately but

together. We will continue to produce the Circuit Worship Sheet, the Recorded Service and Zoom Services.

Whether you feel able to return to church or not will be your decision and to help you in your thinking I am enclosing a personal risk assessment. This is not mandatory but for guidance. It has been produced by the URC and I feel it is very helpful. You will see on the back of it how to score yourself and it may well recommend that you continue to participate in church life from home. This must be read in conjunction with government and local advice about staying safe.

**Please put your safety first and do not think you must go to the church building just because it is open!**

I have received these words which I think are very wise "These last months have proved that virtually anything is possible with the will and the motivation. PLEASE let us not get bogged down in our old anxieties about the way we have always done things. Recent weeks have proved that you never know what can be achieved until you try; always, of course, with reliance on the leading of the Spirit.

This will all take time, please bear with us, continue to pray for one another, stay safe and ask for God's guidance as we go forward.

God bless  
Debbie



Culford School from Hannah Stammers

Last Autumn, the MIST Chaplains took part in a Child Bereavement training course. At the time, little did any of us think that we would all need to use that knowledge in the next year. School chaplaincy in a pandemic has not been easy. My inclination is to be with the bereaved, to hug the distressed and to clasp hands in prayer with the lonely. Over a phone, I have to think of something to say! Collective Worships are now all pre-recorded and it feels a lonely affair indeed preaching to my phone screen. However, being a school chaplain in the middle of a pandemic has also been an extraordinary privilege and has opened my eyes to the wonders of technology that enable us to be physically apart but still together.

A hundred years ago in the Spanish flu epidemic, schools did not have the luxury of teaching online. Schools in parts of Suffolk closed only for ten days, and no doubt pupils and staff remaining in school contributed to the tragic death toll. The landscape now is so very different: we can teach, meet and pray online.

September is a bit of an unknown for teachers. Government guidelines change quickly and we are well aware of the need for plans A, B and C. I jokingly suggested to a colleague the other day that my new chaplaincy motto was 'working on a wing and a prayer' and it certainly feels like it at times! But really, the Bible passage that springs to mind when planning for the challenges September brings is Philippians 4:13 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'. It's a message that can speak to all of us in every setting at this time – whether school, home, church or hospital.

Nothing is impossible with God.



Newsletter from the Bury St Edmunds Circuit  
for Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Friends

**I would encourage you to read the centre article in this newsletter before the paper entitled Making Choices about returning to Activities in the Church Buildings.**

Things are beginning to move forward, more and more people are going out. I have heard many people say I feel safe now because people wear masks in the shops – I would ask you please do be careful, people are not wearing masks in the streets, or the markets etc. Covid 19 has not gone away as we have recently realised with the new spike in Spain which has resulted in new quarantine laws.

As we move forward it is good to be going out, and this weekend I have had the delight of a friend staying with me and we have cautiously gone out. A friend I have known for many, many years and together we have gone through thick and thin!

It reminds me of the story of Ruth that we have been using for Bible Month. Ruth and Naomi managed to get through all their problems together, they were there for each other and it is good to have a friend like that. However, at the centre holding the relationship together was the love of God. He never leaves us even when we think life is hard, or when life is really good, or when we are too busy to remember him – he is there! Through all that we have been through God travels with us and will continue to do that. He will hold our hand and lead us when we struggle with our faith, he will guide us on our journey, he will carry us when life is so hard. And as we begin to look to open our buildings he will continue to hold our hand. We may have struggled through the pandemic, but God is always there and will walk with us as we find our way forward, through thick and thin.

It reminds me of the wonderful hymn

What a friend we have in Jesus

All our sins and griefs to bear!

Together we grow in the love of God. *From Debbie, Ruth and Rita*