

Vale of Stour Coronavirus Guidance 17 March 2020

Methodist Church 17 March, 2020 - Vale of Stour Circuit

Thank you for your patience today - at 3pm the Methodist Church issued a formal communication to all churches in response to the government's announcement yesterday.

The full text of this is here:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus/>

1. Worship and Meetings Suspended - based on direction from the Connexion

From today all church meetings and planned events are suspended and this coming weekend there will be no services. **BUT churches should note that the option to open our buildings for prayer has been left as a local decision.** Clearly the important thing here is to avoid too many people spending too much time, too close together - so perhaps opening up at certain times of day, playing some quiet music and inviting people to come for 15-20 minutes of quiet reflection whilst avoiding gathering as groups, may be a sensible solution.

The ministry team will look to provide some reflective resources. If preachers also have some resources please could you offer them.

a) Can we therefore ask each local church - in conversation between the stewards and the minister - to assess if you want to open your building at what times and to communicate this to your local congregation.

2. Pastoral Support of the Isolated.

One of the most important things we now need to do is to ensure that we keep a proper eye on those in our churches and local communities who will become isolated because of the current government advice.

The ministers and leadership team suggest the following:

a) Can pastoral leaders please make sure that your pastoral visitor team know the telephone numbers of the people on their list and can they please be encouraged to ring round and get a sense of people's situation and needs (eg shopping...)

b) To share this pastoral load in the coming weeks **can we seek to create an 'adoption' programme** between mobile, younger people/families and older more vulnerable members who may be self-isolating to protect themselves. On this basis please could those who are less at risk and who are reading this email please volunteer to help by contacting your church pastoral leader.

c) Many of our older members do not have internet access so please can you print and sharing this letter and ongoing new / notices from your church as thing progress.

3. Access to Worship Resources at Home

We are keen to provide resources to people to enable worship to continue in the home. Please share the following ideas and links as best as your are able. We also hope to share some Vale of Stour Specific resources in due course:

a) Services on Radio and Television

- BBC Radio 4 LW has a daily bible reading/prayer/reflection at 9.45am

- BBC Radio 4 has a Sunday morning service at 8.10am
- Premier Radio on Sundays has: Favourite hymns/songs at 8am and Worship at 10am

b) Internet Resources (beware - there are many of variable quality!)

We recommend:

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/>

- See Worship during the coronavirus pandemic.

Our friends at Family Friendly Churches – are offering, free of charge, weekly prayers, address and a couple of hymns as videos (with words and music) for use within the home. These can be found at:

<http://www.ffctideas.org.uk/Corona.php>

4. Helping the Wider Community

We have a calling to love those beyond our walls. There is much we can do for those around us. For example the news highlighted a family who put cards through the doors of neighbours offering help. People who rely on extra support to receive essential food and resources may find the next few months particularly challenging.

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have produced a simple guide on how you can support foodbanks during the coronavirus pandemic. See:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16393/foodbanks-and-covid-19.pdf>

A Closing Reflection

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ - adversity is common for many across the world. How we respond really matters and speaks to the heart of our faith. We are children of a creative and loving God who has shown us that it is always possible, by God's grace, to find and bring goodness out of adversity.

Philippians 4:12–13 (NRSV): *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Despite incredible challenges and even threats to life, loneliness and job security, these next few weeks will offer many of us a different daily routine than we may have never experienced before. Let us together, as a people of hope, seek, find and share God presence with those we meet and serve.

Please print the attached version of this letter and pass to as many as possible - thank you.

God bless you and be with you in the weeks to come.

Rev Alan Combes and the Vale of Stour Circuit Leadership Team