

## Wolverhampton Methodist Circuit

### COVID-19 Response – 17-03-2020

***This document is sent to senior church stewards, Local Preachers, the Circuit Leadership Team and Supernumerary ministers. Please forward to other officers as required and discuss with your minister how this information will be communicated to your congregations.***

It is with sadness and disappointment that Circuit Leadership Team (“CLT”) has reacted to the latest guidance issued by the Connexional Team by **suspending worship in all of the circuit churches from now until further notice**. [St. Andrew’s, being a Local Ecumenical Partnership is to consider its position to public worship on Thursday].

This suspension also **applies to other church activities** such as lunch clubs, after school clubs, playgroups and fellowship groups etc. These activities should be suspended as soon as possible.

It is also recommended that we **cease to meet face to face for church meetings** including church councils and circuit meetings. Given the nature of the situation it is not clear at the moment what and when business will need to be transacted through those meetings. The CLT will advise when as and when required.

**Please assume, and encourage others to assume, that activities are cancelled unless you hear otherwise.**

This is, I think, unprecedented and will naturally lead to concerns for a church that believes deep in our DNA that we have no faith but a social faith and a faith that witnesses at the margins – being where no-one else is. We are asked now to be the church in new and foreign territory and that’s going to take some figuring out.

We are communicating tonight our current position. We are reacting to the situation. Our response – how we seek God in this situation – will develop and we will let things develop naturally rather than forcing a response in the heat of today’s decisions.

You will no doubt have many questions. We have tried to answer the questions we have anticipated. If you have other questions please email them to [christopher.collins@methodist.org.uk](mailto:christopher.collins@methodist.org.uk) and we will issue a FAQ sheet from time to time.

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That said, here are some initial thoughts:

**How do we continue to witness the love of Christ?** This is the very moment when we need each other, and we can look after each other. Regular phone calls offers of collecting groceries or prescriptions if it is safe to do so. We can also look out for our neighbours and other vulnerable people in our neighbourhood. If you see a need or have an idea, please let us know.

This is the time to engage our creativity in new and vivid ways to communicate the love of God for these times. We are going to share ideas and stories on our circuit Facebook page. If you can’t access Facebook, please do email [christopher.collins@methodist.org.uk](mailto:christopher.collins@methodist.org.uk) with your great ideas so we can share them.

**How can we look after each other?** We encourage churches to keep in regular and sustained contact with people who can’t make it to church through appropriate means paying attention to the people on the fringes of our communities.

Ministers and local leadership teams will be developing ways of keeping in touch and responding to pastoral concerns. You can help by encouraging people to say if we need to respond differently. Tell us now when we can address it!

**How can we continue to worship?** There are lots of ideas already in circulation. There are links in the Methodist guidance to worship at home sheets and to services streamed from Wesley's chapel. We are working on developing local resources and a way of getting them to people in our churches. We can also point people to Radio 4 Sunday worship and BBC Songs of Praise.

Ministers in collaboration with local leadership teams will be looking at how we can open our buildings for personal prayer. We will let you know when this begins to emerge.

**What about baptisms, weddings and funerals?** Firstly **baptisms**: our guidance is that baptisms are not to take place in public worship and we should seek to advise parents to consider rebooking later but if they are to take place it should be with the smallest gathering possible (candidate, parents and God-parents). There is no question about emergency baptism which will always be honoured.

**Weddings**: where weddings continue consider how to minimise the congregation (Bride, Groom and two witnesses). If this is the case we will offer a blessing at a later point to celebrate with family and friends. We wouldn't anticipate charging a separate fee for this. Where weddings are postponed into 2021 we will honour the fees agreed for 2020.

**Funerals**: can still take place but with a smaller congregation. Again, we could offer a small funeral now and a thanksgiving service later in the year – again we'd anticipate no additional fee. We anticipate that this situation will continue to evolve and further guidance will be issued as and when appropriate.

**What about other groups that use our buildings?** We anticipate that most groups will have already suspended their own meetings. Where they have not we strongly recommended they do. We do not anticipate receiving license payments (rent) while groups cannot meet.

Where groups wish to continue please ensure that a trustee or leader of the group is sent an email or letter setting our recommendation that they suspend and if they continue, they do so at their own risk.

**Paying attention to Safeguarding and Data Protection:** The Methodist Church guidance contains clear guidance on developing our safer culture through Safeguarding in this situation. Please read it carefully. Equally we need to remember our obligations under GDPR and not to share addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses without the data owners permission.

Revd Christopher J Collins (in consultation with Revd Joanne Cox-Darling and Mr James Peterson)

On behalf of the CLT

17-03-2020