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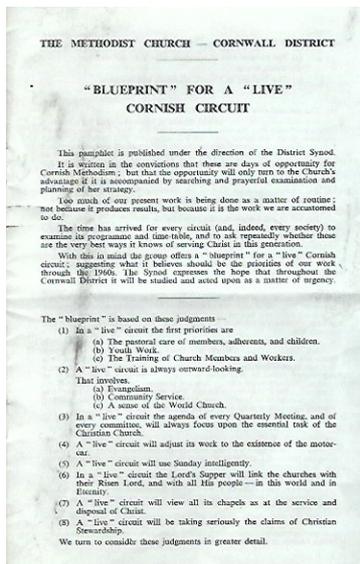
Circuit Pastoral Letter - March 2021

Dear friends

Well, we now have a roadmap. The Government has set out the route that we will be following over a very long period of time to get us out of lockdown, so that we can finally reach something that might be described as 'normal life'. There are stages along the way that bring us, one step at a time, to the point where we can think of a world without social distancing and face masks, and where we can gather in groups without fear. But from here on, we will always mark events as 'before Covid' or 'after Covid' - in the same way that older people talk about 'before the war' and 'after'. It has been a major event in world history, and things won't be the same again, however much we might long for them to be.



When a minister moves to a new place, inevitably papers are handed on. Some are very useful, others...less so. I found a pamphlet when I came to Falmouth, entitled, *'Blueprint for a 'Live' Cornish Circuit'*. It outlines the characteristics of a 'live' circuit - one that sets out the priorities for work as we move forward. It covers areas such as pastoral work, youth work and training of members and workers. It suggests that a 'live' circuit is always looking outwards - evangelism, community service, and a sense of belonging to a World Church. It talks about the meetings that are held, and ensuring that they focus on the essential tasks of a Christian Church, and about how we use our time - especially in relation to worship, and reminding ourselves of the central importance of Holy Communion. It closes by reflecting on resources: our chapels and other buildings, and our personal stewardship of all we have (our money) and are (our abilities and time).



You may be thinking that this document has passed you by - perhaps it was in the pile of papers from the last Synod, or something. The document is undated, but there are a few clues about its age. One is the reference to taking account of the existence of the motor car!! Another is the reference to suggested giving of 1/- in the pound (do you remember shillings?!). The final one is a reference to looking forward to the 1960s. However, I couldn't find anything in this pamphlet that wasn't still relevant today. More than that, rather to our shame, I could see that we haven't made much (if any) progress on most of these areas in the intervening 60+ years.

The last year - most of it without services in our places of worship - has concentrated our minds on the truth that *the church is the people not the building*. We have learnt to worship online, through Zoom or YouTube. We have become much better at maintaining pastoral contact with members of our congregations, especially those on the periphery of our churches. We have exhibited love and care in a way that is a true expression of Christian discipleship.

Now what? The roadmap set out by the Government does not say anything directly about churches or ways of worship. That is up to us. Where do we go to from here? What does being church mean in the world 'after Covid'? We have an opportunity, having stopped what we were doing, to start againbut doing the things we ought to be doing. We don't need to repeat the mistakes of the past, or live in a way that is out of date and irrelevant to the modern world.



Lent is traditionally a time of reflection. A time to pause and consider what we have been and what we have done, to be contrite....and then to be different. How are we going to be different after lockdown? Where will we worship? On which days and times will we hold our services? What will they look like? How will we express Christian love and compassion to

a hurting world? How will we show and tell people what Christian discipleship looks like?

Do we want to be a 'live' Cornish Circuit? Make no mistake, it's costly. It means giving up things that may be very familiar, and indeed precious, to us. It means re-ordering our priorities. It means accepting that the God who makes all things new is asking us to go along with the unexpected, the uncomfortable, the challenging. But if we do want to be a 'live' Cornish Circuit, perhaps we had better dust off our copies of the ancient blueprint, and be guided into a future of hope.

A prayer from Day 24 in the Methodist Prayer Handbook:

God of yesterday, we thank you for the rich heritage of our faith in writing, music and architecture and in the examples set by those who have followed you down the centuries.

God of today, we praise you that we meet you in our daily lives, in worship and through the kindness of others, in the ordinary and extraordinary.

God of tomorrow, we thank you that you will be with us as we journey onwards. Help us to trust you and to turn to you in faith, for you will travel with us every step of the way. Amen

Catherine James, local preacher, Derby Circuit.

With this letter I hope you will find Deacon Jane's latest newsletter 'The Way Ahead'.

May the 40 days of Lent be a time of real blessing to you, where you encounter afresh the living God, who calls us to be a living people...in our living Circuit!

Love

Andrew

Rev Andrew Mumford

**Superintendent Minister
Falmouth and Gwennap Methodist Circuit**

