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Falmouth and Gwennap Circuit Pastoral letter – July

Dear Friends

I can hardly believe that I am writing the July pastoral letter already, the longest day has passed, and the school year finishes in a few weeks. I hope this finds you well, to me the first half of this year seems to have gone by in a flurry of dates, deadlines and changing restrictions. As I write we still anticipate that many restrictions in England will be lifted on 19 July, having been delayed four weeks due to new variants and the time required to vaccinate most of the adult population.

The reduced restrictions on travel have already been a relief for many of us, finally able to see friends and family members after so long, yet there is still anxiety about the further lifting of restrictions. Cases continue to rise in Cornwall, local businesses have been forced to close for a few days following staff members testing positive, and several schools have sent a class or year group home for similar reasons.

The vaccine rollout now includes all those over the age of 18, yet the future may still not be as clear as we would like it to be. There are hopeful signs that some of the limits on what we are able to do may soon be eased, wouldn't it be nice to be able to sing in our churches again!? We are going ahead with a Circuit meeting 'on site' at Falmouth Methodist Church on July 8th (the safe meeting of trustees being allowed within current restrictions). Whilst the technology that has allowed us to continue 'meeting' during lockdown has been helpful, some people have been unable to participate, and computer links cannot truly replace the quality of engagement that actually 'getting together' enables.

So July is here, the 4th of July is celebrated in the US, as 'Independence Day', but, herein lies a problem. The story of American independence, like many historical events, is understood differently depending on who and where you are. Yes, it marks the birth of America as an independent nation, freed from colonial government, but it was a nation that did not recognise the citizenship of the indigenous people, and with many states that did not allow women and/or African Americans to vote. Independence, such as it was, was not inclusive. No telling of this history, however, paints the British in a positive light. As we, and other European nations, colonised the 'new world' those who already called it home were dismissed as 'savage' and, as the country developed, those born there were not equal, regardless of allegiance, often being overlooked when it came to promotion or political office.

This was true even within the Church who would not allow America its own Bishops, an injustice John Wesley recognised which was finally to lead him to 'part company' with the Church he had once held so dear. Whilst ever church language allowed people to equate 'the mother country' with all that was good, including heaven, equality was always going to suffer.

But we are a colony of heaven on earth as we cling tightly to our life-giver, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our humble bodies and transfigure us into the identical likeness of his glorified body. And using his matchless power, he continually subdues everything to himself. Philippians 3:20-21

So how are we to understand the notion of being Citizens of Heaven rather than earth, or a colony of heaven, when we are also to abide by the law of the land and are expected to offer hospitality to all?

For all the latest news about the Falmouth and Gwennap Methodist Circuit please check our online presence:

Website – <http://fandgmc.org.uk/>

Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/Falmouth-and-Gwennap-Methodist-Circuit-126416989738/>

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Scripture has many passages that describe the good things that await us in Gods Kingdom. Christ gave us the mission to spread his teachings, through preaching, healing, practical service and by living as examples, so that all may come to know that this Kingdom is for everyone. Unfortunately, human nature has always had the tendency to 'get in the way', indeed many of the epistles seem to be responding to situations where selfishness or bias have crept in, leading to the early church not including everybody in shared meals, or not treating people equally due to their wealth or background.

Sadly, this has been many peoples' experience of Church, as the world has changed around us, we have failed to keep in step. In ages past churches tended to be the biggest, most imposing buildings and Church 'loomed large', having a voice in society being held in high regard. These days it is a different story, as offices and tower blocks have come to dominate the skyline, so too Church is held in less regard by society. To many people Sunday is just another day, and as our 'standing' has diminished our gaze turns outwards once again, forcing church to become:

"perhaps what it always should have been, a small, even suffering, community. Identifying more with the poor than the powerful, although let's not forget that the powerful need God as much as the poor do. Power for the church lies not in its wealth and great buildings, but in its loving service. And its service must be out there in the loneliness so often found in the tower blocks, rather than offered from the warm security of the church". Eddie Askew; 'Breaking the rules'

As Families are forced apart for work, and houses are snapped up as second homes, more and more people find themselves living alone in once thriving communities. This, and the increase in unemployment, has left many with little hope and there is a heightened need for voluntary organisations to respond. The church can and should be the vanguard, we need to be seen carrying out our mission, to become a 'flock' that people respect and want to be a part of once again. By making our faith known in our communities we become the witnesses that the New Testament repeatedly calls us to be.

In a year the ministry team in this circuit will reduce once again, we can no longer maintain what we have become accustomed to, i.e. 15 independent societies with 15 services, 12 of which start within half an hour of each other! Although some are currently content to meet fortnightly, we need to go further. As a Circuit we face a 'Crunch Time', in response we are running a drop-in time of prayer and discussion on Saturday July 31st, 10am-2pm in the grounds of Stithians Methodist Church. Please come if you are able, contact your minister about other ways you could be involved.

While I do not wish to take anything from the celebrations of Independence Day, I do want to challenge the personal independence/individuality that has become central to western culture. Over the years the UK has developed a culture of 'I', embodied by phrases such as 'charity begins at home' or 'Not in my backyard', which is negative when exploring the call to place the needs of others before our own. This was not always the case and there is much we can learn from other cultures. The indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, New Zealand have a saying that translates as **"My strength is not as an individual, but that of many"**. Similarly, there is an ancient African notion of 'Ubuntu' - literally 'humanity to others', which means **'I am what I am because of who we all are'**, i.e. the community I belong to is an integral part of my identity — these cultures, like Christianity, are based not on I but We, which is a much healthier approach to life.

Methodism is as a 'Connexion' of individuals, chapels, circuits and districts, the idea being that those with 'means' support those without. Sadly, when we are struggling we tend to look inwards, seeking to 'hold on to what we have', and it can be hard to see beyond what we have always done and what we want. Understanding that 'It's not about me' and that the needs of others as valuable as our own, is essential. If we allow ourselves to look at 'the bigger picture' and share with others we may just find that we can become more than we thought possible, and I pray that is exactly what unfolds.

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