



Romans 12: 1-13



The Methodist Church

Falmouth & Gwennap Circuit (12/3)

Pastoral letter to Members & Friends of the Falmouth & Gwennap Methodist Circuit

Alone Together

Dear Friends,

May 31st 2020

As I write the sun is high, the sky is blue, flowers are abundant, the birds are singing and nestlings beginning to fledge, 'June is busting out all over' to quote the song from Carousel. Life is all around us and, though the streets are slowly beginning to get busier again, it is certainly not going to be a normal June in Cornwall! So many individuals rely on seasonal employment, many of our businesses rely on tourism and some crops have relied on transitory staff to bring in the harvest. How so ever the current situation is affecting you, I pray that June finds you well.

There is solidarity in being alone at the moment, we are all facing difficulties living in new circumstances, we are united in managing isolation. Whilst we are all required to remain socially distant and many people still need to isolate, we do not all cope equally, it is becoming increasingly evident that there is a difference between being alone and being lonely. Many 'introverts', who are comfortable in their own company, have thrived whilst many 'extroverts', who revel in company have found it harder. Some people struggle to focus on anything but what they cannot do, while others have grasped the time available to them to engage in crafts, music, gardening and other hobbies they do not usually have time to do. Our task is to seek out those who are struggling, reach out, and attempt to help.

Last month Robbie wrote about Culture shock, relating the experience of going to Sierra Leone as a Mission Partner. Following his thinking we are now approaching stage three, starting to accept the new way of doing things, and we are doing that just in time for the start of the easing of restrictions.

My own experience of spending time in South Africa whilst training for ministry has taught me that we expect the new to be different, but it can actually be the return home that is shocking. Moving from a place where there was little available in many shops to the overwhelming variety on our supermarket shelves, and the excess and waste that produces for example.

If we were to follow this thinking through, what may this 'reverse culture shock' look like as the lockdown is eased? Some people are already more nervous driving, there is lingering anxiety about social interaction, there is reluctance to lose the quality time some have been able to spend with those in their household and I am not looking forward to having to travel to evening meetings again.

Despite the negativity that is bolstered by press and social media, there is evidence that the majority of people have responded to the lockdown with solidarity rather than resentment. We talk about 'the British Bulldog spirit' as a thing from the past, yet a recent poll revealed that British people still believe that lives are more important than economics.¹ Local evidence of this is very clear in those communities who are striving to ensure the most vulnerable are not left to fend for themselves, Indeed Maurice and I, forced to stay home to 'Shield', were recipients of so much assistance from people in Falmouth in the weeks before we were able to arrange groceries to be delivered.

Cracks have become apparent in the society we knew pre COVID-19, can we dare to hope that the mutual interdependence we have come to rely on will continue beyond the restrictions? If life post lockdown is to enable this set of values each of us will be required to change the way we do things, we will need to re-learn what is 'normal' and develop new habits of home life, church, travel, shopping and mutual support.

¹ conducted by Populus for the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, at the University of Birmingham

Change requires patience and relies on our capacity to live with the kind of hope that acknowledges that the future is uncertain, indeed, it will be this very uncertainty that inspires us to try to make things better.

I pray that we can collectively take this opportunity to seek a future that looks more like God's kingdom, that we do this in the name of God, recognising that what harms any individual also harms us.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God Romans 12: 2a

God bless and stay safe,

Jane

Deacon Jane Mills *Circuit Minister*

Robbie writes:-

What happens church-wise when we come out of lock down? A question on our minds! The Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) have been discussing this; this is our broad plan:-

That we:-

- await further Methodist Church and government guidance before making definite plans.
- make any draft plan only when guidance is clearer, maybe on a month-by-month basis.
- restart church-held worship, *from a date convenient to us (agreed by CLT)* after permission to restart is given. (Likely to be some time on/after July 4th, depending on what notice we receive).
- follow guidance on preparation of buildings, especially in terms of cleaning and social distancing.
- initially use our ministers/pastor in leading worship, in up to 3 or 4 centres on a Sunday.
- approach the way of worship flexibly, possibly, eg, using a drop-in format.

The CLT will be discussing this in detail; we ask that the Circuit abide by decisions the CLT makes. I hope this answers some questions, even if it generates a lot more! Please feel free to be in touch with your thoughts.

Contact Details

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|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| • Rev Robbie Bowen | 01326 378616 | robert.bowen@methodist.org.uk |) <i>Please feel</i> |
| • Rev Liz Harris | 01209 820077 | elizabeth.harris@methodist.org.uk |) <i>free to</i> |
| • Deacon Jane Mills | 01326 211361 | itsjanemills@gmail.com |) <i>phone for</i> |
| • Rev Andrew Mumford | 07557 569520 | andrew.mumford@methodist.org.uk |) <i>a chat at</i> |
| • Pastor Jenny Lockwood | 01209 213657 | jenny.lockwood@btinternet.com |) <i>any time.</i> |
| • Chris Trewern (Admin) | 01872 863140 | office@fandgfmc.org.uk | |