



7<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear friends

I write this letter as the debate develops within the country as to how lockdown will begin to be lifted and over what timeframe. With regard to returning to churches for worship, and as sanctuaries for prayer, many things will continue to need to be considered to ensure we are keeping each other safe and playing our part in minimising the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The Connexional Team will offer updated guidance when they are able. The Superintendents of the District are discussing these matters each week, too, in our regular 'Zoom' meeting.

I want to make it clear that we do not expect any return to regular patterns of worship in our church buildings for some considerable time. However government policies develop there will be an ongoing need to uphold social distancing and to especially protect those who are shielding and in vulnerable groups. In many of our contexts this will make corporate worship unsafe and impractical.

It may be that it becomes possible, relatively soon, to once again hold occasional small funerals in church, and to be open for personal prayer; but again this will only be when we can be absolutely confident that we are minimising risks of infection.

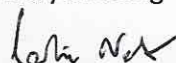
I appreciate that this is disappointing, as we all long for the time when we can gather together for corporate worship and meet around the Lord's Table. However, I trust that you will recognise the priority of keeping each other safe and playing our part in ensuring that our society can move through the effects of this pandemic as soon as possible.

Importantly, in the meantime please can I encourage you to continue to be imaginative and faithful in 'being church'. I have been so heartened by the many examples of worship, prayer and fellowship being offered online and offline. Many of you are involved in serving others with care and dedication. Please, as you are able, also continue to be generous in supporting local and global charities - and your local church. It is good to hear stories, too, of how we are responding to the desire of many people to hear the Good News of the gospel afresh in these days.

Although there is undoubtedly something very precious about meeting together in our churches, we are being reminded just how much our life together depends not on our buildings but our relationships - with God and each other. In this we are revisiting something rich in the experience and witness of the early church. We are the Body of Christ, and even in these most challenging days I firmly believe we have all we need to watch over each other in love and to serve the world with faith, hope and love.

I continue to hold you all in my prayers.

Every blessing

  
Leslie Newton  
District Chair