

Dear all

Please find the latest guidance from the Methodist Connexion below.

In the light of its opening paragraph, Rev Stephen our Superintendent, has asked to inform you that all public worship at the chapels in our Circuit will be suspended until further notice.

There is a lot to take in from this document, and ministers, stewards and others will need to read it carefully and act accordingly.

If you have any queries, please do come back to me.

John Keast
Circuit Administrator

Coronavirus guidance

Update 17 March 15:00

It is with sadness that we recommend that worship services in Methodist Churches are suspended for the time being in line with Government guidance. We would encourage people who lead services to think about how worship might be offered in different ways, including online and using [worship at home sheets](#).

During this incredibly difficult time when people might want to spend time in prayer in their Methodist Church. Local trustees should consider whether it is possible to open up their churches to enable people to come and pray or sit quietly, perhaps offering prayer stations as a point of reflection with precautions around physical distancing.

Suspending services means that we advise that baptisms will not take place in public worship and if you have a wedding planned in a Methodist Church you should speak to your minister. While funerals may still take place, we would advise that the number of people attending is limited as per the Government's advice.

In terms of Church business, we recommend that all meetings including church councils and circuit meetings should be cancelled. Districts chairs will be in touch about Synods. The next meeting of the Methodist Council has been suspended and we will advise on how essential business will be carried out. We will be issuing further advice on this.

Other community activities:

Foodbanks and night shelters: If your church runs a foodbank or night shelter please take notice of all the advice that has been given by the Government and the NHS. If you are concerned about older volunteers we advise that (in line with the guidance) they should stay at home. The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have produced [a simple guide on how you can support foodbanks](#) during the coronavirus pandemic.

Other community events like lunch clubs, after school clubs, playgroups and fellowship groups should be suspended.

Pastoral visits: in these extraordinary times, pastoral support is incredibly important and it's likely it may increase but we would advise that you contact people by phone in the first instance to check they are still happy for you to go in person. If you're visiting a care home or hospital take your guidance from them. You should also be mindful of [updated safeguarding guidance which you can find here](#)

[Pastoral concerns](#)

[Helping others](#)

[Worshipping at home](#)

[Safeguarding considerations](#)

[Planning ahead](#)

[Prayers](#)

[A message of thanks and support](#)

[Links to official information](#)

The Methodist Church is monitoring the situation around COVID-19 which at the moment is now considered a high risk by the UK's Chief Medical Officer. The Methodist Church has issued the following updated guidance to ensure the risks are reduced, recommending practical precautions to prevent the spread of infection. Should advice from the UK government change these guidelines will be updated, but please look regularly at the websites listed below for the latest information.

Pastoral concerns

Churches may want to consider carrying out pastoral 'visits' by phone. In any case it may be worth calling the person you are due to visit to check they are comfortable with you being there. Now is a good time to be thinking proactively about who in the church might need extra help should they decide or be required to self-isolate. Is there the need to create a plan for shopping for more vulnerable members of the community for example?

If you have someone who is not able to join your services, please consider [printing a service sheet](#) and dropping it round to them for them to use at home or email them this link to live services.

Remember that many people are anxious and a reassuring phone call and an offer to pray might be very much appreciated.

Helping others

People who rely on extra support to receive essential food and resources may find the next few months particularly challenging.

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have produced [a simple guide on how you can support foodbanks](#) during the coronavirus pandemic.

Worshipping at home

Last week we provided a worship at home service sheet. We will endeavour to coordinate this for the coming weeks. A new section on the Singing the Faith plus website has been created to host these materials. See [Worship during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

If you are willing to draft a similar act of worship please email Gabriella Mahadeva mahadevag@methodistchurch.org.uk who will send you guidelines and allocate you a particular Sunday.

Our friends at *Family Friendly Churches* – are offering, free of charge, weekly prayers, address and a couple of hymns as videos (with words and music) for use within the home. These can be found at: www.ffctideas.org.uk/Corona.php

Safeguarding considerations

Inevitably at this time churches are being encouraged to think about those who may be in greater need, isolated or unable to get out and about. Whilst working within government and health guidance about levels of contact and self-isolation we also want to remember standard safeguarding practice including:

- being clear about the role any visitor is performing
- making sure that anyone who is visiting has oversight from the church
- making sure that someone else is told about the visit, its purpose and reporting back any points of particular concern
- anyone who wishes to start visiting at this time undergoes standard safe recruitment processes

For those receiving visits

- Do not allow strangers into your home, even if they claim to be part of a Community Support Scheme. Check with the scheme first (not using the phone number supplied by your 'visitor')
- Do not pay for shopping in advance
- Pay for your shopping deliveries by:
 1. Bank transfer if you are online or a family member can arrange this
 2. Telephone banking – this can be arranged by phoning the number on the back of your bank card
 3. Cheque (if you don't have Covid19)
 4. Cash as a last resort

For those undertaking visits and/ or keeping in contact with members and associates

- You will need to think about care for your community who are ill or self-isolating, and how you can support them. Current advice for those who are self-isolating is to try to avoid visitors to your home - although friends, family or delivery drivers can drop off food. You might be able to collect essential supplies and medication for them. Also consider other methods of communicating with those who are ill or self-isolating, such as phone or email
- The new Foundation Module materials remind church volunteers and paid staff of the need to protect themselves, so as well as washing your hands as instructed, keep records of shopping payments, receipts etc.
- Pay particular attention to the care and needs of single people and the elderly who are isolated from their families.
- You may want to think about how you will pastorally and spiritually support your community during this time which may be frightening and difficult for some people. You can [download worship resources here](#) or perhaps direct people to livestreamed services online that they can take part in.

For superintendents

This period will inevitably present a number of challenges including managing safeguarding considerations and whilst the churches' safeguarding policy will continue to provide the main source of guidance and direction (add link to SG page), you may have to make temporary decisions in respect of individuals. This may mean that contact that individuals who may pose a risk to others or have restrictions placed on them by virtue of a Safeguarding Contract will need to be suspended or altered (as many subjects of Safeguarding contracts and/or MSG members will be over 70). Please contact your District Safeguarding Officer or the Connexional Safeguarding Team if you wish to discuss specific concerns.

Planning ahead

If keeping the church premises open, make sure it is well cleaned before and after use paying particular attention to surfaces and door handles.

If you're a minister, consider what your plan might be if someone in your congregation is diagnosed with the virus.

The latest Government advice is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#diagnosis-and-analysis>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation-for-patients-undergoing-testing/advice-sheet-home-isolation>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19>

Prayers

Remember that the Methodist Church is wider than Britain We are learning from our sisters and brothers around the world who are dealing with a difficult and uncertain situation and we would ask that you hold them in prayer, particularly those in affected areas.

Revd Paul Wood, Interim Director of the Ministries Team, said: "As we deal with the practicalities of protecting people from coronavirus we continue to remember Our Calling to care for the other whilst always being mindful that is that our call is always to respond to the good news in Jesus. We are a people of hope we need to declare and model good news in these difficult times."

Head of Mission, Jude Levermore said: "Our Calling is to respond in love and service to the needs of our communities. The aim of this advice is to help us do this even while the extent of the issue is still unclear. We are grateful to our sisters and brothers around the world who hold us in prayer as we hold them. We should not be afraid "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." [2 Timothy 1:7](#).

God of all hope we call on you today.

We pray for those who are living in fear:

Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them.

May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.

For those people who are worried about attending worship.

For those needing to make decisions in order to care for other

For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.

Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that

Nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.

Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you.

Amen

A message of thanks and support

Dear Friends,

Here at Methodist Church House we are working hard to support you all in Mission and Ministry to fulfil your calling. We wanted to say how grateful we are for the way you have responded to the challenges of these current times. We have seen so many of you going the extra mile in producing web based worship, in sharing resources, and in building one another up. This last Sunday we saw hundreds of examples across the Connexion of true connexionalism and we are so encouraged. This will be a marathon and not a sprint, we are committed to serving you as you

serve the world, take care of yourselves and please feel free to make contact if we can offer more, or you spot gaps that you might have ideas on filling. Thank you.

Jude Levermore Head of Mission and Paul Wood Interim Director of the Ministries Team

More information

[Guidance on avoiding the spread of the virus on the NHS website](#)

[Full details of the coronavirus outbreak from Public Health England.](#)

[Download an NHS handwashing poster to print out](#) (Pdf)

There is Government advice for travellers returning from various countries, including Italy. For latest guidance please click **[here](#)**.

If you have any questions regarding the Methodist Church and coronavirus, please email **enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk**

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