



## THE METHODIST CIRCUIT OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Superintendent Minister: The Revd John Hellyer

19 Estcourt Road, Gloucester, GL1 3LU

Telephone: 01452 933068 Email: [superintendent@glosccircuit.co.uk](mailto:superintendent@glosccircuit.co.uk)

January 2021

To Churches in the Gloucestershire Circuit.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Most of the churches in the Circuit are now closed for public worship. The current lockdown regulations make it clear that we should stay at home and only leave our homes for essential reasons. Unlike last March the regulations now allow places of worship to remain open for services if certain strict conditions are met. This includes the prohibition of any form of social interaction or mingling between people before and after services.

Although we can open our buildings for worship that does not mean that we must. One of the ways we can choose to help reduce the spread of the more virulent form of the COVID-19 virus and help to protect others in the wider community is close public worship. To do this, with all the difficulties it presents, is an expression of solidarity with those who have been told to close their businesses and places of work and leisure.

With the support of the Circuit COVID-19 action group I am urging churches to remain closed for public worship and not to reopen before the current regulations are relaxed. The legal responsibility for deciding to reopen lies with the Church Council or Trustees in the Ecumenical Partnerships and no church should reopen before the COVID-19 risk assessment has been reviewed by the Church Council/Trustees and they are confident that the risk assessment can be fully and securely implemented. I am asking that Church Councils/Trustees should give the COVID-19 Action Group an assurance about this before reopening. Any proposal to reopen while the current regulations are in force will need to be justified.

One of the greatest concerns about the long-term effect of the pandemic is its effect on mental health. People are experiencing the effects of loneliness, isolation and anxiety. Sadly, we are not able to help people with this through the opportunities for fellowship and meeting that go alongside public worship. We can help in other ways and I am grateful to all those people, including Pastoral Visitors, who pick up the phone or write a note of encouragement to keep in touch with people who are struggling.

We will continue to produce resources that you can use at home so you can be fed spiritually. Printed services are available to be posted as well as services that can be found on the internet. For those who have the technology many churches are holding Zoom services.

We all know that there is light and hope that this crisis will come to an end. Three effective vaccines have been produced more quickly than has happened with any other virus. These will take time to roll out and those who are able to receive it soon will still need to help those who may have to wait months by continuing to stick to the lockdown regulations. From the perspective of Christian faith, we live by the conviction that God is with us and will lead us through death to resurrection.

With every blessing and best wishes for 2021,

**Revd John Hellyer**