



**Yorkshire
North & East
Methodist District**

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE DISTRICT

1st November 2020

Dear friends

As you will be aware our country faces new 'lockdown' restrictions from Thursday. Once again these will have a significant impact on the life of our churches, perhaps especially those that have begun to open their buildings again. The relevant Government guidance is given below. I realise that queries may arise about particular situations, and we will try to provide further clarity as soon as possible.

I also recognise the very significant practical and emotional concerns that these new restrictions will bring for many. I hope that all our church communities will re-double efforts to 'watch over each other in love.' Please do contact your pastoral visitor or minister if you would appreciate some particular support or prayer.

I was reminded recently of Luke 24:21, within the 'Road to Emmaus' account, where the disciple dejectedly says, "*But we had hoped...*" I think these four words resonate deeply with us just now: we are sad that our hopes for fuller meeting and sharing physically together in worship and fellowship recede for a further time. Luke tells us that the disciples were kept from recognising Jesus whilst on the road. It was only after they had urged him to stay and he had sat at table with them that their eyes were opened to his risen presence. Then they were able to recognise and affirm how their hearts had been warmed by him along the way.

So, even - and especially - in these days, I encourage you to be continually inviting Christ to come and abide with you. I am praying that you will know your heart warmed and your life uplifted by the assurance of his risen presence.

May I also encourage you, please, to remain faithful in prayer:

- for those who continue to serve sacrificially day after day on the front-line within our communities – such as in healthcare and education - and for those supporting them in chaplaincy ministry. For over seven months contexts such as these have been filled with anxiety, stress and tiredness. We pray that God will renew strength and deepen hope as the generous source of perfect love and amazing grace.
- for those struggling to make ends meet and losing livelihoods. Alongside your prayers, please add your support to the Methodist-sponsored JPIT campaign to 'Reset the Debt' – to provide 'a fresh start for families in Britain swept into debt by Covid-19.' There are more details here: resetthedebt.uk

I write this letter on All Saints Day when we are encouraged to look to, and be inspired by, the faithful witness of all those who have gone before us. I invite you to read chapter 11 of Hebrews and see there the powerful reminder of just some of the great cloud of witnesses who surround us and are cheering us on to '*run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*' (Hebrews 12:1-2.)

And so may we all, throughout this further lockdown, continue to be 'living stones' bearing faithfully the Good News of resurrection life: being hope-bringers, light-bearers and kingdom builders.

With my continuing care and prayers.

Every blessing

Leslie Newton

Weddings, civil partnerships, religious services and funerals

Funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people, and it is advised that only close friends and family attend. Linked ceremonial events such as stone settings and ash scatterings can also continue with up to 15 people in attendance. Anyone working is not included. Social distancing should be maintained between people who do not live together or share a support bubble.

Weddings, civil partnership ceremonies will not be permitted to take place except in exceptional circumstances.

Places of Worship will be closed, unless they are being used for:

- *Funerals*
- *To broadcast acts of worship*
- *Individual prayer*
- *Formal childcare or where part of a school*
- *Essential voluntary and public services, such as blood donation or food banks*
- *Other exempted activities such as some support groups*

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november#weddings-civil-partnerships-religious-services-and-funerals>