



Revd. Gordon Gresswell

608 Chepstow Road

Newport

NP19 9BZ

[g.gresswell@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:g.gresswell@yahoo.co.uk)

Home: 01633 272066 Mobile: 07570992890

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Dear fellow disciples of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

It was with sadness that we said farewell to Revs. Preben and Ruth, alongside Margaret and Richard, on Sunday. Whilst we couldn't gather the Podcast put together by Cliff Randall and his team was wonderful and, hopefully, allowed our four dear friends to know how appreciated they have been and are. We look forward to welcoming them back to the Circuit next year when we can gather and say a personal thank you.

This watershed event is a prompt to bring an update about where we are as a Circuit, and as Connexional Church.

#### Circuit Meeting

We have not met, formally, as a Circuit Meeting since November. However, the appointed Leadership Team have been extremely busy on behalf of the Trustees of the Circuit Meeting ensuring that safe and legal procedures have been followed through. From advising running taps and flushing toilets, to Safeguarding audits, to agreeing a budget for next year, work has continued. A formal letter went out to all Trustees and we are in a position to move forward into the next Connexional year in September having fulfilled our legal requirements for this year. The CLT are due to meet at the end of August, and we hope to be able to organise a Circuit Meeting as soon as it is safe to do so.

#### Finances

Roger Langford has worked closely with church treasurers and has gained agreement for next years budget. About £44,000 has been taken from Circuit reserves to assist local churches over the two quarters of lockdown. This has been agreed by the Circuit Meeting. A budget for next year has been agreed. As a CLT, as Synod and as a Connexional Church we are aware of the significant challenges in front of us all. Roger will continue to work closely with church treasurers.

#### Re-opening of Churches

The Welsh Government has issued guidelines as to the re-opening of places of worship in Wales. These include provision for safe distancing, the numbers of worshippers allowed in a space (currently the limit is 30 max), no communal singing and steps to be taken for the giving of Holy Communion. The Methodist Church gives guidance too. As a CLT we are keen to see our sacred and community spaces open up as safely, and quickly as possible. As such we advise the following:

A/ Each Church/Chapel needs to complete a written risk assessment and demonstrate that they have implemented this before allowing people back into their space.

B/ We recommend that Sunday worship be continued in its current format, which is done in various ways across the Circuit. This continuation is until August 30<sup>th</sup> as we will be planning for Sunday worship from September 6<sup>th</sup>. From September it is recommended that there be only one Sunday Service in any given Church.

C/ We recommend that Churches attempt to open for prayer in a corporate way, if desired, on a weekday in August, allowing people to safely access 'their' sacred space before formal worship commences on a Sunday from September. This is a recommendation, not instruction, but, for Insurance purposes, we do insist on a written risk assessment being completed prior to opening up.

D/ The Churches can start to plan for community use of their building. The Welsh Government guidelines indicate that they are willing community spaces to be used from Monday August 3<sup>rd</sup>. Any user group needs to produce a written risk assessment that the local Church Council are willing to agree.

E/ We will try and update Property Stewards of new guidelines as and when they arrive.

### Staff Matters

As indicated in my last letter we have brought forward a planned restructuring of the Circuit into 4 Missional Hubs. As such, a local Preaching Plan will be prayerfully compiled in and for each Hub.

Chepstow & Caldicot Missional Hub: Overseer: Rev Rachel Frank

Preben has retired and is moving over the water to Clevedon. We wish him and Margaret all the best. Revs. Joe Rooney and Lin Healey will take pastoral responsibility for Caldicot and Rogiet. Rev Gordon Gresswell for Earlswood Hope/Valley and Penyaemawr, with Rev Rachel Frank having pastoral responsibility for Chepstow and being the Missional Hub overseer.

Monmouth Missional Hub: Overseer: Rev Bethany Willers

Bethany and her husband, Joel, come to Monmouth in August. They replace Ruth and Richard as Ruth takes up an appointment in the Dorset South Circuit, herself being based on the Isle of Portland. Bethany is a MOCC Minister, Minister from Other Church or Conference, in this case the USA Conference. She brings a wealth of experience and we look forward to welcoming, as a Circuit, Bethany and Joel, once it is safe to do so. There is a 'local' Welcome Service with the Chair of Synod, Rev Stephen Wigley on Sunday September 6<sup>th</sup>, that will be, due to safe spacing, by invitation only.

Newport East Missional Hub: Overseer is Rev Les Jones and he is excited about this new venture.

Newport West Missional Hub is myself and I, too, am excited about this and look forward to working closely with Rev Paula Rose Parish and the Circuit appointed Mission Developer, Tim Crahart.

### Local Preachers

The coronavirus lockdown has revealed some creative and imaginative ways of worship. It is hoped that the online presence will continue, and people are to be encouraged to use their gifts. Upon re-opening from September, Local Preachers and Worship Leaders will be, certainly for this first quarter, to be as local as possible, primarily in their Missional Hub and certainly in shaping the context of delivering Passionate Worship in their local Churches.

We have not had a Local Preachers Meeting during lockdown. My hope is that we will arrange one

for the Circuit when it is deemed safe enough to meet. It may be that the local Missional Hub Local Preachers and Worship Leaders will be able to meet on a more regular local basis sharing creative ideas and helping to shape Passionate Worship in their Local Churches and Missional Hubs.

#### Circuit Stewards

The Stewards continue to work hard in the background supporting the Circuit, myself and the staff members. They have all agreed to serve another year and Keith Harvey has graciously agreed to stay on as Senior Steward at this time due to a pastoral need. I publicly thank them here on all our behalves.

#### Stationing

We have no stationing needs at this point. We have agreed to work with 4 stationed presbyters at this point and in light of the uncertainty of the current times, this is a relief.

#### Synod and Connexion

Conference met electronically and there is a briefing from this available on the Circuit website. Synod has postponed the September 12<sup>th</sup> Synod and hope to have this in the Spring of next year. The discussion on Marriage and Relationships was postponed at Conference and we await the next steps.

On a personal note can I say a big thank you for all of the prayers, support and encouragement many have given me. I find this being a Superintendent really challenging and I appreciate the graciousness in which people cover up my mistakes and offer wise council. This has been the strangest of times for us all, and I have heard so many wonderful stories of God's grace amongst his people. There is an article in the next Link magazine about the Missional Hubs. I truly believe that this pandemic has shown the value of local over global, and passionately believe this is the right structure for the Circuit going forward. There will be niggles, but, in Christ, we know we are more than conquerors.

Shalom

*Gordon*