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Happy New Year!

More than 10 years since leaving full-time education our three children still think of September as the start of a new year. This seems so appropriate when we think on the historical emphasis Methodists have placed on education and the scriptural and social transformation of society Methodism has been so involved in for well over 200 years. I say again; Happy New Connexional Year!

This year feels like no other. It feels '*new*' in respect of *new* thinking that is required in growing our on-line presence, *new* measures in opening up our buildings for worship and community use. *New* arrivals in Rev Bethany and her husband, Joel, filling the gap left by our sister and brother, Ruth and Richard. We have a *new* way of a local Welcome Service in Monmouth, rather than a Circuit wide one.. We have a *new* model of Circuit which feels old; Four Missional Hubs reflecting the drawing together of 3 Circuits in 2008/9 and *new*, experienced Ministers in the gracious offer of Revs Joe Rooney and Lin Healey to help out in the Caldicot and Rogiet part of the Chepstow Missional Hub.

We have *new* social distancing rules, *new* hand sanitiser dispensers in our Churches and we enter a *new* reality unsure of what the future holds. As a Circuit Leadership Team we are trying to lead in these strange times. We have booked a Circuit Meeting for the evening of **Wednesday October 14th**. This will be done electronically, and we will inform you how this is to take place when we have a clear idea. We hope to arrange a Local Preachers Meeting in a similar way, and we are to encourage local Churches to have Church Council's for good governance and opportunity to pray together and to look ahead on how we continue to share the good news of God's love shown to the world through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and the continued active work of God through the Holy Spirit guiding us into all truth day-by-day.

May I say what a privilege it has been to be involved with so many detailed risk-assessments as regards opening our sacred and community spaces. The care and attention to people's well-being has been a wonderful witness, and the practical solutions from so many gifted people has got us to a point of beginning to build people's confidence up and allowing folk to enter sacred space and encounter God alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we have shared so much down the years.

Let us tread gently into this new year, and new beginning, and let us look forward to when we can all, as a Circuit, gather together to sing God's praise; to say a big thank you to Local Preachers, one of whom has dedicated 60 years of ministry this year; to say a proper goodbye to Preben, Margaret, Ruth and Richard; to welcome Bethany and Joel and just to be together rejoicing that we can echo the words of the Psalmist: 'I sought the Lord and he answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.' [34:4]

Gordon