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God has said, "never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am sorry.

I am sorry for a delay in writing this letter. I was awaiting the full guidelines from the Welsh government to come through about church closures.

I am sorry that we have had to close chapels and churches and delay re-openings.

I am sorry that we cannot offer solace and space in desperate need at this time.

I am sorry that we cannot plan ahead with any certainty or clarity.

I am sorry that it looks like Advent and Christmas are going to be disrupted, and I am sorry that we seem so powerless at this time of national and international need.

However, we can be assured that God, revealed in Christ, is with us and all we pray for, that God will never forsake us.

As you are all aware, it is official that we cannot open our Church buildings up for worship for the next three Sunday's at least. This includes the significant one of Remembrance Sunday. Yvonne Oakes has graciously agreed to put together an Act of Worship for this special day, and I hope that we will all make an effort to be still at 11.00 AM to observe the two minutes silence. There are various Churches across the Circuit using Zoom and/or other media for worship on Sunday mornings and evenings. Please do not be afraid to ask Paula or myself about these and I am sure the likes of Caldicot, Chepstow, Monmouth, St' Julian's, Trellech and/or Trinity will make you more than welcome.

The Welsh government guidance is that this 'firebreak lockdown' is just for this 2 ½ weeks. However, my advice would be to not make too firm a plan for November 15th!

It looks like Zoom; You Tube; Daily Worship Sheets etc. are here to stay for a while. Trinity Church Council agreed to extend Sunday morning services on Zoom until March at the earliest and if the opportunity came to worship in the building to do this at a separate time to the Sunday morning. Others may wish to think along these lines.

We also have the significant Christian times of Advent and Christmas coming up. For Advent, Rev Bethany Willers has offered to take the Daily devotions as a creative Advent Calendar and encourage all to try and access this. Thank you Bethany.

At Christmas, again I use Trinity as an example, we are to have the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Services on Zoom hoping for engagement from family members in different parts of the country to be involved. We are also looking at creative ways of putting on carols and a Christingle, fully aware that this will not take place in the sacred space. May I encourage us all to be thinking creatively for this special time of year where you are.

The Welsh government guidance does not allow any Church Governance meetings to take place in Church buildings. If Church Councils, for example, are needed please be open to the suggestions of your Minister and Church Council Secretary. Please do use common sense and keep communication channels open amongst one another in your local church, and if most things are to be 'put-on-hold' for a few months, please allow this to happen. God is with us and we will come through these strange times.

(the Welsh Government' formal advice has not been published yet and we will send out the link later this week when the formal document is released)

We will continue to make plans for forms of worship over the winter months, and we will continue with the Daily Devotions until at least the end of February (unless something miraculously happens in the mean-time!) and if anyone would like to contribute towards these devotions please do let Paula know.

We will try and keep you informed of any changes, and I am aware that we all watch the news and take pragmatic and common-sense steps in according with the news. Thank you for your diligence and care. Please do continue to look out for one another and keep the communication channels open.

We have pencilled in Pentecost Sunday, May 23rd 2021 as day of celebration for us all as a Circuit. We hope to have a United Service, inviting Preben and Ruth back, welcoming Bethany, celebrating Margaret Nicholas Local Preaching for 60 years (yes 60 years!) and Arthur and Barbara Isaac 25 years. To celebrate God walking us through the dark days we are currently facing, and to remember and pray for those for whom this has been an especially bad year. Let us look forward in hope.

Please do pray for one another, and may the God of grace see us through these days.

In Christ alone, our hope is found

Gordon