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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

Today is the night that marks the turning toward summer. If the rain had been less persistent I was going to watch a sunset one minute later than yesterday! The future looks brighter, though the present is dark.

This letter is in response to the current Coronavirus situation that seems to change almost day-by-day. As we are aware, a new form of lockdown was issued by the U.K. and Welsh Governments on Saturday December 19th. This has led to changes of many people's Christmas plans, including our own. These instructions came into force at midnight of December 20th and are the current rules. These may well change in the days ahead, but this letter is written in light of the current rules. An appraisal from the e-mail I received from Rev Stephen Wigley is to be found at the bottom of this letter.

As you can read below, the official Welsh Government advice for Wales, in Tier 4, is that places of worship may be open with a completed risk-assessment, the wearing of masks and no singing. However, the official Welsh Government advice for Wales, in Tier 4, also says; 'to not travel without reasonable excuse'.

Methodist Church policy is that the local Trustees; i.e. The Church Council, determines the risk to all who cross the threshold of their building, whether for worship or for other events. In other words, I, in my role as Superintendent Minister cannot instruct the local Trustees of whether or not, prayer or acts of worship can take place or not on local church premises. The risk is held by the Church Council.

I am aware that this is a diverse Circuit with two Chapels in Herefordshire which are in Tier One, and some in Monmouthshire, which, thankfully, so far, has a low prevalence of Covid 19. We also have Chapels in Newport and Caerphilly which have some of the highest incidence of Covid 19 in Wales.

After consultation with the Circuit Leadership Team, and the Synod Chair, **the advice for all Church Councils is to seriously consider whether the risk of keeping open their building to communal worship is the right course of action to take at this time.** The advice to Local Preachers and Ministers is also to seriously consider whether you wish to be exercising your preaching ministry in church buildings at this time. Many Churches have already decided, in my view correctly, chosen to not be open for communal worship in their premises. However, the current Welsh Government guidelines does, currently, allow worship to take place both indoors and outdoors. Please think carefully on any decisions made.

Whilst recognising there are some unable to access alternative forms of worship, such as Zoom, there are these options available across the Circuit, across the country, and across the world; (Trinity in Newport had someone from Italy at their Zoomed Carol Service last weekend). Paula Farr has a full list of available Services.

On a personal level, currently, I would not feel comfortable in leading an act of worship in any of our church buildings at this time. Nor do I feel comfortable at the thought of driving to public places unless it is pastorally essential. This month, most of my pastoral ministry, with Church members, their families, neighbours and others, alongside the nine funerals taken this month, has involved many, many people with Covid 19 issues. This brings the seriousness of the situation home.

Like many, our Christmas plans have been ripped up, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. The 1920s became known as the 'roaring twenties' as people emerged out of the bleakness of war and an epidemic that cost a further 50-100 million lives. People found faith in Christ, and also found new dances and music.

Let us persevere, knowing that God is Immanuel; with us in Christ, and may we continue to find creative ways to shine the light and love of God in the communities in which we live and serve.

May each of you know of God's peace this Christmas time.

Gordon

This is the latest advice that came through today from Gethin, the faith communities representative at the Senedd.

On December 18 Welsh Government published the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 5\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) which cover 120 pages, as they include provisions for all four possible levels of coronavirus alert, and special arrangements for Christmas. On December 19 substantial changes were made to these regulations by the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 5\) \(Wales\) \(Amendment\) Regulations](#) which came into force at midnight on December 19/20, placing the whole of Wales under Level 4 restrictions and tightening the rules for Christmas.

We expect revised guidance from Welsh Government regarding places of worship and community centres to be published over the coming days. In the mean time, we have updated Cytûn's web page https://www.cytun.co.uk/hafan/?page_id=2861&lang=en as far as we are able, and received clarification from Welsh Government on some questions.

The headline changes are:

- Worship may continue both indoors and in the open air, subject to a full risk assessment and safety measures being taken.
- Other activities within places of worship are limited to essential voluntary services and public services requested by Welsh Government or local authorities. These include food banks, registered child care, mental health services and support for those with addictions. Although the wording of the regulations suggests that local authority permission is required for all these activities, we understand that the guidance will confirm that this is not so in the case of services provided on a charitable basis (even if they involve paid staff).
- Extended households (to include up to two households, plus one single adult living alone, single parent + children or single adult + those for whom s/he has caring responsibility) will be limited to Christmas Day, so only at services on Christmas Day itself may extended households sit together. At other times, extended households will be restricted to one household plus a single adult who lives alone, a single parent + children or a single adult + those for whom s/he has caring responsibility.
- Face to face pastoral care on compassionate grounds may continue, but subject to safety considerations.

However, the most important message is that placed at the head of Cytûn's web page:

As you read this information, Welsh Government would remind you that the health situation in Wales is currently very serious, and all risk assessments should begin by asking the question *Given the inherent risks involved do I need to engage in this activity at all?*

Are there safer alternatives such as broadcast?