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### Circuit Pastoral Letter

July 29<sup>th</sup> 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The pandemic has been, and continues to be a trying experience. The last couple of months have been especially trying in light of Conference accepting the changes to Standing Orders within the God in Love Unites Us Report. This has led to some of our precious brothers and sisters in Christ feeling that they can no longer worship the Living God in a Methodist Church. This grieves me deeply as I, like each of us, try to walk this tightrope between living a pure and righteous life whilst knowing and living with my many flaws. Let us always keep doors open and pray for one another.

Each Church in the Circuit has re-opened, and it is good to praise God with others in person, as well as in the hybrid format of using technology. The Wales Synod provided grants for equipment to be used in Churches to encourage worship at home alongside brothers and sisters in the worship areas, and five of our Churches have benefitted from this grant. Praise God!

In this re-opening we are aware of the struggles for some of our churches and chapels. We will no longer be providing Local Preachers nor a Minister at Trinity Congregational Church in Pontywaun due to our diminished human resource as a Circuit. Several of our churches are asking the question of their continued ability to continue to be a worshipping community in their community. We trust that the Lord will guide us wisely and lovingly as we go through this discernment process.

It was wonderful to finally have a way of saying 'goodbye properly' to Revds. Preben and Ruth (alongside Margaret and Richard) at the Chepstow Bandstand. We also celebrated 60 years of service to the Methodist Church from Michael Gray; 60 years of preaching with Margaret Nicholas and 25 years of preaching with Arthur and Barbara Isaac. We also welcomed Revd. Bethany Willers and many expressed how delighted they were to see Bethany in 3-D! It was a joyous occasion and great to actually stand up and sing for the first time in ages! A big thank you to Cliff Randall, Steve Ellard and Keith Harvey for the music and technology to allow this event to happen.

We also welcomed Richard Parry into the Circuit. He is undergoing a series of historical Christian pilgrimages across Wales and a dozen of us awaited his coming from Wesley's Chapel in Bristol by boat across the Bristol Channel. Alas, he ended up coming by taxi and we met at Devauden the following morning for an act of worship next to Wesley's bust. I had the privilege of being at four outdoor acts of worship that week as Tim Crahart took us on a spiritual journey through Forest Church. I found this spiritually uplifting and there were 20 of us and, for me, it was great to be one of the oldest people there!

We have also had the sadness of lives departed. Several of our longstanding and faithful friends have passed on to be with the Lord since our last letter.....please take a moment to remember these now.

There has also been sadness with the Revd. Rachel Frank curtailing her appointment. Rachel has had many traumatic personal events in these past two years, and the Wellbeing Team of the Methodist Church, and the Circuit Leadership Team, have agreed that, for Rachel's wellbeing, she takes what is called a 'year of recuperation'. She will continue, for this next year, to live in the Chepstow manse as her family support network is in the Chepstow area, and she will be supported by the Synod through the Cardiff Circuit. I have been privileged to work alongside Rachel for these past two years, and I am sure I speak for us all, that we hope that this year will be one of refreshment and that Rachel will go forward as a blessing from God with others in future years.

So, where does this leave us as a Circuit? There is a Circuit Invitation Committee in place at the moment as Revd. Les Jones has indicated that he would like to carry on his appointment for another three years. Praise God! Sue and I have indicated that we wish to move 'north' and be closer to our family. The pandemic has been a strain on us all hasn't it?! And we feel a strong need, at this stage of life, to be alongside our children and hoped-for grandchildren. Therefore a profile is being created for a Superintendent Minister based in the Newport West Missional Hub.

With the retirement of Preben last year and the curtailment of Rachel this year, this leaves us with three full-time stationed Presbyters. When the Newport and Lower Wye Circuit came into being in 2009 there were seven full-time Presbyters. We restructured into the four Hubs (Newport East and West; Lower Wye North (Monmouth) and South (Chepstow) to account for four Ministers. In this transition time we have been blessed by Revs Lin Healey and Joe Rooney in a paid capacity in Lower Wye South assisting Rev Rachel in this Hub. The loss of Rachel gives us a challenge and an opportunity.

Currently I have responsibility for Chepstow Methodist Church, one of nine Churches I am overseeing, and Revs Lin and Joe and overseeing Caldicot and Rogiet. From the new Connexional year, beginning September 1<sup>st</sup>, Joe steps aside from his paid role (he is still working as only Joe can!) and Lin has oversight of Caldicot and Rogiet. I will continue at Chepstow, and there will be a phased transfer of the Earlswoods and Penyaemawr Chapels into the oversight of Revd. Les Jones. This is a 'temporary fix' whilst we discern the next steps forward.

I cannot offer any solutions at this point of time. There are a lot of conversations taking place on how we give pastoral oversight, encouragement and guidance to Chepstow, Caldicot and Rogiet Methodist Churches. Any 'solutions' will need to be in place for the next two years when the Circuit hopes to go into Stationing for a newly appointed stationed Presbyter in 2023.

There are ideas floating around and we are in conversation with the Synod to see if there are Presbyters around that may help out in the short-term, and we are exploring potentially creative use of paid Lay Workers. Please be assured that no Church will be without a named Presbyter and that the Circuit Leadership Team are creatively praying through our current predicament. We hope to have an update by the Circuit Meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup>.

As we go forward in faith let us live the holy life God puts before us; let us strive to bring the kingdom of God closer into our lives, and our communities lives and let us never cease in working to fulfil God's purposes. Let us live day-by-day with God's blessing; let us be gentle with one another, forgiving and loving, and may we live a life worthy of God; the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Shalom

*Gordon*

p.s. a little Bible Study on next page

I would like you to read **Matthew 6:9-15**, or **recite to yourself the Lord's Prayer**. Please do this before reading on, letting familiar words soak into your very being.....

Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

These are often called the 'Thou petitions' in that they focus on the eagle's-eye view, the metanarrative, and remind us that each of us are part of the great sweep of history. These are the lofty themes of:

Making holy the name of God; the coming of the kingdom of God; fulfilling of the will of God.

The next three: daily bread; forgiveness in community; freedom from evil.

These have been called the 'we petitions' and guides us into this pattern.

God makes his name holy.....and I am expected to live a holy life.

God brings in the kingdom.....and I am to work toward the goal of its coming.

God fulfils his will.....and I am to discover that will and obey it in daily life.

He gives the gift of bread....and I must work to earn it.

He forgives....and I must forgive.

He guides me away from evil.....and I must live a life of righteousness.

And all of the above are really hard to do! The holiness of God requires purity and righteousness. When such lifestyles are not exhibited God cannot ignore their absence. But God is also love, and the love of God is affirmed by his title of 'Abba' (Father). These two aspects of the known nature of God are conflicted in the heart of God by the reality of the lives of people. The book of Hosea explores this in great depth and the cross of Jesus is the ultimate solution to this problem. God loves, God forgives and we are called to pick up our cross and follow suit. God asks us to say yes to this solution every single day.

It is a great privilege being a Christian, and can be costly too. Let us be gentle with one another and seek to build each other up in faith as we look ahead trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Healer, Saviour and bringer of a peace, a deep peace beyond all understanding.