

**The Revd Dr Barbara Glasson**

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To all our friends in ministry

We are aware that we are moving on from managing an emergency into a new kind of reality for ministry and church life in this on-going virus threat. And we are also conscious that for all of us there has been a need to dig deep and find new ways of communicating the gospel and supporting our communities without being physically present. This has been unbelievably hard but we thank you all for your resilience, wisdom, commitment and faith.

We are also mindful that many of you have buried members of your congregations without relatives or the church family being present or being able to grieve. And for some of you there has been bereavement and loss in your own personal lives too. Some have unexpectedly become full-time carers or teachers.


And if this wasn't enough, many of you are preparing to take leave of your Circuit responsibilities and move on to new appointments without the usual processes of being able to say proper goodbyes or have joyful anticipation at arriving.

We all wish things were easier to bear, and could be managed more straightforwardly – but sadly they can't. We hope that there are practical things happening in your Districts and we know that the Connexional Team are working unbelievably hard from their own isolated contexts to help communicate with you. Nevertheless, this is not easy at any level and we appreciate that uncertainty is very hard.

In many ways this is not the Presidential year Clive and I were expecting! Since March we have also been grounded in our respective homes and all visits have been cancelled. We have tried our best to keep in touch, both with Districts and with the Connexional team, and we have also tried to reflect theologically on our present situation. It is some of that reflection we would like to share with you in the next paragraphs.

It has always been the experience of the people of God that they are in transition. 'Journey' is an overused metaphor for discipleship and the spiritual life but nevertheless life is a journey - tough at times, often circuitous, seldom straightforward. We get exhausted, side-tracked, even locked down on occasions. In the story of the Exodus (Ex:13.17-18) we hear that the people of Israel did not take the shortest route to the Promised Land but rather went via the way of the Wilderness.

As people who live in covenant relationship with God, we know that there will be times for us that resonate with the Exodus narrative. These might be in our personal lives, in our ministry or in our communities. We rarely experience such times as a whole people, yet that is what is happening in this current crisis. Of course, we are experiencing this in particular ways as individuals. But we are also trying to offer leadership in this time of uncertainty, fear and unknowing. Our Methodist Covenant Service reminds all of us, ordained or lay, that we are 'put to what you will' but that God also remains faithful and present.



It is hard for us to exercise our ministry without the context of our people. Zoom meetings are practical but lack the warmth and nuance of being physically present with each other. Leaving Circuits or being welcomed into new appointments requires the warm hospitality of real people. Leaving and arriving is not going to be easy or satisfactory. We will not be able in our traditional ways to mark great occasions like ordinations or honour those who have died, but in time we will do so.

The Conference will happen in late June and early July and we will meet via Zoom to worship together and to deal with as much business as is required of us. We will also hear some reflections on the year past and the year to come. We will elect the successors to the President and Vice President. We will deal with matters of stationing and reception into Full Connexion - the Secretary of the Conference will be sending more details and the Conference agenda will appear on the Methodist Church website soon,

Our hope is that there may be an opportunity for us to be together in a Covenant gathering, at which we will be able to celebrate our covenant promises, our Methodist Way of Life and our on-going movement as the Methodist people. In this, we must not follow our individual desires but our collective wisdom. As soon as there is anything firm then you will hear, But we don't want to raise hopes either, there are so many factors to be considered, including health, finance and feasibility. In reality, this might not be possible until the Conference of 2021. Please be as patient as you can be, recognising that what we want is not always possible and we must work together in God's time.

We are people who travel together and we do experience the angst, anger and loneliness of the wilderness. But we are also people of promise and need to lead others to a vision of faithful covenant with God to lament all that is lost and to live the hope of resurrection. Although we are currently isolated, we are not alone. We are part of the Methodist people. We are part of God's story as we travel together in covenant hope.

With our blessings



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