



The Methodist Church

United Stockport Circuit (Manchester and Stockport District)

www.stockportcircuit.org.uk

A Message from the Superintendent Minister March 18th 2020

We are living in a strange time.

It feels as if the Covid-19 virus has changed everything – no gatherings, self-isolation, even church worship and meetings have stopped. And believe me, it takes a lot to stop a Methodist meeting from taking place!

But one thing does not and will not change. The reality of the love and care which we hold for one another, which flows from the unchanging and unceasing love of God.

In this uncertain time there are few things which, as a Circuit, we are committing to. These are, as far as is possible and practical, to:

- Ensure that every church member knows that they are being prayed for
- Ensure that every church member is in touch with someone else in the church on a regular basis
- Ensure that our most vulnerable members are offered practical help and support.
- Offer opportunities for you all to engage in prayer and reflection, both through our websites and - for those of you not online - through regular mail communications.

In turn we hope that you will also commit to some actions:

- To pray for others – church members and neighbours, friends and strangers around the world who are impacted directly by CV-19
- To maintain your financial giving to the church as much as you are able. If you already pay by Direct Debit then that will continue as normal. If you use envelopes, please fill them each week and put them to one side to bring to church when we are able to meet again. If you put in cash, please also put this to one side, or keep a note of what you would have given and offer it when you come back to church. If you would like to set up a direct debit at this time please let me, or one of the other ministers know. It is really important that we maintain our income as much as possible – we will lose income from our regular users, yet our normal church expenses will continue much as always. So to be assured of our regular congregational giving is very important.

Having said that, we recognise that the current situation may well impact some of you financially in a very challenging way and it is not our intention to make life more difficult for you. If your resources need to be diverted at this time, then I also understand that.

- Every **Sunday morning at 11am** – when we would all normally be in worship in church – to pray the following prayer. This way we stay connected in a very really and tangible way.

God of Love and Life,

We pray to you this morning for the life the United Stockport Methodist Circuit, for our sisters and brothers who belong to:

(pausing briefly to reflect after each name)

Christ Church Methodist /URC

Davenport Methodist Church

Dialstone Lane Methodist Church

Edgeley Community Church

Hazel Grove Methodist Church

Heaton Mersey Methodist Church

Heaton Moor United Church

St. Johns Methodist Church

Tiviot Dale Methodist Church

Trinity Methodist Church

Windlehurst Methodist Church

In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of your spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another.

We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

We ask that this time of crisis might pass and that those who suffer might find comfort and strength within the knowledge of your grace, revealed through the kindness and compassion of the people of God.

Eternal God,

Though the self-offering of your Son

You have filled our lives with your presence.

Help us in our sufferings and trials

Fill us with hope

**And strengthen us in our weakness.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

We may not currently be able to gather in our premises, but this makes it even more important to remember the deep truth that the Church is not the building, but rather the body of people called Christians. Whether we are together or dispersed (as we are at present) we offer prayer, support and practical action in the name of Jesus Christ, in whose footsteps of love and peace and justice we follow.

We are still in the season of Lent and I hope that those of you who have been following Lenten programmes of study or commitment will continue to do so in the comfort of your own homes. We are faced with a serious trial of our own in these forty days – and probably beyond – and it is important that we resist the temptations to despair, fear and selfishness. One of the most helpful things I have read recently is this, from Brother Richard, an Irish Monk. I was going to read it in church this Sunday but as I can't now do that, I will share it here:

Lockdown

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighbourhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples

are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

*All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.*

While we are living through this time I will try and write every couple of weeks as a way of keeping in touch. Please stay safe and positive, be kind and receive help where it is offered to you.

If you are able to go out and would value the opportunity to be in church, Dialstone Lane Methodist Church will be opening on Wednesdays between 10am and 12 noon for private prayer and reflection. Please do come by, for as long as you wish. The church will be set out in a way that will allow for social distancing and personal space, in line with current Methodist guidelines.

In Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood which was shed on the cross.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Revd Cathy Bird **Superintendent Minister**