

Life After the Storm: A Support Book for Circuit Leadership Teams Travelling through Lockdown



Eularia Clarke, Storm over the Lake, Methodist Church Modern Art Collection



Darlington Methodist District

Introduction

‘This crisis has not broken us. It has broken us open.’ *Michael Patterson*

Welcome to *Life after the Storm*. This booklet is designed to support Circuit Leadership Teams as together we identify a way forward as we emerge from lockdown. The pandemic has been a time of trauma and anxiety for many and, as we emerge from the lockdown, there is a widespread recognition that its repercussions will continue to be with us for many years. The personal, social and economic impacts of coronavirus upon our churches and communities are significant and provide both an immediate and long term context within which our ministry and mission will be exercised in the next few years. At the same time, whilst no one would have wished the pandemic upon us, the lockdown has proven to be a time of great creativity in our churches. Our life and witness has continued and we have learned things in a few weeks which in normal times may have taken us several years. We do not want to lose what we have learned nor the opportunity it creates for us to reflect on what we really need for the future.

As a piece of graffiti in Hong Kong puts it, ‘There can be no return to normal because normal was the problem in the first place.’ Even in the midst of lockdown the Spirit has been leading us, enabling us to identify what is really important and significant in our life together in Christ. The theologian, Kosuke Koyama, notes that the Japanese character used for the word ‘crisis’ combines two characters which mean ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity’. Crisis, as Koyama, points out is the place where danger and opportunity meet. The title of this booklet deliberately evokes the story of the calming of the storm in the gospels. The disciples’ experience of the storm is one of danger, threat and acute anxiety. That might be how you or others in your Circuit are feeling at the moment. What will the future be like? Will we survive? Am I up to the task? But the key to the story is the presence of Christ in the boat, the one whom the wind and the waves obey – the one who does not merely revive the body but raises the dead. We cannot go back so we must go forward. We move through death into life. We do so together – because we are a connected people. And we do so as a people invested in the promise that Christ is with us, even in the midst of crisis, because he has told us that he will be with us until the close of the age (Matthew 28: 20). We may not know what the future will look like but we can know whose future it is and take a step of faith to follow – that is all that is asked of us, today, tomorrow and the day after.

This booklet draws upon a URC document entitled, *Ready for the New Normal*, as well as work produced by the Cleveland and Danby and Durham and Deerness Valley Circuits and the Lincolnshire District. I am extremely grateful for their support in creating this resource.

Peace and light,

Revd Richard Andrew,

Chair, Darlington Methodist District

Prayer

Take a moment before you read any further to pray on your own or with others.

You may want to light a candle. Sit comfortably and open out the palms of your hands as you wait to receive from God.

Spend a short time in silence. Notice your breathing. How are you feeling?

Bring to God the things on your mind, perhaps especially your fears for the future.

If it's helpful, express your fears by clutching your fists together.

Repeat the words below quietly a few times and ask God to grant you peace and to transform your fears into hope for the future.

You may wish to express this by opening up your hands in a gesture of praise and thanks – don't worry if this takes some time.

Calm me Lord, as you calmed the storm;

still me, Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease;

enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

David Adam, Singing the Faith 624

There is a musical setting of this prayer by Margaret Rizza which can be found at <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=margaret+rizza+calm+me+lord&docid=607993195127571521&mid=ECAD81203D1F2435C8B2ECAD81203D1F2435C8B2&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

How to use this document

This resource is broken down into three sections. You can use the sections in any order or simply use the sections which are most relevant to you. However, this is a period when it is tempting to move straight to action rather than pausing to reflect. This is a good opportunity as a team to pause, to reflect on how you and people in local churches may be feeling and to pray about the way ahead.

Section 1, *Leadership beyond Lockdown*, offers you some resources for reflection. There is some exploration of scriptures which help to guide us on our way and reference to some signposts which remind us of our priorities as we build for the future.

Section 2, *Returning to Physical Space*, contains some practical guidance about returning to our church buildings. This section draws upon a URC publication, *Ready for the New Normal*, which can be accessed in full at <https://urc.org.uk/new-normal.html> and the current guidance on the Methodist Church website (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus/>). Please note that this guidance is updated regularly and it is important to look at the most recent government and denominational guidance.

Section 3, *Future Story*, offers two tools which can be used as part of a simple review of local church and circuit life as you reflect on the choices that lie ahead and how you might participate more fully in God's mission.



Section 1: Leadership beyond Lockdown

Biblical Reflections

The following offers some resources for reflecting together on what we are experiencing and the role of the Circuit Leadership Team as it helps a circuit live through a time of potentially profound change. The temptation is to forget about reflection and to move straight into action, feeling that we need to be seen to be doing 'something'. It is important to take time together to discern the Spirit's guidance, to reflect on what people have been experiencing and to identify how we might lead wisely as we emerge from lockdown.

How to use these texts

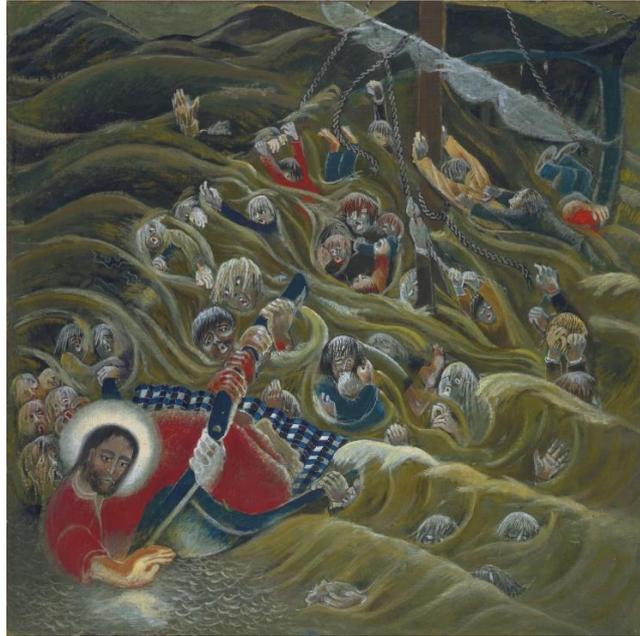
A small selection of texts have been chosen as examples in this section. There may be others which speak to you more powerfully in your context. For example, some people have experienced the Psalms, and particularly psalms of lament, as helpful resources during lockdown. Others have pointed to the experience of the people of Israel journeying through the wilderness or the experience of exile in Babylon as helpful reference points. If another passage speaks powerfully to you, please don't hesitate to use it. Also don't feel that you need to use the method below if another way of working is more helpful. The most important thing is to spend time reflecting, discerning and praying together.

Three gospel passages have been chosen for reflection. The text is accompanied by a suggested piece of reflective music, a picture from the Methodist Church Modern Art Collection (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/reflecting-on-faith/the-methodist-modern-art-collection/>) and a short reflection.

Set the scene with a short period of silence. Perhaps light a candle to signal that you meet in God's presence.

- Read the text slowly and invite people to look at the picture whilst they listen.
- Ask people if there is a word or an image which strikes them having heard the text and gazed at the image. Suggest that people do not enter into open discussion at this point but simply listen to and receive what others have to give.
- Read the text slowly again and invite people to continue looking at the picture.
- Is there anything else (a word, an image, a reflection) which resonates as you approach the text/image for a second time?
- Share the reflection.
- Invite some open reflection before a short time of prayer together.

Luke 8: 22-25 (NRSV)



Eularia Clarke, Storm over the Lake

Reflective Music: Singing the Faith 624, Calm me Lord, as you calmed the storm
<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=margaret+rizza+calm+me+lord&docid=607993195127571521&mid=ECAD81203D1F2435C8B2ECAD81203D1F2435C8B2&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

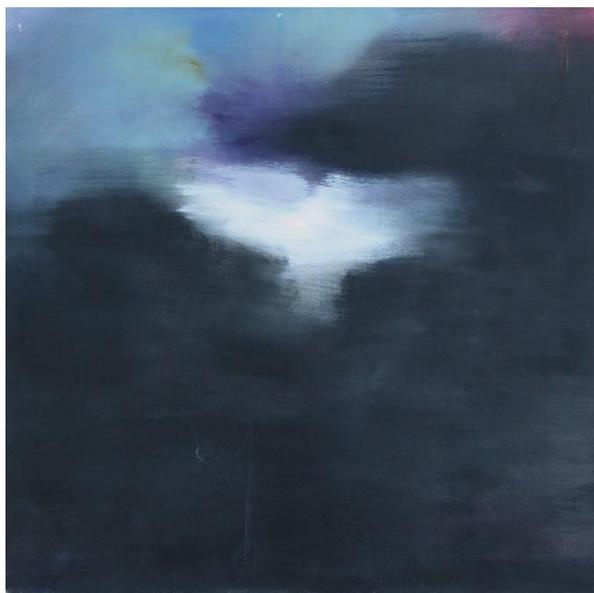
One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them. “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, we are perishing!” And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?”

Reflection

A friend of mine, who used to work as a business consultant, used to refer to what he called the 'crazy time' model of change management. This wasn't so much a model or theory but a recognition of what is happening to people as they live through significant change. When we live through profound change it can seem as if we have become unmoored, as if the anchor which held us in place has gone, and we are left feeling anxious and uncertain. Our natural inclination is to want to go back to the place we were at before, even when that is impossible, because we felt secure there. One biblical parallel is the story of the people of Israel journeying through the wilderness towards the promised land. Despite the promise that lies ahead, their natural inclination is to want to go back to Egypt even though that was a place of slavery and oppression. Leading and living through change creates a major pastoral challenge. Some people will find the idea of change exciting, even liberating: others will feel anxious about the future. More broadly there will be people in our churches and communities who have experienced trauma as they have lived through the lockdown for a whole variety of reasons, including loss of loved ones and an impact on mental health. We need to give space to people and to recognise that the task ahead is not just a practical challenge but a pastoral one and that will affect how we lead. The story of Jesus calming the storm offers us some clues about the way ahead. The waters in the Bible are often used as a symbol of chaos – notice how, for example, in the first creation story in Genesis, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters bringing order out of chaos (Gen. 1:2). Jesus, who commands the waves, brings order in the midst of chaos. Note how the experience of the disciples mirrors our own – anxious, fearful, driven to control what they can. In the bottom left hand corner of Eularia Clarke's picture, Jesus is seen bringing calm to the waters. In time the whole of the lake will be still. Some people speak about the importance of being a 'non-anxious' presence in leadership. Whether that is entirely possible for any of us, it is a reminder of the importance of being a calming presence in the midst of confusion. It is important to recognise that we are not alone. Jesus is in the boat with us. Whilst confusion and chaos may seem to reign, it is not the final word.

Spend some time reflecting on the passage together and close with a short time in open or silent prayer.

John 20: 19-22 (NRSV)



John Brokenshire, Pentecost

Reflective music: Singing the Faith 710, Peace, perfect peace is the gift of Christ our Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVPHKznhrrg>

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you”. After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” When he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Reflection

Our liturgical year has had a particular resonance this year. We began lockdown in Lent, engaged in all kinds of holy experimentation during Easter and as we begin to emerge from the lockdown, we find ourselves in the season of Pentecost, a time to celebrate the gift of the Spirit and the renewal of the life of the Church. How apposite! John 20: 19-22 provides a helpful hinge between Easter and Pentecost – it’s a passage used in the lectionary for both seasons. It couples both a resurrection appearance and the gift of the Spirit with the sending of the Church. It’s a reminder in the midst of our desire to return to ‘normal’ – whatever that is – that the boundaries of the ‘normal’ have already been transformed in the

resurrection of Christ. We do not pray for mere revival but the resurrection of the body, a new heaven and a new earth. That ought to give us some perspective on what we have regarded as 'normal'. Is 'normal' what we want to return to or can we honour what is good in the past yet build beyond it? – I am struck that the risen body of Christ though changed continues to bear some continuity and resemblance to the past. I also find it intriguing that the disciples themselves experienced lockdown: they hide behind closed doors, uncertain about the future, anxious about the environment in which they find themselves, afraid also to make a public confession. More positively we might say, they are waiting to discover God's new intention. Perhaps there is a resonance for you here. In John Brokenshire's picture the Spirit hovers in the darkness but it is clear that a new light is beginning to dawn. Jesus blesses them with God's peace and as he blesses them he sends them. But they and we are not alone. He breathes on them God's Holy Spirit – he continues to journey with us in the power and the presence of the Spirit. Evidently the peace, presence and power of the Spirit is a greater security than locked doors.

Spend some time reflecting on the passage together and close with a short time in open or silent prayer.

John 21: 1, 3-6, 9 (NRSV)



Jacques Iselin, The Elements of Holy Communion

Reflective Music: Singing the Faith 782, Thuma mina

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=thuma+mina&&view=detail&mid=E5B568D568A264A94CE7E5B568D568A264A94CE7&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dthuma%2Bmina%26FORM%3DHDRSC3>

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way...Simon Peter said to them [the disciples], "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish....When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

Reflection

A colleague said to me this morning, “To live outside of the box you need to have a box first”. I’m not sure where that expression comes from but it strikes me as true. It is hardly surprising that people who have grown up fishing should return to something they already know and understand; a box as it were. There is a setting on many electronic products now which reads, ‘Default to factory settings’. How tempting it must be to just go back to what you already know. But, of course, returning to factory settings on a computer, for example, can mean giving up all the information you’ve gathered along the way. We have learned many new things during lockdown – you might want to share some of your learning together – and we don’t want to lose it. It is easy to assume that we can go back to the way in which things used to be. Indeed we may question whether that is at all desirable. Yet perhaps there are clues to the way ahead in the text itself. The scene begins with Peter and the disciples fishing in the dark and catching nothing. The Lord appears, ‘...just after daybreak’, just as a new day is dawning, just as new light is breaking. He invites them to take what they are already doing unproductively and to cast their nets in a new way, on the other side. I wonder if this is an opportunity for us to take what is already part of our calling (worship; learning and caring; service and justice; evangelism) and to recast it in a way which is both familiar and yet transformed. The catching of so many fish is often regarded as a symbol of others beyond the disciples being drawn into the new community of Christ. Perhaps that is a reminder of where our priorities should lie. I have chosen Jacques Iselin’s abstract picture, ‘The Elements of Holy Communion’, because as well as the elements of bread and wine, it includes a fish, an ancient symbol of Jesus Christ. It is a reminder of the mysterious presence of Christ in our midst as we journey forth. In all that we endeavour to do, the crucified, risen one must be at the centre.

Spend some time reflecting on the passage together and close with a short time in open or silent prayer.

Section 2: Returning to Physical Space

Introduction

In this section we begin to explore some practical considerations concerning a return to our buildings. At some point you may wish to reflect on what kinds of buildings and how many we need in the future to support our Christian presence and witness. It's important that we don't forget some of the lessons we've learned through the lockdown about what is possible. But for the moment let's assume that we will need to return to our buildings at some point in the near future whatever we decide about individual buildings in the long term.

Some people have said that coming out of lockdown will, in many ways, be harder than going into it. There are many uncertainties about reopening and the time scale within which that might happen safely. Changes in government and scientific advice will impact upon how quickly or slowly we are able to move and we need to encourage people to be patient. It's worth noting that in a period of uncertainty – what we called 'crazy time' in the reflections – there will be extra pressures on those in leadership because naturally people will crave answers and some level of certainty. These pressures will come not just from churches but also from community groups and those wanting to connect with churches for baptisms, weddings and funerals and thanksgivings for loved ones who have died during the lockdown. As you work together, be kind to one another, surround each other in prayer, and remember that this will not all happen in one day.

The approach recommended here is of a gradual, step by step approach to church reopening for worship and community use which can be varied in speed according to whatever the current advice is from the government and from the Methodist Church. It is important to keep up to date with this advice as you work through these steps. Here are the links:

Gov.Uk - <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

The Methodist Church - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus/>

Pick yourself up, dust yourself down...

It is worth reminding ourselves that the lockdown has been a period of significant trauma. Whilst some people have found surviving lockdown relatively easy, others have experienced significant personal struggle, anxiety and trauma.¹ These experiences at an individual level are mirrored at a community, societal and, of course, congregational level. We need to

¹ You may wish to look at the material produced by the Tragedy and Congregations project on the experience of trauma in congregations - <https://tragedyandcongregations.org.uk/>



remember that local churches have been through a significant experience of trauma. This has pastoral dimensions which need to be attended to. However, for the purposes of this section, let's focus on what it might mean for us to 'restart' in physical spaces in such circumstances.

One analogy to the situation facing us might be the experience of undergoing a significant operation. No one imagines that after a major operation that they can return immediately to life as normal. It takes time, often small steps, and particular support and interventions, for example from physiotherapists, to get 'normal' life back on track. The same is true for church life after the lockdown. The likelihood is that physical distancing will be with us for some time and we will need to adapt our church life to that. It will also take time for confidence to recover, especially amongst vulnerable groups. There will also be practical limitations on what we are able to do at any given point. For example, those we might ordinarily expect to open and close our doors may themselves be in a vulnerable group. Similarly, many worship leaders and local preachers listed on the plan may be reluctant to lead worship until the virus is much less prevalent. So just like recovering from a major operation we need to develop an approach which is step by step – we may even experience some knock backs along the way.

My wife and I are in the second week of Couch to 5K, the app designed to get you running 5,000 metres in 9 weeks. We are not very experienced runners or indeed particularly good ones. The app is designed for people like us who have a desire to get fit and to take up jogging but are not sure how to begin. It is broken down into a series of manageable steps and targets which seem achievable. It recognises the potential that some weeks won't work out and allows you to go back and repeat a week if you need to. You even have a coach who provides encouragement as you run, who is realistic about how hard it is, especially at first, and celebrates your achievements. It seems a long way from Week 2 to Week 9 but we have started and that in itself makes us feel it is 'do-able'. This is the kind of thing being suggested here – Couch to Congregation, if you like! Small, repeated steps that gradually help us resurface to some kind of normality.

So here are 3 suggested steps. Feel free to play around with them and to move through them at your own pace. The key thing is to have a process, a rough strategy worked out which helps you to move forward, even if you need to revise it along the way. However you choose to proceed it is important that we are seen to be 'singing from the same hymn sheet' offering a sense of **continuity**, **joined up thinking** and **consistency** whilst acknowledging that different patterns may emerge in different contexts.

Step 1: Groundwork

It is important to do some groundwork and put firm foundations in place before reopening buildings. Identify what needs to continue from your experience of church during lockdown. For example, many churches have developed new forms of pastoral support such as ringing members on a rota or small groups meeting online for worship and fellowship. If these things are valuable they are probably worth continuing in some form. It is likely that people in vulnerable groups will need to self-isolate for some time and, therefore, online worship and distributing hard copies of worship materials will need to continue. Now is a good time to physically check buildings and to begin thinking about risk assessments. If you have not done any financial planning, do it now. There will be an impact upon income from loss of both offerings and lettings and it's important that a Financial Resilience Plan is put in place to ensure that all the assets at the circuit's disposal, including those held by local churches, are used to support the circuit through a time of financial stress. If you have lay employees, they may have been furloughed or have been working from home or in quite different ways from normal. This is a good time to review how your employees might work in the coming months and, importantly, how they are kept safe. As you plan, ensure that safeguarding guidance is followed - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/policies-procedure-and-information/policies-and-guidance/>

As you begin to prepare for reopening buildings, here are some things to bear in mind – note though that detailed advice can be found at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/> including templates for risk assessments and checklists for reopening buildings <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17380/re-opening-of-building-checklist.pdf>

Physical security check

Someone will need to have a check around the building before start-up can be considered if this has not already taken place.

Risk assessment

This is a time to review potential risks, i.e. trip hazards, electrical health, potential to maintain social distance etc. A template can be found at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17421/covid-19-risk-assessment-template.pdf>

Legionella

If the water supply has not been drained down during the lockdown it is advisable that the taps are run for 20 minutes; instant hot water needs to be set to 60° to kill off any legionella bacteria. For more guidance see the HSE leaflet, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16869/hsa-guidance-legionella.pdf>

Cleaning

Before any start-up it is advisable to undertake a thorough clean including all surfaces and chairs; remember soap and water is still the best defence against Covid-19; cleaning teams will need to be planned after each act of worship or activity on church premises.

Contacts for advice on:

Property – Maurice Aspey, District Property Secretary, maspey@globalnet.co.uk

Finance – John Monkhouse, District Treasurer, john.monkhouse@jnetmail.co.uk

Lay Employment – Sue Jakeman, District Lay Employment Advisor,

stevensuejay@btinternet.com

Safeguarding – contact the Regional Safeguarding Officer, Carolyn Godfrey,

newcastle.darlington@dso.methodist.org.uk

Stage 2: Starting Over

In Jeremiah 32, the prophet Jeremiah is imprisoned. The forces of Babylon are besieging Jerusalem and within a short time, many of the leaders of Israel will have been taken into exile. What Jeremiah does next is intriguing. He buys a field from his cousin Hanamel as a testimony to the fact that some day in the future, houses, fields and vineyards will be bought and sold again in Israel (vv. 6-15) – in other words something like normal life will be resumed.

In times of great turbulence, visible symbols of hope are very important – think, for example, of the importance of the weekly gatherings to clap the NHS during lockdown. The government has indicated that places of worship are able to open for private prayer from 15th June, and at a later stage, possibly 5th July, for public worship. Clearly not all buildings will be open on 5th July. Indeed it will take some months before the majority of our buildings reopen. Nevertheless, it may be worth thinking through whether there are one or two buildings in a circuit which are able to open, even at this stage, as a visible sign of a return to

some kind of normality. Some have even suggested that a small number of churches might open on a rota basis to avoid the need for a deep clean after each occasion of use.

No one should feel forced to reopen their buildings. The virus remains active and we need to proceed cautiously. Online and other forms of worship will need to continue indefinitely – indeed they are likely to become an integral part of future church life.

As churches begin to reopen, there are some important things to keep in mind:

a) Who decides when or whether to reopen?

There are several things to consider:

- This could be a connexional decision – at present the advice is not to open churches again until after further advice is issued following the Conference, which adjourns on 1st July. It is unlikely that the connexion will advise that all churches should open on 5th July. However, it is likely that guidance on reopening will be provided at that point.
- The Circuit Leadership Team could take a lead in discerning which buildings could be opened first and, with the support of local Church Councils and the Circuit Meeting, work out how this might happen in practical terms. This approach seems to offer a more strategic and coherent way of working.
- Ultimately the decision to reopen is a decision for the managing trustees of each church but it is important that this happens in a co-ordinated way, working with the Circuit Leadership Team.

b) Who might come to church?

A significant number of people will need to remain shielded, especially those with underlying conditions. At the same time, there will be people who have reconnected with faith during lockdown who might appreciate the opportunity to join a worshipping community. How will you communicate the fact that the church is 'open'? What opportunities do we have to market ourselves, not just through traditional forms but through social media? Even if people do not attend worship, it may be a source of comfort to know that churches are reopening. What additional/alternative worship provision can be made for those who cannot physically attend church? Are we able to provide for the needs of different age groups? It is important to remember that in many places we might need to say that now is **not** the time to resume, because of factors that may mean social distancing cannot take place. Don't forget the opportunities which might be presented, particularly during the summer months, for outdoor worship.

c) Planning the use of space

Here are some practical considerations as you plan for the use of space – the list below was developed by the Lincolnshire District.

Read the risk assessment advice carefully and start working through the sections -
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17421/covid-19-risk-assessment-template.pdf>

What follows is not an exhaustive list. It is meant to help you plan for whenever churches are able to open whether for private prayer or for services. Every church and congregation will identify different risks and ways to manage them. Please record your discussions, risk assessment and decisions.

The areas to consider in brief are:

Social Distancing

- How can you ensure people are kept 2 metres apart?
- Do you need a one-way system in place?
- Do you need tape or a way of marking out seating etc. to keep people 2 metres apart?
- Can doors be left open (taking fire and security into consideration) to reduce the need for people to touch door handles?
- Would signs be a good reminder to keep 2 metres apart?
- DQ set up a register of who enters the building, noting the requirements of data protection. People should bring their own pen.
- Purchase hand sanitisers in readiness.

Cleaning

- What will need cleaning and sanitising?
- Which objects are touched frequently e.g. door handles, light switches, reception area
- Who will do the cleaning?
- Should you put in place a 'clean-and-sanitise-as-you-go' system with wipes and hand sanitisers in place e.g. for meeting rooms, printers etc.?
- Toilets are high-risk areas. Do people need a sign to know how to protect themselves e.g. hand washing?

Good hygiene

- Do you have good hand washing facilities that provide running water, liquid soap (in a dispenser) and paper towels?
- Remind people to wash their hands regularly for 20 seconds

- Use paper towels (not hand driers) and safely dispose of waste frequently
- People should be able to wash their hands when they arrive and leave or sanitise them

Personal Protective Equipment

- Face masks and gloves are no replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing
- Face covering in enclosed public spaces may reduce the spread of Covid-19

d) Planning for public worship

Consider what will happen in worship. There is some scientific evidence to show that hymn singing might not be advisable. Face the reality that for some not being able to sing might be as unsettling as not meeting.

Be aware that handshaking and hugging is not appropriate as you welcome people and as people leave.

It is inadvisable to serve coffee and tea after worship in the medium term because of the dangers of contamination.

Communion/Lord's supper

Can this be done safely and without cross contamination; it is important that people serving the elements use hand sanitiser and you need to think about the way people will receive whilst maintaining social distancing. Clearing up after communion should involve gloves and PPE.

Baptisms

Baptisms often involve larger congregations. In the immediate future we need to enforce small gatherings of people. Is this be a time to think about baptism outside of normal worship and being very clear about what is and what is not possible?

Taking an offering

It will not be appropriate to hand collection plates around. Consider something like a retiring offering. Those who count and handle money will need to use PPE. Some people may bring offerings which have been put to one side during lockdown. How might you plan for that safely? Is this a time to encourage people to think again about their giving and encouraging people, where possible, to move onto standing orders?

Junior Church

How will you safeguard both young people and children from transmitting the virus? Is the room large enough to allow appropriate distancing? What about all age worship as an alternative or as a way of complimenting other acts of worship?

e) Planning for other groups

There will be other groups looking forward to the reopening of church buildings. These will include church based groups, community based groups and those letting or leasing the building. At the moment church buildings can only be used for designated activities or weekly inspections.

As the lockdown begins to ease the same considerations about safety will be paramount. Whilst we must acknowledge and accept the financial importance of church lettings and bookings, we also have a duty of care to outside groups and much of what has been written above will be applicable. At the same time, now is a good time to engage in conversation with user groups about what will need to be put in place to enable them to resume their activities, even if no firm timescale can be given at this stage. It may also be worth noting that a number of public institutions may be looking for additional space. For example, local schools may be seeking additional classroom space. It is worth considering entering into conversation with local schools, councils and public providers to explore what might be possible on church premises within the guidelines.

Stage 3: Re-emerging

Re-emerging is likely to take several months. At each stage of reopening, it is important to consolidate what has been gained, to reflect on what you are learning and to build on it, especially as guidelines, hopefully, continue to be relaxed. Some buildings and congregations may not reopen in the same way. Some congregations may feel that they are no longer viable: others may recognise that mission and ministry can flourish without needing to own a building. It will look different in different contexts and even across a single circuit. This will be the 'new normal' or starting place from which to begin planning for the future. It is perhaps also a particular time for prayer, vision and imagination.

In the next section we explore some simple tools to help you as you begin to imagine what a new future might look like and build upon all God has been teaching and showing us during lockdown.

Section 3. Future Story

Introduction

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." (Attributed to Albert Einstein)

As life begins to normalise after lockdown, there is a real danger that we simply go back to the status quo and fail to recognise what God has been teaching us about being church. To quote Einstein again, "The solution to our current problems cannot be found from the level of consciousness that created them", in other words, the problems we face will not be solved by the same kind of thinking that led to the problems in the first place. In gospel terms, new wine needs fresh wineskins (Matthew 9:17).

This is not about throwing things away but about looking at the same things in a different way, through a different lens. As a URC document expresses it,

'We can have a new vision of what we want our churches to be like – what they might become rather than what they have been. There are so many things that we have been doing that were and are the right things, and we don't need to throw them away. But nothing should unthinkingly be carried forwards.'

Leadership literature talks about this as an 'adaptive' challenge. An adaptive challenge requires different thinking and changed ways. It does not require experts but rather ordinary people watching what is going on, reflecting upon it and responding. If we are to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church and to individual churches, then now is a good time for some experimentation and adaptation – don't be afraid to fail! We have learned a lot through lockdown. I am sure there will be several things on your list but here are a few on mine: the importance of pastoral connection and small groups; a seriousness about discipleship and lay formation; confidence in sharing good news and inviting others to join in; new ways of worshipping together; the importance of facing outwards towards our communities; the opportunities created by technology and social media; an increased sensitivity to issues of justice.² There are many things which could be added to this list.

This section exists simply as an encouragement to Circuit Leadership Teams, and perhaps also individual churches, to grasp the opportunity to reflect on what has been learned through lockdown and how as a Circuit you might need to change, adapt and experiment in the coming years. The section offers two tools, one based around *Our Calling* and another called *Today, Heaven and Hell*, which may help to stimulate discussion. Other more comprehensive forms of review can be found elsewhere. The important thing here is the

² You may want to look at the new Joint Public Issues Team campaign, 'Stay Alert to Justice', <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/corona-virus/stayalert/>

conversation and the willingness to follow where the Spirit leads and to put our learning into action. It is assumed in the exercises that follow that they take place when you are able to meet and that social distancing has been relaxed.

Our Calling: SOAR Exercise

What follows is an example of what is called a SOAR exercise.³ SOAR (Strengths – Opportunities – Aspirations – Results/Resources) is an alternative to the more widely known SWOT (Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats) analysis and is a tool for strategic thinking and planning developed as a part of Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative and participative approach to community development which focuses on the positive, generative opportunities which are already present, i.e. those things which might ‘appreciate’ or grow in value. It relies on participation so that whatever emerges from your conversation is more likely to be ‘owned’ and delivered.

An Our Calling SOAR exercise

This exercise focuses upon the learning we have gained through lockdown and how we might build on it. It is worth spending time on this together and it could take a whole day so plan time to eat and pray together.

- Begin with prayer and a short reflection – the reflections at the beginning of this booklet would work well in this context but use something appropriate to your context.

You will need:

- Lots of floor or table space
- Bold marker pens, flip chart paper and sticky notes
- A copy of the *Our Calling* banner below for everyone or a copy on screen – you can find a powerpoint slide at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/our-calling/>

³ SOAR was developed by Jackie Stavros and Gina Hinrichs. See *The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths Based Strategy*, (Thin Book Publishing, 2009).

Our Calling

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission

It does this through



Worship



Learning and Caring



Service



Evangelism



The Methodist Church

www.methodist.org.uk

Facebook | Twitter | YouTube | Instagram | Flickr | Google+

1. Begin the SOAR exercise. At each stage break into small groups of 3 or 4 people. Give each group a piece of flipchart and after each stage provide an opportunity for groups to feedback and pin or blue tack flipchart pages on a wall. Have a short time of plenary to reflect on any common insights which are emerging. Write common themes on a sticky note, then place them on a wall where everyone can see. Group similar issues together and remove duplicates. Note timings can be adapted but each stage could take an hour or even longer. As an example, if you provide an hour for each section, approximate timings could be 15-20 minutes in small groups, 20-30 minutes for feedback, 10 minutes for plenary. Emphasise the importance of listening to one another and giving each other a chance to speak.
2. STRENGTHS
 - What is good in our present circumstances that we want to continue?
 - Where have we made a difference?
 - How do we currently support people in their spiritual lives?
 - What skills, knowledge and experience do we bring to this circuit and its people?
3. OPPORTUNITIES
 - What have we learned during lockdown in relation to?
 - Worship?
 - Learning and caring?
 - Service?

- Evangelism?
 - What opportunities does this learning present us with?
 - What can we do differently?
 - How might God be asking us to live prophetically?
4. ASPIRATIONS
- In what ways do we want our Circuit to develop?
 - What new ways of working do we need to fulfil God's purposes?
 - How might we support the development of 24/7 discipleship?
 - How might we think about the use of our resources differently?
5. RESOURCES
- What are the resources we need to begin moving forward?
 - Who can we call on for help and support?
 - What are the first and smallest actions we need to take?
 - How will we know we've got there?

Today, Heaven and Hell

You can find versions of this resource in *Voice Activated* and *Our Church's Future Story*. This version is from the latter resource with some minor adaptations.

This exercise will help you explore in a group your current situation as a church/circuit and the worst and best case scenarios for your future. It will also ask you to think about the steps that would need to be taken to get to either the worst or best future position.

- Begin with prayer and a short reflection – the reflections at the beginning of this booklet would work well in this context but use something appropriate to your context.

You will need:

- Lots of paper hexagons – see below for a template
- Lots of floor or table space
- Bold marker pens and sticky notes

Step 1: The Current Situation

Write the word 'NOW' in large letters in the centre of one of the hexagons. Place this on the floor or table and ask the group to think of six short statements that describe your

church/circuit's current situation. These six statements are each written in one hexagon, which are then placed around the original NOW hexagon.

Note: Before beginning Step 1, you might want to split the group into pairs and ask them to come up with an 'elevator pitch' (something that could be shared in the duration of a short ride in a lift) that describes the current situation in your church/circuit – this might stimulate conversation.

Scenarios

Step 2: Worst Case Scenario

Take another hexagon and write 'WORST' in its centre. Place this at a distance from the NOW hexagon. Then ask the group to come up with another six short statements – this time describing the worst case future scenarios for your church/circuit. Now ask the group to build a single line of hexagons from the NOW cluster to the WORST cluster. Each hexagon in this line should describe a step in a fictional story of the road to WORST.

Step 3: Best Case Scenario

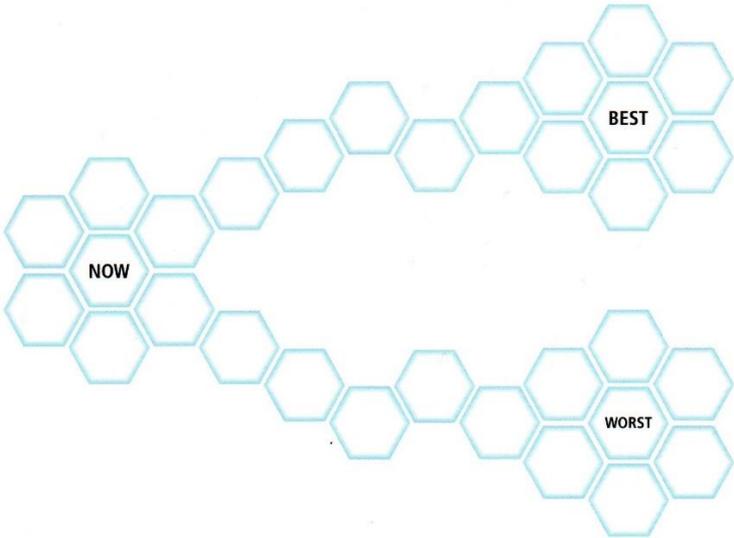
Finally, write 'BEST' in another hexagon and again place this at a distance from the NOW hexagon. The group create six more hexagons, describing their ideals for the future of the church/circuit and then place these around BEST. As before, the group then create a single line of hexagons from NOW to BEST, describing the step by step fictional journey the church/circuit could take to get to that point.

Note: Before beginning Step 3, you might want to take some time to imagine the future you hope for. Ask everyone to close their eyes, then say: *'It's five years from now and our plans for growth have been a complete success. What can we see, hear, smell and feel to tell us that all the work has been successful?'*

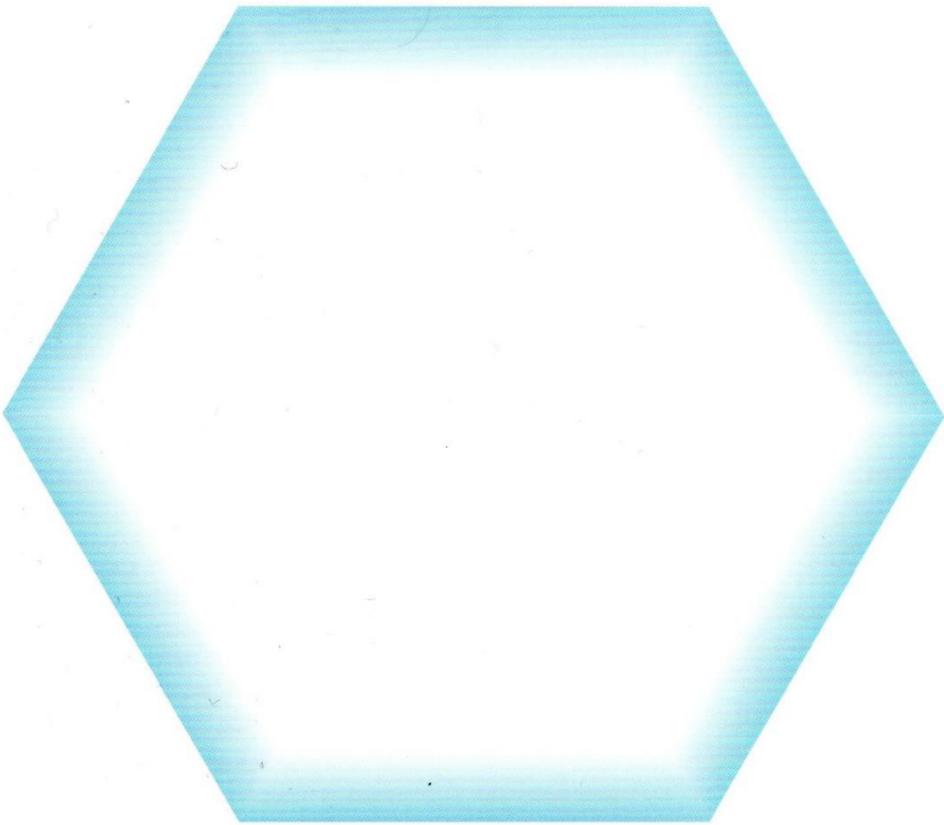
Step 4: What could stop us?

Initially working in pairs, brainstorm all the obstacles and issues that might stop the church/circuit from reaching the best case scenario. Write each obstacle on a sticky note, then place these on a wall where everyone can see. Group similar issues together and remove duplicates. Then, as a larger group, discuss how these obstacles can be overcome. As you find solutions, remove the sticky notes from the wall.

Example Diagram



Hexagon Template



Conclusion

Jesus came near and said to them... 'I will be with you always, to the end of time'

Matthew 28: 18, 20

We are living through 'interesting' and challenging times. But we are not the first people to live through challenging times, as our history demonstrates. I am sure that there have been other times in Christian history which have been just as 'interesting'! You may remember how the presenter Nick Ross used to close *Crimewatch* by turning to the camera, after all the terrible crimes that had been reported in the programme, to say, 'Don't have nightmares.' Of course we must not downplay the reality of the challenges that we face as we emerge from lockdown. At the same time, we are people of the promise, the Church will endure in whatever form, and we are not alone. As John Wesley is reputed to have said on his deathbed, 'Best of all, God is with us'. Jesus promises to be with us now and to the end of time. So live confidently in that promise because he is present to you now in the power of the Spirit.

Resources

Methodist Church guidance - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus/>

The URC publication, *Ready for the New Normal*, can be accessed in full at <https://urc.org.uk/new-normal.html>

The mission planning toolkit *Our Church's Future Story* can be purchased at <https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/OCFS119/our-churchs-future-story>

The Romero Prayer

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that. This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.
Amen.