

Ministers:

Rev Stephen Willey and Deacon Sheila Dawson

Dear Friends

May 2020

I'm writing a letter to all our members and friends just to say "Hello!" and to keep in touch.

I want to start by saying that you are in my prayers at this time of lock-down. It is a hard time for us all, but especially for those who are having to self-isolate alone. If you feel isolated, maybe because you are not on email, and you'd like to get in touch, please contact Doreen or Elaine, Sheila or myself.

I'm sorry it has taken so long to write to you all. I realise that many of you are in touch with one other, communicating via the phone and other electronic means but we have been locked-down for several weeks, and I hope this letter reminds you, if you feel out of touch, that you are part of our church family. The letter is being sent to all connected with our Church at Central Hall (electronically, or by good old Royal Mail!)

Something that has surprised me, is how I have been occupied with lots of new (and often unexpected) things since the lock-down began. Preparing for worship on a Monday, doing YouTube clips, being at electronic staff meetings and Bible studies, and getting our website up to date have all been new experiences for me.

There have been some difficult times too. The most difficult decision that we've made as a church, was to shut Wesleys because of the losses it was making and the high likelihood that those losses would continue into the future. Since the beginning of September the average losses at Wesleys were about £1000 per month and these losses were being covered by lettings and members' contributions. In the end, we accepted that the situation was unsustainable and closed the café permanently. I am still very conscious of the employees and wonderful volunteers the café worked with and I am sure we will work hard to find ways to work together with our volunteers in the future. I am sure you will agree with me that we must keep alive our relationships with the communities we serve.

This means that when we get back into the building we must redouble our efforts to welcome all those who pass through our doors, or pass by our building. I would love to see a welcoming team based in our foyer, offering a radical welcome to everyone. An important aspect of this (already agreed) is that, overseen by our stewards, the Aldersgate Chapel will return to being set aside as a place where people can come and pray and have some times of silence (It will not be used for commercial lets).

Linked to this, we are planning to move the office staff (including me) into the foyer area. The minister was originally situated downstairs and it seems to me a much better way to be amongst the people. This was agreed by a Church Council which involved lots of emails! At the same Church Council, we agreed that the upstairs office would be used on Sundays as a vestry for the preacher, and we made decisions about church leadership and how to plan for the City of Culture. We can look forward to some challenging but exciting times.

In worship, I hope we may be able to manage our worship in a way that permits social distancing as things return to something that approximates normality. Fortunately we have a big worship space and if chairs are

spaced carefully, I do hope we could get worshippers in and still offer social distancing before too long. We await government advice.

Gradually, we will welcome back organisations which have survived and wish to re-let spaces in our building. These include many community focused charities. The blood donors are the only group that have continued to meet whilst we've been on lock-down and I am glad that in the midst of this crisis we have been able to support this vital work for the NHS.

Although the café has shut, I expect that organisations using our premises will still be able to stop for a cup of tea in the foyer area, supported by the volunteers on duty. I also hope that, as a church, we will continue to meet and have food together – as often as we can!

To help leadership and communication we have set up a Church Leadership Group including our Church Council Secretary, Treasurer, Senior Steward and at least 1 other steward, Property Steward and Ministers. The Group will need input from others to keep it relevant and connected to the whole of church life. Members of the Leadership Group will not have the power to make significant decisions but will be able to make suggestions to the wider church and think in detail about church life. In relation to church governance, just to note that our AGM which was scheduled for 17 May, has been postponed.

Looking ahead to 2021 and the City of Culture, we have set up groups to oversee the year. They will find ways to consult widely with the church congregation, focus on events and projects suggested by church members and delegate responsibility for events and projects to small project groups. We also expect to employ artists in residence (not to live on site, but to work with us during the year). In order to make all this happen, we will make an application to our Circuit for grant support.

I'd be happy to have reflections from you about these, or any issues you feel are impacting on our church. I realise that it is hard to measure how the church is doing in the current crisis, and it may be many months before we can get back to something more normal.

A big thank-you to all of you who have been keeping our church alive and rooted in God's love during the crisis by your care for one another.

Also, some of you have asked about financial matters and giving. Donations can be accepted at any time by transfer to our bank account but these donations cannot be Gift Aided unless the individual has signed a Gift Aid form (details from Doreen Hawthorne or John Bennett). Our bank account details are CAF Bank: Coventry Central Hall, Sort Code: 40-52-40, Account Number: 00028245. Please use "OFFERING" as the reference and if possible email jayne@coventrycentralhall.co.uk saying that you have made a transfer so that she will know what it is. We can also accept cheques posted to Coventry Central Hall, Warwick Lane, Coventry CV1 2HA and made payable to "Coventry Central Hall".

Finally, please, all of you, keep praying. I write to you during Christian Aid week. Please pray for other nations, particularly where many already die from preventable diseases, pray for our country badly affected by the virus and especially, please, pray for our church and the churches of Coventry. May we keep our eyes on Jesus, our way our truth and our life.

This comes with love from Deacon Sheila and myself,

May God's blessing be upon us all!

Stephen