

A message from Rev Richard Teal, the President of the Methodist Conference about the second national lockdown in England

Dear Friends

We are all devastated by the expected introduction of a second national lockdown in England as well as the ongoing restrictions imposed in Scotland and the firebreak that our sisters and brothers in Wales have been living under for the past couple of weeks. Scientific advice is being heeded to bring down the rising rate of the virus and its possible consequences. The introduction of the lockdown from Thursday in England may be necessary but its consequences will also be far reaching.

There will undoubtedly be a serious setback for the economy, and people who are struggling financially and in numerous other ways will be greatly affected. It could prove to be a tipping point for many people. The poor and the vulnerable have and will continue to be hit the hardest. There is a feeling of hopelessness for many people.

Our National Health Service staff and other keyworkers are already tired through the outstanding service they have given to us all, particularly during these past few months and this second lockdown will be especially difficult for them. They need our continued support, encouragement and prayers.

Governments, all those in political life plus medical and scientific advisers are having to make very hard decisions on our behalf which, in a number of places, are far from popular. Whilst they rightly need our scrutiny, they also need our support, encouragement and prayers, that their decisions will help people's well-being.

One of our Methodist Presbyters commented to me recently that during this period she was trying to develop what she calls a 'sacrament of kindness'. I like that phrase very much. In the concerns of the moment we all need in our living to develop to each other a 'sacrament of kindness'. So much seems to be against this idea but it is something every single one of us could develop in our attitudes to ourselves, to other people and indeed the communities we serve.

Finally, as I write as the President of the Conference, I would be denying my role if I did not specifically mention something of our Faith. Bishop Leslie Newbiggin of blessed memory was once asked whether, as he looked to the future, was he optimistic or pessimistic?

His reply was simple and straight forward 'I am' he said, 'neither an optimist nor a pessimist. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!'

Therein lies our hope. The God who is with us in the worst of situations, even when the flame of hope seems very weak. Such is our faith and hope in the risen Christ. Not a hope which ignores the shadows of suffering, but a hope strong and secure in the assurance that love is at the heart of all things, that the eternal God is our refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. The best of all is, God is with us.

A Prayer by Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Let nothing disturb or dismay us, O God, for all things are passing and you alone are unchanging. All things are wrought in patience, O God, and those who possess you lack nothing. Our sufficiency, O God, is in you alone, now and always. Amen.