

On behalf of all the Circuit Stewards may I wish you all a happy, safe and healthy new year. With the prospect of a vaccine becoming a reality for many, we begin to see signs of hope of a return to some degree of 'normality'. This will obviously take some months, but a settled pattern of church worship is more than just a vague hope.



So, what is happening at the moment?

Having had the opportunity for many of our churches to open in September and October we had to close again in November, with some opening again in December, allowing for some Christmas Services and very different Carol Services. Other churches organised online or recorded Christmas Services.

Then the Circuit found itself in the strange situation of straddling Tier 3 and 4, with the difficult decisions that brought. And now we are in lockdown again. Whilst churches are able to remain open in Tier 4 and lockdown, many have decided to again close in order to encourage people to comply with the recommendation to 'stay at home'. This also eases the expectation for preachers to travel outside of their local community in order to fulfil their appointments. Some of our Circuit churches have decided to remain open under strict constraints.

But, as we begin a new year, we do have things to look forward to and to celebrate.

On 11th March we shall have our Circuit Meeting, which will most likely have to be on Zoom. We are very aware that this may prevent some from attending and it will be challenging to manage a relatively large meeting virtually, enabling people to have the freedom to contribute effectively. After this meeting all members of Circuit Meeting shall be able to vote for our new Circuit Stewards by ballot. I would ask you to pray for those who will be nominated to become Circuit Stewards as they consider the commitment to offer leadership and guidance impartially, effectively listening to those who speak quietly as well as to those who are more forthcoming. At that meeting we shall offer our thanks to Chris Lusher and Kate Philips for their commitment as Circuit Stewards.

On 28th March Phil Dixon has his Testimony Service in the evening at Highcliffe in preparation for his Ordination. It is hoped that this will be 'live' and not a virtual Service. His Ordination is on 18th April at Westminster Central Hall and details of that will be distributed as soon as we have them. We understand that this has been very difficult for Phil as he hoped to be Ordained last year. Please pray for Phil as he prepares for this important milestone in his Ministry.

We shall be very sorry to have to say goodbye to Nigel and Rhoda Deller as Nigel finishes his time as a Circuit Minister. We have planned for a Circuit Service to say farewell to them for the evening of 13th June at Verwood.

As you have already heard, we were successful in the second round of Stationing and Nick Wood has been invited to join the Circuit to take responsibility for Nigel's 3 churches. Nick and his wife, Suzannah, are currently in the Poole Bay Circuit. Arrangements for the Welcome Service will be distributed as soon as possible (by then we may even be able to shake hands).

In preparation for Nigel's departure, after Easter Martin Keenan will take on his responsibility for Mudford Lane. We should like to thank Nigel for his work with Mudford Lane and thank Martin for taking on an extra church.

In the Autumn the Circuit Leadership Team started to plan for a whole Circuit Review, as we feel that this is an opportunity to both review what is currently happening and to plan for the future development of the Circuit. We had thought of starting this after Easter, but we now feel that this would be premature, considering the disruption to churches at the moment. Now we have pencilled it in for Autumn 2021. This means

that the new Circuit Stewards and Nick Wood will be in place to participate in both the arrangements and the implementation of any recommendations/changes to the structure and management of the Circuit.

May we again thank everyone for all they have done during these 11 months. Many have learned new skills, churches with appropriate gifts have prepared online or recorded services, others have distributed written worship. People have been keeping in contact with members and adherents. You have adapted to sudden changes in arrangements with grace and understanding. Thanks also to Margaret Symons for the way she has maintained our excellent website.

I began by wishing you a happy new year. We go forward trusting that God is with us, that he understands our frustrations and our concerns. We do not know what our Circuit will look like as we emerge from this pandemic, but we put our faith in the knowledge that God will work through us to produce fruit if we listen to him and go where he guides us.

Please pray for the Government, that they may make the best decisions in a very difficult situation.

Please continue to pray for our Ministers and all who lead in our churches and in the Circuit. Please try to understand that we are all doing our best to make right and good decisions, that some of these may not suit you, but they may suit others, and that most decisions are a reasoned compromise.

Until we are able to meet again please continue to develop and practice the Fruits of the Spirit:



And try to find something each day to laugh about:



Liz Ward, on behalf of the Circuit Stewards

January 2021

Finally.. let us reflect on the most popular Bible verse of 2020

Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

With blessings, The Stewards