

Glenholm Cottage,
Broughton.
ML12 6JF
fiona@glenholm.co.uk

18th March 2020

Dear Friends,

It's in times of crisis and uncertainty that many in our communities turn to the church for reassurance and guidance. However, in these troubling times, we are now being strongly advised not to have regular worship services for fear of spreading the virus. So the question being asked is: how can we be the church in our community if we cannot meet? We as members of Presbytery are seen as the leaders in our church community but with an added complication: a lot of us are either in the over 70's bracket, have underlying health condition or in some cases both! Jesus talked about his followers being like salt and light in the world, but how do we fulfil this challenge under the present circumstances?

As Moderator of Melrose and Peebles Presbytery, I'm writing to you to ask for your help. We need to be creative and imaginative in how we keep our church communities going and be that salt and light to the communities we live and work in. So can we work together to help each other in this task? I'm sure that many of you have some very good ideas about what we can do, and may already be implementing them in your own community. But, please don't keep these ideas to yourselves. It would be great if we could share these ideas with each other and help keep our churches serving God and the community. I would suggest that we could use the Presbytery website to share these ideas as John Henderson, our website editor is always happy to receive articles and posts for the website.

There have been some suggestions already about moving some services online and allowing people to stream them from their homes. If your church is capable of doing this, great, but I would ask that you share the link to your service or output with the rest of Presbytery so that a wider audience can share in your worship. Again, this could be done via our website or any other social media platform you prefer. Just get the message out to us. To this end, would anyone like to volunteer to set up Facebook for the Presbytery as I wonder if this is the time to think about this form of communication?

Although we are discouraged to hold services in our churches, there is nothing to stop us keeping them open for the community to visit in times of need. It may be that some of the time your church can be manned, at other times left open for people to use, whatever is suitable for your own church. However, whatever you choose to do, I'm sure you'll remember to keep a safe distance and not put anyone in danger. It might also be prudent to check insurance policies if necessary. With my own church we have agreed to have the church open all the time and publicise times when someone will be there to chat or say a prayer as needs be. We're also making sure someone is there on a Sunday morning but not to lead worship.

Underpinning all of what we do in the name of our saviour is prayer. So can I be so bold as to encourage all of us to spend more time in prayer? In the next few weeks, hopefully not months, we will probably find ourselves with less to do so why not fill some of that time conversing with God? If

we can't meet together in prayer, we can still pray for each other and for the wider world? Things being suggested already are setting a time of day when as many as possible pause for prayer, knowing others are praying with them at this time. Another idea is to publish set prayers which can be said together but not in the same place. I heard today of a church that has set up a virtual post-it note board on their website for people to send prayer requests for their praying community to use. Again if you have some good ideas that are working for you, please share them with the rest of us.

I hope that we will be able to meet as a Presbytery in May but we will let you know nearer the time what is being suggested. In the meantime, please stay safe, encourage each other in the faith and know that God loves and cares for us, even in these trying times.

Yours in Christ

Dr Fiona Burnett

Moderator, Melrose and Peebles Presbytery.