

Covid-19 Coronavirus Guidance

When Paul writes to Christians in Philippi he encourages them “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1: 2). He goes on to point them to the nature, character and beauty of Jesus. Our circumstances may be very different to our Philippian brothers and sisters, but the invitation and challenge to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...whatever happens, is exactly the same.

This letter contains practical guidelines and some directions for Church Councils and Circuit Executives in light of the spread of Coronavirus. However, as followers of Jesus our response while including them, must be more than taking steps to hold back the spread of infection. Our response is to live, whatever happens, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. So, what does that look like for ‘the people called Methodist’?

Pray

A primary response is to pray for all affected by Coronavirus, and for the whole community at this time

- for those who have the virus and for their loved ones for a real sense of God’s presence.
- for all who are grieving the loss of loved ones that they might know God’s comfort
- for all who are anxious because of Coronavirus, that they might know God’s peace
- for healthcare workers that they might know God’s protection and strength
- for those with responsibilities in the Health Boards, HSE, PHA and government that they might know God’s wisdom in their decision making
- for our whole community, for economic stability and that we might be good neighbours to one another

“ Whatever happens”: a people whose confidence is in God

Followers of Jesus are consistently reminded throughout the Bible to live life to the full, with confidence in God, Creator, Son and Spirit. In reminding Christians in Philippi to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, whatever happens, Paul is making it clear that we will face challenging situations. In those contexts, when it is understandable to be afraid the invitation which comes to everyone is to make a conscious decision to trust God. The rise and spread of this virus confronts us all with the fact of our mortality, we can be open about that and support each other. Jesus invitation is to live every day fully and not be afraid.

Being good neighbours

- Disciplines like hand washing, holding back from handshakes and hugs in an effort to stop even inadvertent passing on of infection, are a way of being good neighbours
- Practice the discipline of sharing. Of course, if we are self-isolating we need supplies, however, our actions, in buying large quantities of food or supplies thus clearing shelves have impact on those who cannot afford to buy big quantities at one time. Will we intentionally and generously resist the impulse to hoard? Will we practice the Christian discipline of sharing, perhaps asking our neighbours what they need and helping them to get it?

Pastoral Care

At the time of writing only specific groups are being required to self-isolate. However, it is likely that the situation will get worse before it gets better. Therefore, every Methodist congregation is asked to:

- Plan now as to how to support members of the congregation who are housebound or isolated. Those plans may include prayer chains, offering to deliver meals to the doorsteps of those who can't get out, thinking about how to support those who are not suffering with the virus but whose domiciliary care workers are ill, and who therefore need support.
- As a minimum every Methodist society is asked to have a list of those who are isolated and housebound and put arrangements in place to make regular contact by phone. This is a task which can be appropriately shared between leaders.
- Put into announcements that we respectfully ask that anyone displaying symptoms of the virus remain at home in order to protect vulnerable members of the congregation
- Members of the congregation should not expect anyone from the church to visit in those circumstances, although pastoral care can be offered by phone, Skype etc

Sunday Worship:

At the time of writing gatherings for worship etc are not prohibited. However, we need to think ahead now as to our response if that situation should change. Therefore

- Every Church Council is asked to explore the use of technology should we be unable to gather for worship, that may mean use of podcasts or live streaming, emailing Bible Studies or at least pointing the congregation to other resources.
- Should it be that smaller gatherings are permitted rather than large ones, could arrangements be made for the congregation to gather for worship as small groups?

Being a good employer:

If your congregation employs anyone then we have a responsibility to be a good employer. A guidance paper is **attached**.

It should be noted that, if we are well, a requirement to self-isolate does not mean that work stops, and every effort should be made to work from home.

Precautions to prevent the spread of the virus:

Every Methodist Society is required to keep up to date with the relevant government guidelines and to implement them. These can be sourced at

Public Health Agency (NI)

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

Health Protection Surveillance Centre (ROI)

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/>

In addition, there will be regular (at least weekly) up-dates from this Office.

Initial guidelines were circulated on 28th February. We are now requiring that

- we do not shake hands or hug each other: this applies to the sharing of the Peace during worship, and to welcoming before services and leaders of worship shaking hands at the door. This is a challenging discipline and some may be tempted to think that they are willing to take the risk of a handshake or hug for themselves. The issue however is not for others but for others, as infection can be unwittingly passed on. Holding back from handshakes and hugs is a way of protecting others.
- every church displays posters which guide re health precautions. Posters produced by each jurisdiction are **attached**.
- Disposable gloves should be worn when counting the offering
- hand sanitiser be supplied, if it can be sourced, along with additional tissues. Tissues should be disposed of in bins (with liners). Bins should be emptied after every service or church gathering and the person disposing of the bins should wear disposable gloves.
- enhanced cleaning of kitchens and bathrooms with use of anti-bacterial spray must take place
- copies of the NHS 7 steps guidance (**attached**) should be displayed in both kitchen and toilets

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1: 2). In the power and grace of the Holy Spirit our challenge is to live consistently, as individuals and as a people so that in all things we point to Jesus.



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