

Dear Friends,

We suddenly find ourselves in a World that has, at least temporarily, been changed beyond what we could ever have imagined. The Coronavirus and all the measures to protect our communities has meant that we are no longer able to gather together for Sunday Worship, Bible Study or for times of Fellowship.

As we adjust to these changes we will find new ways of working and worshipping.

Here are some resources to help us to Worship in our own homes but in the knowledge we are united with the Church throughout the World.

As a Circuit I ask that at 11am each Sunday we unite in praying for all our Churches and Communities.

You will also see details of the national call to prayer at 7pm.

A favourite song in many of our Schools is "My Lighthouse" [Rend Collective] and the words have taken on a whole new meaning for me in the situation we find ourselves in.

In my wrestling and in my doubts  
In my failures You won't walk out  
Your great love will lead me through  
You are the peace in my troubled sea  
You are the peace in my troubled sea

In the silence, You won't let go  
In the questions, Your truth will hold  
Your great love will lead me through  
You are the peace in my troubled sea  
You are the peace in my troubled sea

My lighthouse, my lighthouse  
Shining in the darkness  
I will follow You  
My lighthouse, my lighthouse  
I will trust the promise  
You will carry me safe to shore

I won't fear what tomorrow brings  
With each morning I'll rise and sing  
My God's love will lead me through  
You are the peace in my troubled sea  
You are the peace in my troubled sea

God's great love will continue to lead us through and will bring us peace in the troubled sea of life.

*Michael*

### **Worship this Sunday**

#### **Radio**

**BBC Radio 4 Sundays 8:10am Sunday Worship**

**BBC Radio 4 Wednesdays 3:30pm Choral Evensong**

**Repeated Sunday 3:00pm Choral Evensong**

#### **Television**

**BBC One Sundays 1:15pm Songs of Praise**



## **Light a candle of hope: A national call to prayer**

*Presidents of Churches Together in England have issued a call to prayer in the light of the Coronavirus pandemic. This is for all churches and people of prayer to join on Sunday 22nd March, Mothering Sunday.*

This Mothering Sunday, 22nd March, we are calling all churches to a National Day of Prayer and Action. At such a time as this, when so many are fearful and there is great uncertainty, we are reminded of our dependence on our loving Heavenly Father and the future that he holds.

At 7pm this Sunday, light a candle in the windows of your homes as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ, our source and hope in prayer.

Whether you are continuing to worship as congregations or not, we have the great privilege and freedom to be able to call upon God, wherever we are, individually and corporately, for healing in our nation. We would pray for all in leadership at this time, making decisions about the containment of the COVID-19 virus, for those working in health and social care, and especially for the most vulnerable, whether elderly or those with underlying health conditions.

There are already stories being told of wonderful acts of kindness across neighbourhoods. Alongside your prayers, take the opportunity to telephone or email someone who is isolated, buy some additional food for your local foodbank, or offer to deliver shopping for an elderly neighbour. We may not be able to touch physically, but we can make connections in so many other ways.

At least for those of us in the global North, we do seem to be in unusual times, and wisdom and flexibility about worship gatherings are a key part of our Christian discipleship during this period.

We note that this call to prayer and action comes on Mothering Sunday: a time of thankfulness, remembering especially mothers who have served us, often in very costly ways. It is also a very mixed day for many. For some the remembrance is painful, and for others Mothering Sunday is a reminder of disappointment or loss. In many ways, this period under the shadow of the coronavirus will be prompting similarly diverse reactions and so it seems especially appropriate that the call to prayer is made this Sunday. At this time of uncertainty join in with the National Day of Prayer and Action, lighting a candle of hope\*.

“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you” 1 Peter 5:7

### **Presidents of Churches Together in England**

**\*Safety note** - please take all necessary fire precautions when using a lit candle. Ensure you remain with the lit candle at all times, and do not leave it to burn if you leave the room. Ensure there are no fabrics or

*materials such as curtains near the candle. If you are able to use a small electric 'candle' instead, that will be safe to leave unattended.*



## Prayers

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7.*

God of all hope we call on you today.  
We pray for those who are living in fear:  
Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other’s reactions to them.  
May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.  
For those people who are worried about attending worship.  
For those needing to make decisions in order to care for other  
For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.  
Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that  
Nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.  
Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you.

Amen

Loving God,  
If we are ill, strengthen us.  
If we are tired, fortify our spirits.  
If we are anxious, help us to consider the lillies of the field and the birds of the air.

Help us not to stockpile treasures from supermarkets in the barns of our larders.  
Don't let fear cause us to overlook the needs of others more vulnerable than ourselves.  
Fix our eyes on your story and our hearts on your grace.

Help us always to hold fast to the good,  
See the good in others,  
And remember there is just one world, one hope,  
One everlasting love, with baskets of bread for everyone.

In Jesus we make our prayer,  
The one who suffered, died and was raised to new life,  
In whom we trust these days and all days,  
Amen.

*The Revd Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference*

***Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, Professor Clive Marsh, reflects on where God is during the coronavirus pandemic.***

My hunch is that if someone were to do a check across the Internet of uses of the word 'virus' in recent years, a large number (the majority?) might have referred to computer viruses. Now we are struggling collectively, across the world, with a virus for real. Of course, there have been plenty of real viruses around before now. But of late they've largely been under control, at least in the West. The dominant theme in many of the faith-related comments I've seen about Covid-19, though, is striking: suddenly we realise we are most certainly not in control, 'we' being humanity as a whole. The fragility of life is emphasised, the limitations of knowledge become plain and human hubris is challenged.

We may quickly then want to remind ourselves that 'God is in control' in response. True though this will prove, the tricky thing is that it might imply that God somehow caused the virus. I suggest we don't waste any time with such apportioning of blame, or on some need to locate a cause. Yes, there will be scientific explanations for where the virus came from, and there are scientific endeavours happening as we speak to fight it, and we should be thankful for all that work. God is in the midst of those efforts. But as for handling and responding to the situation which the God-given freedom of the natural world has thrown up, Jesus' response to the blind man is decisive (John 9.3): don't ask about sin here, just concentrate on what happens in response to the situation we're in. Even if there may be a sense in which God is 'responsible for everything', don't press for detail, ask where God is being revealed *now*, as people cope, adjust, show compassion, help neighbours, find new ways of connecting, stop their busyness, support the weak, learn the value of rest.

The feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6.30-44, and other versions) is a story which works on so many levels, though connects directly with the calls from leaders of supermarket chains urging people 'just to take what they need, so that others can get what they need too'. The disciples' exasperation at how all could possibly be fed is being dealt with in the present. I wonder whether the repeated emphasis that 'there is enough food to go round' will keep on being repeated, on a global scale, after coronavirus has abated. And thinking of the petition in the Lord's Prayer to 'give us this day our daily bread' (Matt 6.11), the reminder to live simply so that others may simply live has never seemed more pressing.

The coronavirus is here to stay, as part of life, and will take its place alongside others which are already known and tamed. There will be other viruses yet to come. God's world remains wonderful and fragile, and God has entrusted so much to us, as human beings, to be involved in its care (Gen 1.26-27), not because of any particular merit, but just because this is how humans are to be understood (Ps 8.4-8). May God help us and be with us in our struggles.

### **Prayer from Italy**

God of grace,  
we turn to you in prayer in this difficult time  
in which the spread of a pandemic infection has forced our governments  
restrictive measures that limit the normal course of life,  
they block our sociality and risk making us shut up in our increasingly small sphere,  
but they are necessary.

God of love,  
help us to maintain community bonds and solidarity with our sisters and brothers,  
especially with those who are in sickness and need,  
and help us to be a family for those who are without a family.

God of healing,  
we pray for those who have been infected and for their family members,  
give them the courage to face this moment of illness;  
we pray for all healthcare workers who are spending so much  
to manage this epidemic competently and generously,  
for scientists who are working hard on a cure in a short time;  
give them all strength and vision to face and try to stop this epidemic.

God of mercy,  
allow us to live this time as a profitable opportunity to reflect on our experience of faith  
and on our being part of an easy society prey to fear and discouragement in the face of adversity;  
help us, despite the difficulties of this situation, to keep us united and open to others,  
help us not forgetting all the other great tragedies that undermine peace and disrupt the world.

God of salvation,  
we pray you to support us in fighting the chains of exploitation and injustice  
and help us to maintain chains of solidarity throughout Europe;  
please don't abandon us to the fear of contagion,  
but even more to the contagion of fear  
for Christ Jesus our brother and saviour.

Amen *Rev. Mirella Manocchio CEMI (Opera per le Chiese Evangeliche Metodiste in Italia)*