



ALSAGER UNITED REFORMED CHURCH NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2020

From our Minister

Dear friends,

At the end of July I attended a Zoom conference exploring ministry in traumatic times. There was a great deal to reflect on afterwards. As part of the course we explored three different images of resilience in difficult times:

The rock, that remains solid and immovable even when subjected to the tide, the wind, rain and sun.

The tree, that sways in the wind, giving way a little before the strength of the wind but solidly anchored by its roots.

The sand-dune. It was this image that I find very helpful at this time. The sand-dune is made up of many individual grains of sand each of which can be lifted and thrown around by the wind. Many grains near the surface of a dune can be swirled and moved in all sort of ways and yet the core of the dune remains. The dune itself is constantly changing shape and form in response to the effects of the elements on it and yet it clearly remains a sand-dune.

So it feels with the church at the moment, individual members of the body of Christ can often be thrown around and buffeted by what life throws at them, this has been intensified this year by the storm of Covid-19 and as a result the church often finds itself changing shape or form in order to respond to the elements buffeting it. However, with Christ at its heart it remains constantly resilient and recognisably church, the body of Christ on earth today.

In September, as long as the government advice does not alter drastically Alsager and Congleton churches plan to open for prayer and worship on alternate Tuesdays and Worship on alternate Sundays. As a result of the pandemic the shape and form of worship has had to change and will not be what it was for

some considerable time, however, it is still worship. The ways we gather have changed, but gather we still can. How we are gathered and scattered has changed but as always gathered and scattered we remain. We are church with Christ at our heart. Near the end of the newsletter you will find information you need to read carefully before you decide whether you wish to come to the building or at this time you prefer to be church in the places you live. Whichever you choose day by day, week by week nothing will stop each of us being a beloved child of God and a valued part of the church.

Your friend and minister

Murray

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### **Opening the church buildings for worship and Prayer**

Please read this information carefully and keep it for reference.

A **personal risk assessment form** is attached at the end of this newsletter for your information and to help you decide whether you wish to gather in a church building at this time or continue your church life in your own home. Please read it and consider it before deciding whether or not to come to church.

Worship material will continue to be delivered with the monthly newsletter and services will continue to be live streamed and/or recorded as possible. We will continue to care for each other across the church family through the phone ministry.

In order for a church building to be opened for worship or personal prayer, at least two and preferably three people will be needed to act as volunteer stewards on each occasion.

I am not asking particular people (or elders) to act as Stewards but am relying on those who feel able to consider doing this occasionally to contact me directly. **Please, if you would like to know more about stewarding or feel you could volunteer ring me on 01260 273 873 or email me on [rev.msg60@gmail.com](mailto:rev.msg60@gmail.com) All volunteers will be provided with the appropriate guidance and PPE before being asked to steward.**

If there are not enough Stewards available on any particular day to open the building safely it will remain closed on that day!

A list of the proposed opening dates and times are below, please take careful note of them because neither church building will be open each week at present!

When you come to church your name and a contact number will be taken so we can cooperate with the track and trace system if necessary. (Your details will not be used for any other purpose).

We would ask you :

- not to come if you have experienced any of the symptoms of coronavirus in the past week, but seek advice from your GP;
- to bring your own face mask and wear it whilst in the building;
- to bring your own water bottle with you if you think you might need it;  
*(additional masks and water will be available for you if you forget!)*
- to observe social distancing and follow the guidance given by the stewards with regard to movement around the building and where to sit so we can reduce the risks to everybody;
- to refrain from singing or saying the Lord's Prayer out loud;
- to follow the one way system to the designated exit on leaving and **TAKE ALL YOUR BELONGINGS WITH YOU.**

These measures may seem extreme but they are designed to minimise the risks to us all.

None of the measures will prevent us gathering or worshipping with music in a God Centred way. I pray that this is just the first of a number of small steps forward we can take in the following months.

I want at this point to thank the elders and all those in each church who have worked so hard to make sure we get to this point and who will be joining me in offering worship and prayer during September and October.

Below are the proposed dates and times each church will be open and the personal risk assessment is at the end of the newsletter.

God bless

*Murray*

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**Live stream and Open Church dates for Alsager and Congleton
URC's
September and October 2020**

Tuesdays	10.00 – midday	open for prayer
	midday – 12.45	lunchtime service
Sundays	10.30	act of worship

September		
Sunday 6 th		Congleton
Tuesday 8 th	Alsager	-
Sunday 13 th	Alsager	-
Tuesday 15 th		Congleton
Sunday 20 th		Congleton (led by Congleton Youth)
Tuesday 22 nd	Alsager	
Sunday 27 th	Alsager	
Tuesday 29 th		Congleton
October		
Sunday 4 th		Congleton
Tuesday 6 th	Alsager	
Sunday 11 th	Alsager (Harvest Festival)	
Tuesday 13 th		Congleton
Sunday 18 th		Congleton
Tuesday 20 th	Alsager	
Sunday 25 th	Alsager	
Tuesday 27 th		Congleton

Zoom Events for September

Each week we now have the Sunday service, as well as the usual Tuesday lunchtime service, and the Wednesday evening Fellowship and Prayer.

If you have not yet used Zoom, it is very easy to use, either by downloading it or by entering the full internet codes given.

If you don't have access to the internet you can still take part by telephone (mobile or landline).

You can use either of the numbers below to ring in and then you will be asked to key in the meeting ID and the Passwords. It is a great way to join any event and you can be fully involved with the worship or the meeting as you can hear and be heard!

Please try it, it is very straight forward and it would be great to hear from you.

By phone using a Land line or mobile phone (it costs no more than a normal phone call) :

0131 460 1196

0203 051 2874 (the same numbers for all meetings, but see below for Wednesday evenings)

However the codes for Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays differ, but are the same each week, so please keep the internet links for each meeting,

Sunday services 10:30 am each week on Zoom by or phone:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83515434620>

pwd=S2xRYitTaWd5aGVrSIRzZTlvNjl5UT09

Meeting ID: 835 1543 4620

Passcode: 405858

Tuesday lunchtime services

Weekly Tuesday lunchtime (12 noon) services on Zoom by or phone.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85434510444>

pwd=YIBENmRuaEREdW5DNmlzUkQ4RnQ3Zz09

Meeting ID: 854 3451 0444

Passcode: 244292

Fellowship and Prayer time

Wednesday evenings at 7:30pm every week.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88978693846>

PWD=OUdCRUDCEEXTHLRCZY4TVRHMI9HDZ09

Meeting ID: 889 7869 3846

PASSCODE: 790327

Phone: 0203 901 7895 . or
0203 481 1196

For those who cannot get to a church building and are unable to access services by phone, online or via email, here is:

A service liturgy in the Celtic Tradition

with a number of biblically based reflections.

Song/Hymn (R&S 403) **Laudate omnes gentes** (Praise the Lord all you peoples)

Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum.

Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum.

Sing praises all people Sing praises unto God

Opening responses

In light and darkness, in peace and in confusion

Jesus Christ wants to make his home and meet his friends;

He is the Light of Life:

HE IS THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

In him there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither insider or outsider;

ALL ARE ONE IN JESUS CHRIST

He is the Light of Life:

HE IS THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

In him there is neither rich nor poor, neither black nor white

ALL ARE ONE IN JESUS CHRIST

He is the Light of Life:

HE IS THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

In him there is neither male nor female, neither master nor servant;

ALL ARE ONE IN JESUS CHRIST

He is the Light of Life:

HE IS THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

Hymn: (HoGSoP 772) In the Lord I'll be for ever thankful

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice! Look to God,
do not be afraid;
lift up your voices, the Lord is near; lift up your voices, the Lord is
near.

Prayer

Silence

Psalm 40

I waited patiently for God and God bent down to hear me.

**GOD LIFTED ME FROM A MURKY PIT AND SET ME FIRMLY ON
A ROCK WHERE I CAN STAND CONFIDENTLY.**

God put a new song on my lips, A new song of praise to my Maker.
**MANY WILL LOOK ON IN WONDER AND PUT THEIR TRUST IN
GOD**

Countless are your wonders, O God; In goodness you have no equal.
**WE WOULD PROCLAIM ALL YOUR WORKS WERE THEY NOT
TOO MANY TO NUMBER.**

Reading:

Reflections:

Hymn (R&S 402): Ubi Caritas

Ubi Caritas et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est

*Where there's tender care and love tender care and love, God is
there.*

*Prayers for others – Use this space to bring your concerns for the
Creation, the Church and the world before God*

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name;
Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread; And forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil;
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
Now and for ever. Amen**

The Peace

Peace be with you

AND ALSO WITH YOU

Song Take, O take me as I am

Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

Blessing

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During September and October the lectionary includes readings from Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi. This time last year, the Daily devotions from the URC featured the letter. Below is a reflection by The Rev'd Angela Rigby, Minister, Christ Church URC Tonbridge and St Johns Hill URC Sevenoaks as part of that series. I thought it might be good to share it with you now and although it was written before the pandemic it might help us reflect on things in the present. *Murray*

Philippians 1: 19 - 26

### **Reflection**

Paul shares the message of Jesus Christ for the benefit of all who will hear it. He faces persecution because of it. He is imprisoned. Yet here, in today's reading, he tells the Philippians, "Whatever happens – I live or I die – I'm going to be okay. However, if I live, all the better for you and people like you, because I can keep telling folks about Jesus" (my paraphrase). After weighing up what to hope for, Paul chooses life. What might that mean today to choose life as Paul does?

Choose life. Choose risk. Choose possibly saying the right thing, to the wrong person. Choose prison. Choose not knowing if you will be freed in this life or the next. Choose love. Choose to love God enough to give God all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. Choose to love your neighbour as yourself – no - better than yourself. Choose to love each other especially when you disagree. Choose to share the good news to anyone who will

listen. Choose Christ. Choose the narrow gate, to follow the Shepherd's voice, to be found when you stray. Choose sinners. Choose to eat with, to chat with, to laugh with, and to cry with those people the religious elite have warned you about. Choose to expect the dead to be raised to new life. Choose community. Choose inviting everyone. Choose the refugee and the migrant. Choose sharing. Choose that you might lose your shirt. Choose gaining your soul instead. Choose the Earth. Choose less plastics and petrol. Choose being a good caretaker of Earth for future generations' sakes. Choose to follow the life-changing Messiah. Choose God's community building project marked by "fruits of the Spirit" at work within it. Choose not to "rage against" whatever for the sake of raging. Choose an intentional life that builds God's community. Choose life. Choose Christ.

### Prayer

God in the prison, help us to choose the life-giving ways of Christ. Help us who experience freedom to seek freedom for those held captive unjustly. Help us to use our freedom to speak Christ's words of grace with boldness. For the sake of Christ and all of His body, Amen

## **Misbehaving Women of The Bible**

by Charlotte (Charlie) Swaine a member and the Youth Leader at  
Congleton

My aunt got me a t-shirt when I became a member of the URC that reads "Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History". The quote is from historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich who wrote it in the 70s, and it is definitely one of my favourite quotes. I think she had people like the Pankhursts, Christine de Pizan, Cleopatra, Debbie Harry, Mary Jackson, and Hedy Lamar in mind when she bought me that t-shirt.

I have a book, leant to me by Rev. Murray (although I highly doubt he's ever going to get it back), called Daughters of Dissent. It tells the stories of women from the Churches of Christ,

Presbyterian, and Congregational traditions, as well as women from the URC. I think Murray has women like that in mind when I wear that t shirt.

Some of the women I have in mind, however, are not engineers, diplomats, musicians, or even the woman who invented Frequency Hopping Spread Spectrum (a technology used in Blue Tooth and Wi-fi).

Have you ever considered that the women that we read about in bibles may not have been the most well behaved of women? Have you considered that if they had been well behaved, we might not even be reading about them? Their lives must be looked at in the context of the time and place. Of course, we can argue that they were very well behaved because they were following God and doing what He wanted them to, but think of these woman away from their Godly narrative and consider what those around those around them would have said. Consider how these women went against the grain of their cultures and what was expected.

Let us take Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an example of this. Mary got pregnant out of wedlock. Ok, sure, it was Jesus, right, so we can surely forgive her? But really, she wasn't exactly the best-behaved girl on her street, was she? In her culture, and amongst her neighbours, she must have been a source of derision for doing something so unbelievably awful. Can you imagine the gossip amongst her neighbours? Yet, I think we can all agree that by misbehaving amongst her peers, she made history.

Right, someone else... Esther. Esther broke all royal protocol by approaching the king without him summoning her. This was such a no-no that it was punishable by death, and yet Esther dared to do it. Esther was not very well behaved. And yet she made history by saving the Jews in Persia.

The woman some denominations call Photini, a Samaritan who met Jesus at a well. Photini had been married several times and the man she was now living with was not her husband. No doubt

as a result of this, Photini was drawing water at a time of day when other people would not be around. It was here, at Jacob's Well, as she drew her water that she met and conversed with a Jewish man. It was this conversation, a conversation that should not have been taking place, that made history. Photini spread the news of the man she had met, the Saviour, through Samaria. Another mis-behaving woman making history.

Next time you read your bible, I invite you to look for the women in the narrative and see how misbehaving they are. Very rarely are biblical women sat at their looms when they are making history. We are all capable of making history. We might not necessarily change the voting rights for people, we might not become the first female engineer at NASA, we might not shape music, but we might be the one person who shapes another person's life for the better, we might influence a person to take up a musical instrument that they love, we might bring someone to Christ. And those things are history making.

So I urge you: Go against the grain. Don't be what everyone else expects you to be. Be kind, when the world is cruel. Be polite, when the world is rude. Be helpful, even when the world turns it's back. Break with cultural norms if need be.

*"Go ahead, go practice what you believe, walk the opposite direction everyone else is walking, wear what you want, question what you're told or simply let your curls run wild and free."* - Noor Hewaidi

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A Letter and address from Ian White member and one of the musicians at Alsager URC

Dear friends

From a church point of view this last six months has been a very challenging time. Who would have believed that we would not be worshipping together for this length of time. That there would be no singing group, no Thursday Afternoon fellowship and no social events.

My prayers in particular have been for those living alone whose lives have always been somewhat isolated and for whom the activities of our church are not only part of their critical routine but actually part of their critical being.

The pastoral calls I have been making, which are just a small part of a much bigger picture of caring across the church, have reminded me that though the buildings have been closed the church community is very much still thriving. We are the church and I am convinced that after all of this we will be an even closer community - the time we have spent encouraging and talking to one another has not been wasted and will not be forgotten.

Those who know me know that in my preaching I regularly use the psalms. During this time Psalm 46 has often come to mind:

God is our shelter and strength always ready to help in times of trouble

Many members of our singing group will remember our successful visit to Homeshire House just before Christmas last year. Admittedly that does seem a lifetime ago now! We had a lovely time. Philip led us so well, the refreshments were excellent and the music was really appreciated. As I played I spotted a lady at the back. I admit that my facial recognition is not brilliant at times (or is that just my age?) but I thought to myself "That's Rita. I recognise her lovely smile. And what is Rita doing here in this place tonight?" Over refreshments I saw that it was indeed Rita and asked her whether she had moved into Homeshire. "Haven't you heard?", she said. "I was living at the Beechmere Residential Home in Crewe. That was the place that was suddenly burned down last August. I lost absolutely everything. All I had left was the clothes I was standing up in. Even my car was destroyed when a balcony collapsed on it".

I was silenced. In awe of the story but in awe of this lady who was still positive, still smiling. She has become my hero and my inspiration. And it made me wonder. What would my reaction have been had I lost everything. The psalmists were used to complaining to God. Would that have been my approach?

Probably, to be honest. And yet we are told in psalm 46 that God is our shelter and strength always ready to help in times of trouble. How does that demonstrate itself?

And how has it demonstrated itself in the past many weeks of restriction and the possible sense of increased isolation?

Has our faith been tested in these times or somehow in the quietness have we found a clearer understanding of how God, as the psalmist says, is always there – always ready.

I look forward to us being together again. I look forward to doing those things we used to do. But I also look forward to new beginnings and new opportunities.

Keep believing and keep trusting. The God of Jacob is our refuge he is our God too and we should not be afraid.

Hope to see you soon

Every blessing, Ian

When Trouble Comes Psalm 46

We look today at Psalm 46

Some people seem to lead charmed lives ... trouble rarely comes their way. When it does come, they're the kind of people who can deal with it quite easily. But one thing that every human being needs to beware of is that real trouble can come one day! There is no way that a human being living in a troubled world, in troublesome times can avoid real trouble. So it's very important that we be prepared when trouble comes.

It may be that we centre our thoughts on the subject When Trouble Comes you will say to yourself, "I don't have any trouble, everything is fine by me." Don't be so sure that what I say won't be worth remembering one day.

On the other hand, many are going through times of real stress and difficulty. Psalms 46 will be a blessing. In poetic language, the psalmist describes the way trouble can come. He talks about the earth being removed, and the mountains being carried into the midst of the sea. That is a picture of an earthquake.

Sometimes trouble comes with the sheer finality of an earthquake. All of a sudden it's there, and there's nothing you can do about it

People who have gone through earthquakes say they don't know of anything else that makes a human being feel quite so helpless. Some who were bombed during the war, wondered whether if only they could get into a deep enough hole, they would be all right. That's the basis of air raid shelters and bunkers they hurriedly got there, and got their head down. They took a book along and read until the thing was over.

Yesterday we went to see the film 1917 which is an epic film but a fairly desperate story – plenty of uncertainty and buildings collapsing.

With an earthquake, you can't even go into a hole because you have a nasty feeling that the hole might be shaking, too. You run out of a building because the building might collapse on top of you. There's no place to go! The earth beneath your feet is shaking and uncertain.

Sometimes trouble comes to people like that — without any warning, with no way of resisting it, with total finality, and suddenly they find that every thing has dropped right out of the bottom of their life.

In my letter above you can read about Rita and how she lost everything in the fire at Beechmere House as a result of the fire. She had lost everything. And were it not for her insurers (and presumably the ability to remember her insurers as all her paperwork was destroyed) she would have had no recompense. As you get to talk to people or hear their stories so you realise that many people have faced their own kind of earthquake – sudden bereavement – or bereavement at all, Redundancy or financial crisis, A diagnosis, a loved one suffering or found guilty of a serious crime. Earthquakes which can either shake or potentially destroy us. When trouble comes with the finality of an earthquake, there are some people who can cope and keep going. To have a working knowledge of Psalms 46 will help Our

situation may not come with the fearful finality and awful shock of an earthquake, but it could well come and we need to be ready for it!

After the Psalmist talks of earthquakes he uses a second poetic expression. In Psalms 46:3, he says, “though the waters thereof roar and be troubled.” Here he’s talking about the trouble which comes with the sheer fury of a storm. The power of storms – we have all seen them and recently we are seeing more and more. I reckon slightly tongue in cheek that since they started to name the storms they are getting worse – of course there is no real evidence for that..

There’s a bloke I like to think about in the Old Testament. He’s one of David’s mighty men. He got up one morning, and was going out to battle. Unfortunately, they had a snow storm. We all know what happens when we have a snow storm. If we want an excuse, we have a beautiful excuse when the snow storm comes — we cancel everything! This man didn’t cancel anything, he kept going. As he was going along in his snow storm suddenly he fell into a pit. I can imagine him lying in the bottom of this pit, having struggled through the snow storm, wondering how he would ever get out. Then he heard a noise behind him, and looked and there was a lion. He probably said to himself, “This just isn’t my day!” I start off with a snow storm, I fall into a pit that I can’t get out of, and down in the bottom of this pit, there’s a lion. I quit! I give up!

What do you do when trouble comes with a fury of a storm from every angle — the snow, the storm, the pit, and the lion? The beautiful thing that he says about this mighty man of David is that he slew the lion, in the pit, on a stormy day, and lived to tell the tale. That’s what you do when trouble comes! You learn to cope with it, and you learn to overcome it when you apply the principles that we have here in Psalms 46.

Sometimes it comes not with the finality of an earth-quake, or the fury of a storm, but with the force of a flood. So in the end of Psalms 46:3, he says this: “Though the waters roar and be

troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.” Here you have the picture of everything shaking, with the swelling of the flood and everything being absolutely overwhelmed.

Trouble does come — sometimes with the force of a flood. But now listen to this: “God Is Our Refuge and Strength, a Very ... Present Help ... In Trouble.” Now what do we do when trouble comes? Three things are outlined for us in this Psalms 46. First, realize when trouble comes that God is a Refuge for His people. Secondly, according to verse five, that God is Resident among His people. Thirdly, the first thing that you must realize is that God is continually available. This is an Old Testament passage, but the New Testament amplifies it even further. The Lord Jesus Himself said that we must come unto Him, all of us who are weary, and heavy laden, and He will give us rest. So the simple message as to what to do in time of trouble is this: admit that God is your Refuge, and you can’t cope. Christ is the One who opens His arms to you and says, “Come to Me with all your burdens, roll them upon Me, give Me the problem, and I promise to be what you need.”

Secondly, we must realize that God our Refuge is not only continually available, but He is thoroughly adequate. For it says in this verse, God is our Refuge, but also our Strength. It will be no good to go back to the Old Testament picture of the Cities of Refuge. It would be no good if they had a City of Refuge and the gates were all broken down, because the guy who was hot on your tail wouldn’t worry about those old gates. If they wouldn’t keep him out, they needed to have a place of refuge. They also needed to have strength to hold it up. There would be no good saying that “God is our Refuge” if He weren’t strong enough. It would do no good to say “God is continually available,” if God were not adequate.

We have to stick our necks out here, and say, “There is no way trouble can come into a person’s life — however overwhelming it

might be — there is no way it can come and be greater than the strength of God to enable you to survive it.

This is the lovely message of what to do in trouble. Recognize that God is my Refuge, and turn to Him. Importantly everyone is different and reacts differently. Imagine two people with the same pressure upon them. They had the same background. They both have blood throbbing in their veins, they've had the same education, they've had the same spiritual experience. The remarkable thing about it was this: one went one way, and one went in exactly the opposite direction. Why is that?

When trouble comes it's like the sun. For some people, it can harden them like clay. For others it can soften them like wax. It all depends on what you're made of and how you respond to the heat of the furnace when it comes upon you. This is what we have to do, realize that God is our refuge.

So then, what do we do when trouble comes? We remember that the most High is in the midst of us, and remember that the Lord of Hosts is with us. That helps us to get the whole scene of our trouble into perspective. Not only do we see the God of purpose seated on the Throne above all thrones acting on "our behalf"; we also see that God has unbelievable power "alive" in might within the very context of our lives, and that's where trouble gets into perspective.

One of the big contemporary challenges of our modern times is gambling. At one time it was in the main something you had to go and do. To a betting shop. To a race track. Obviously telephone betting made access much easier. But today the advent of internet gambling has created an absolutely massive business — bigger than you could ever imagine.

Take our local internet betting company - Bet 365. Over 4000 employees, The biggest private sector employer in Stoke-on-Trent — only education and health could begin to touch it. Wait for this though — takings last year amounted to £65 billion. That was billion. That is half of the annual budget of the NHS which amounts to some £122 billion. Yes the betting industry puts funds

in to balance the effect of gambling – but at £2million it's a pittance of the £276 million a year Denise Coates, the Chief executive of Bet 365, pays herself – that's 9500 times the average salary in the UK. I know that Denise Coates has a foundation and that supports much good work but this massive and fast growing company profits off the back of people who are gambling and getting into debt, relationship problems and stress. And the adverts say to gamblers "When the fun stops stop" By the time the fun stops many people are already in a perilous situation.

What does the church say about all of this. Not enough. Once the Methodist Church had a strong stance against gambling. Perhaps we need to look again at that. The Methodist Church says that there are an estimated third of a million problem gamblers in Britain, for whom gambling compromises their lives, relationships, ability to hold down a job, and even health. However the true number of those who are suffering harm due to gambling is higher - a further million are categorised as being 'at risk' of becoming problem gamblers. The Methodist Church has remained true to its concerns for the 'serious evils of gambling' by making its premises open to meetings of Gamblers Anonymous and by providing services to people who require treatment for addictions.

What has gambling got to do with Psalm 46? Well it's a contrast between the certainty of God as found here and the uncertainty – ultimate uncertainty of chance, or betting or gambling.

Anyone with an addiction can only be helped when they are ready or desperate enough to be helped

The only way that you can ever help anybody spiritually in time of trouble is when they are prepared to draw the benefits of His Lordship from acknowledging Him as their Lord. If you're not committed to that, then much of what I have said would not be of much help to you in time of trouble. But if you are committed, these are the principles, and the obvious thing to do is this: Make

the Lord, Lord. Submit to Him. Invite Him to be your Master and Saviour.

AMEN

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EXODUS CHAPTER 12 VERSES 1 - 14 by Dorothy Donald a member and Elder at Congleton

How have you been coping with the situation during the past few months? The word Coronavirus seems to be a word included in each and every conversation these days because it's changed our lives so much in so many ways. I know that many of us have a fear of venturing out don't we? It's perfectly understandable of course as we wait patiently for the scientists to announce that a vaccine has been tested, is safe and effective and, most importantly, is available. Celebrations all round!

The book of Exodus tells the story of the Israelites. Initially, they lived in freedom but the Egyptians became suspicious and jealous of them after some time and they were taken as servants of the Egyptians. We read of God's work to bring about their freedom from captivity. The passage which accompanies this reflection tells us of God's final challenge to persuade the Egyptians to free His chosen people, the Israelites. Today The Feast of The Passover is celebrated by Jews throughout the world, just before Easter time. This is the reason that Jerusalem was so full of people when Jesus rode into the City on a donkey on Palm Sunday.

Just like we Christians, the Jewish nation has many Festivals and celebrations throughout the year. Remember in our reading from Exodus we hear the following words, 'The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt. This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.' Interestingly, we are approaching the time of the Jewish New Year in September. The Festival is called Rosh Hashanah and will be celebrated from 18 to 20 September. A new year, a new start, a time to go forward.

We hope and ask God's help so that our Churches will be ready and prepared to open the doors to welcome people to come in and spend some time, whether it be in private prayer or for a short service of worship. Just like our Jewish friends who will be celebrating their New Year in September, we will be celebrating returning to our Churches in a new way. A new way which might last for sometime, we do not know but we can be reassured in our faith that God is watching over us at all times. Just as He was all those years ago when he gave the Israelites their freedom from slavery.

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September birthdays: we wish the following a happy birthday. You can sing “Happy Birthday” at home, or over the telephone even if not at the church!

2 nd	Doug Bennett	11 th	Olive Lear
5 th	Alan Abraham	14 th	David Riley Gillian Bowler

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### **Making Choices About Returning to Activities in Church Buildings**

As a community of Christian disciples, we are concerned about the safety of all those who contribute and take part in our shared life. Some are employed or paid stipends as office holders, many are volunteers, more are participants. We are expected to have particular responsibilities towards those we pay, but others may also value guidance about the choices involved in returning to activities in church buildings.

We are familiar with risks that have been around for a while, but COVID-19 is a new risk and we are still learning about who may be affected most. Already we know that certain groups of people are at greater risk than others. The Government has categorised some people into groups:

- the [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) for whom the consequences of catching COVID-19 are likely to be particularly serious. They

will still be cautious about gathering indoors with people from a number of households.

- the [clinically vulnerable](#), which includes all people over 70 and those with underlying health conditions.

Other groups have also been identified as more evidence about the effects of the virus is gathered. We may not know which individuals will catch COVID-19, but we can use some of the information about the risk of complications to help with the conversations people will have about returning to gatherings.

At the time of writing it is not clear whether surviving catching the virus gives immunity or for how long such immunity might last.

As well as trying to assess the risks of catching the virus and the appropriate action to take, we recognise that our attitude to risk varies: the risk that one person may be willing to take is too much for another. Living with someone who is at higher risk, affects the risks other household members are willing to take. When we are talking about gathering together, we need to be sensitive to these variations. When we are coping with new risks we may also be more sensitised to them in comparison to risks that we have coped with for many years. However, government policy is related to the general risk for the population which goes down as the number of the people with the virus goes down, whilst the potential impact of catching the virus for a vulnerable individual remains the same until there are additional treatments and a vaccine.

When the lockdown restrictions were imposed, ministers were designated as key workers because of the fears of COVID-19 resulting in many more funerals. Some churches have also helped with essential food distribution or other essential services and ministers and volunteers have been involved in this work. The URC so far has echoed Government advice that ministers should work from home where possible. As restrictions change, it is time for ministers, volunteers and participants to consider their risks.

Catching the virus depends on the amount of virus to which you are exposed and for how long. The risk of that happening during any activity depends on the circumstances. There is evidence about which groups are at risk of more serious consequences if they do

have COVID-19 disease and you can weigh up these personal risks. The assessment 'tool' below helps you to see how different risk factors may combine to give serious health complications should you catch the COVID-19 virus. It does not include the factors that may make you clinically extremely vulnerable, where you should be following the guidance for those who are 'shielding'. It includes the factors where there is significant statistical evidence but does not include any rarer conditions which you may have, so this only offers a starting point. You may want to discuss the results with your doctor or with those who have expectations about your involvement with church life.

This should be read alongside other government or local advice about staying safe. We are not claiming medical expertise in sharing this way of scoring your risk but giving a way to show how serious catching the virus may be for you.

Circle the score next to each one that applies to you and add up your score.

| <b>Risk Factor</b> |                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Score</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Age                | 50-59                                                                                                                                                           | 1            |
|                    | 60-69                                                                                                                                                           | 2            |
|                    | 70-79                                                                                                                                                           | 4            |
|                    | 80 and over                                                                                                                                                     | 6            |
| Sex at birth       | Male                                                                                                                                                            | 1            |
| Ethnicity          | Caucasian                                                                                                                                                       | 0            |
|                    | Black African Descent                                                                                                                                           | 2            |
|                    | Indian Asian Descent                                                                                                                                            | 1            |
|                    | Filipino Descent                                                                                                                                                | 1            |
|                    | Other (including mixed race)                                                                                                                                    | 1            |
| Diabetes & Obesity | Type 1 & 2                                                                                                                                                      | 1            |
|                    | Diabetes Type 1 & 2 with presence of microvascular complications or HbA1c $\geq$ 64mmol/mol                                                                     | 2            |
|                    | Body Mass Index greater than or equal to 35 kg/m <sup>2</sup>                                                                                                   | 1            |
|                    | online BMI calculator:<br><a href="https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/">https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/</a> |              |

|                              |                                                                     |   |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Cardiovascular disease       | Angina, previous heart attack, stroke or cardiac intervention       | 1 |
|                              | Heart Failure                                                       | 2 |
| Pulmonary (lung) disease     | Asthma                                                              | 1 |
|                              | Non-asthma chronic pulmonary disease                                | 2 |
|                              | Either of the above requiring oral corticosteroids in the last year | 1 |
| Malignant neoplasm (cancer)  | Active malignancy                                                   | 3 |
|                              | Malignancy in remission                                             | 1 |
| Rheumatological conditions   | Active treated conditions                                           | 2 |
| Immuno-suppressant therapies | Any indication                                                      | 2 |
| <b>Total Score</b>           |                                                                     |   |

A score of under 3 indicates a lower risk, but you should still be following the guidance for staying safe.

A score of 3-5 suggests a greater risk and you should consider ways of reducing your risk by taking additional precautions or avoiding some activities.

A score of 6 or more suggests a high risk and indicates that you should continue to work or participate in church life from your home.

The scoring is based on an [article](#) from the [British Medical Association](#) website.

Risk Stratification tool for Healthcare workers during the CoViD-19 Pandemic; using published data on demographics, co-morbid disease and clinical domain in order to assign biological risk:

David Strain, Janusz Jankowski, Angharad Davies, Peter English, Ellis Friedman, Helena McKeown, Su Sethi, Mala Rao  
 medRxiv 2020.05.05.20091967; doi:<https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.05.05.20091967>

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