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Dear Friends,

I am writing to you from the heart with an appeal (not a monetary one!) - because we are approaching one of the biggest tests coming out of the pandemic with its lockdowns, restrictions, and changes. And I want us to come out of it really well - because I want us to be a circuit that pioneers a forward-thinking way ahead and that doesn’t just sink back into the past. Most importantly, I want us to be doing God’s work, and following his calling, he is always calling us on through the work of his Holy Spirit. There are many, many Bible verses that can be quoted that show God’s people moving forward in faith and hope - *‘forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead’* (Phillipians 3 v 13) is just one of them.

Before the pandemic, our worship took place (almost) entirely in buildings - church services were something that happened in church. Although it was great for the people who could get there, with lots of community and fellowship as well as collective worship, it did mean that, for those who couldn’t get there, there was a sense of exclusion from the worshipping community. The 1st lockdown changed all this. All over the country, churches and leaders worked at ways of enabling people to worship at home and, suddenly, it became a much more level playing field. In our own circuit, we issued Worship at Home sheets from the very first Sunday and they have been a consistent resource each week over the last 14 months. They have enabled many people to worship in their own homes (as evidenced by the results of the recent questionnaire and many comments received) and to do so in a way that has enabled them to feel part of a much greater whole. Suddenly, we became inclusive! As well as the worship material on paper, the services were recorded and put on youtube by Watton Methodist Church and these too were being watched by dozens of people all over the circuit.

In the 2nd and 3rd lockdowns, we started weekly services over zoom (both morning and evening) and this started to divide the sense of community. Now, we were offering different options with participants experiencing a real sense of community over the internet whilst others were still experiencing community through the Worship Sheet. When churches started re-opening again, we divided further (inevitably and necessarily) with people now experiencing local church, and circuit, worship in different ways. However! The inclusivity has remained because, now that we are offering different options, people are able to participate in ways that they can - or choose to - in person, over the internet, using worship material at home.

The appeal referred to in the first paragraph of this letter is to ask each one of you whether you will work with myself, and the other staff, in keeping the sense of unity, and community, throughout the circuit and, therefore, through the local churches (including those not able to make it to the building). There is a very particular way in which we are going to trial this sense of wider community - and it will be an experiment and a trial so that we can see what works and what doesn’t.

The experiment is to have a ‘Big Sunday’ once a quarter when we all - in our different places - participate in worship that uses the same theme and, if possible, much of the same material. The idea is, that on that Sunday, we release people from their normal Sunday duties to join the circuit community zoom service and that that service may be live-streamed, or participated in, by churches that have the technology. Other people will still want to attend their church buildings and use the common theme/material. Other people will be at home using Worship at Home material (probably an extended one) that will also be common to everybody. The first ‘Big Sunday’ is going to be tried on July 25th as you will see from the new plan. We will see how that goes, take feedback, and make amendments for another trial in the Autumn.

My feeling is that this is all quite innovative and, if it works well, we may be able to offer our experience to others in the Connexion. As I say, this is only one Sunday in the quarter, there will be 12 other Sundays on the plan to be ‘normal’ or, at least, the new normal! The new normal includes one Sunday a month, in any case, that has a zoom service planned as well as church services and, a zoom evening service weekly, for those who have been depending on a Sunday service online and for those who value a second service but don’t want to go out in an evening. The Worship at Home sheet is going to continue with preachers being planned for the Circuit Message (as well as the zoom services) alongside the church services.

Please would you join me and the Staff in making the experiment work so that we can learn lessons and continue to move forward? And continue to be inclusive whilst feeling a sense of belonging to a bigger Christian family than simply our own local church? The verse that follows the Philippians verse quoted above says: ‘*I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*.’ It is God who calls us, Christ himself who is our reward (Covenant service), and our role is to follow by ‘pressing on’. Let’s press on in hope and faith, and together!

Jacqui

**Zoom Services** **Tuesday at 7 on zoom**

**Morning:**

May 16th Sam Parfitt and Aileen Fox May 11th Sharing a special photo

May 23rd Jacqui Horton May 18th Interview with Jacqui & Jen

May 30th Cliff Shanganya May 25th Introduction to Mindfulness

 June 1st *Local Preachers’ Meeting*

June 27th Jacqui Horton June 8th Personal spirituality in lockdown

July 25th **BIG SUNDAY** June 15th Quiz with the Goldings

Aug 22nd Jacqui Horton June 22nd Interview with Rosemary (part 2!) June 29th **Final sharing and celebration**

**Evening:**

May 16th Anne Richardson

May 23rd Anne Richardson (livestreamed from Beetley)

May 30th Jacqui Horton

June 6th tbc

June 13th Sam Parfitt

June 20th Cliff Shanganya

June 27th *no service*

July 4th Anne Richardson Aug 1st Anne Richardson (livestreamed from Beetley)

July 11th Jacqui Horton Aug 8th Jacqui Horton

July 18th Cliff Shanganya Aug 15th Cliff Shanganya

July 25th *no service* Aug 22nd *no service*