from:

Rev Ian Howarth

Chair of District

5th January 2021

Dear friends and colleagues,

This comes with every good wish for the New Year, and a prayer that you will know the sustaining grace of God as we go forward into the uncertainties and challenges before us.

I am aware that only Church Councils or the Connexion as a whole can make the decision to close churches for communal worship. However, given the spread of the virus and the Government announcement yesterday, in consultation with deputy and assistant Chairs, our strong advice is that for the duration of the lockdown we close churches for public worship.

I am conscious of the immense amount of work people have done with risk assessments to make churches as safe as they can be, but all the advice is that we should not be encouraging people to meet together at the moment, and given the age of many in our congregations, including those in leadership positions, I am sure at the moment it is best to suspend worship.

As before, this presents us with the challenge of how we do enable people to know the support and care of the church, and continue to be part of a praying, worshipping community, and I know many of you will be working out how best to do that in your context. To support that the District online service will continue on Sunday mornings. At present we are committed to a service on the first and third Sundays of the month, but we will review that in consultation with the superintendents later in the week.

It is a real challenge to minister and truly be the church in these days. Those of us in leadership roles face our own personal challenges, at a time when the need for the church’s ministry is greater than ever. I pray that we will find ways of accessing support and supporting each other, so that we may continue to support and minister to God’s people within and beyond the church.

May God bless you in all you do,

Ian Howarth