



Dear friends,

Well, there's a lot of thinking and adjusting going on this week, as we absorb the implications of the next stage of change in the way we're able to live alongside one another safely in a time of Covid-19. I might have spent the whole of this letter reflecting on it – but our Chair of District, Revd Kerry Tankard, has done that beautifully for us already! His comments are available here <https://www.facebook.com/257814050916522/posts/3257211234310107/?vh=e&d=n> and as a transcript for those of you receiving this by post, and I encourage you to read or listen.

Instead, a couple of things which have happened this week encourage me to take us down a side path in our thinking. So...wonder with me for a minute...where is your primary community of faith? Who are the people with whom you share most deeply in your life as a disciple of Jesus?

As a Methodist presbyter, I am not a member of a local church. My membership of the Methodist Church is held centrally, and, as I was reminded yesterday, my primary relationship in the Church is with Methodist Conference. But...these are not the people who I regularly pray with, read scripture with, or talk with when the going is particularly tough, or especially joyful! Those people would be my family, the intentional connexional community of which I am a part, and the Staff and Superintendents' meetings. Who would it be for you? The answer might be obvious, or you might discover something you hadn't noticed before as you wonder...

What is needed for those 'faith-full' relationships to flourish? How often do you need to meet? What is it essential that you do together? And how does the community of faith in which you are rooted relate to the wider Church? Scripture shows us in so many different ways that people who are learning to be followers of Jesus and bearers of God's love in the world need one another as companions on the Way. Most of us don't do so well when we try to 'go it alone'... and the same goes for most communities, we need to be part of a wider network of some kind.

Honesty is critical as we reflect. I have been part of conversations about a 'church', where we realised that almost all those who belonged there belonged to different 'primary communities of faith'. This doesn't make the first gathering unimportant or insignificant, but it does mean that it is unlikely to grow and flourish as a 'primary community of faith' for others; we need to understand that it serves a different purpose. The Church, the gathering of the people of God, will always consist of small groups and large gatherings, there will be (online and in person) soul friendships, class meetings, cell groups, choirs, congregations, bible studies, groups in which to pray, groups where we laugh and cry together, places where as church we enable conversation about other things entirely... Making sense of this web of relationship, and ensuring that within it there is a place for each person to belong, to grow in faith and be enabled to share God's love with others, matters...and matters more than ever as we take our next steps in the coming weeks and months.

I end for this week with John Wesley's final words, which are the theme for our Methodist President and Vice-President this year. You will find links to their addresses to Conference in this week's email. If you receive your material by post and would like a printed copy of one or both addresses, please let the office know and we will send you one in the next available mailing. In whatever community of faith we find ourselves...

"The best of all is, God is with us".

Peace, Jo