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**Revd Jem Hawkins**

**Brownhills & Willenhall**

**Methodist Circuit**

1st July 2020

Dear Friends,

Over the last 3 months, our buildings have been closed, but the church has been alive and living the gospel through people

* praying
* supporting food banks
* shopping for others
* providing food parcels for vulnerable families
* finding new ways of worship (online, social media, at home and mailings)
* online services, Bible studies and prayer meetings
* supporting each other through phone calls, emails, prayers and love.

The church is alive in our homes and communities for **we** are the church.

Soon it will be possible to reopen our buildings but we have a process to follow to open safely, legally and following Government and Methodist guidance. Government guidance came out on Monday 29th June, we expect Methodist guidance to change during Conference (this week).

The process is to use Government and Methodist guidance to;

* write a Covid-19 **risk assessment** for each property
* Write and implement an **action plan**
* Follow the Methodist **Re-opening a Building Checklist**. (send water samples to check for Legionella if required)
* **Managing Trustees** (Church Councils) **are responsible** for deciding **when the building can reopen safely** and to what extent, with reference to official guidance, the risk assessment and action plan. Church councils will likely be using ‘Zoom’ software so people can meet using computers, tablets, smartphones or phone in on their landlines.

Following this process will enable a building to reopen but will mean considerable work for church and property stewards. The circuit is here to offer support and guidance.

We hope that this process will enable some buildings to reopen in August for lettings, weddings, funerals etc but we are aware that church use will be carefully managed in phases. In line with Government advice, we will continue to offer online services (with singing) every Sunday and hope to offer some midweek word/prayer services where possible in August.

Any building-based service will have social distancing, limited numbers, no singing and no socialising. People who are at most risk and are shielding are discouraged from attending building-based services and encouraged to join online worship.

I encourage us all to join in the new ways we have learned to be church, and to make opening our buildings possible by praying for, supporting and encouraging each other. Please be patient, caring and prayerful as we work toward reopening our buildings safely. We are the Body of Christ!

Yours In Jesus,

Jem Hawkins (Revd)

Government Guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

The latest Methodist Guidance can be found at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>