

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Sometimes life catches us unprepared for what is to follow: when the landscape remains the same, yet things feel very different. Such unpredictability is daunting when we feel we cannot alter the situation and see uncharted waters ahead.

Although a global pandemic is such a moment, we do have agency: we can adapt our behaviour for the common good through social distancing and self-isolation. We can look out for one another, even when not meeting face to face. Our worship and prayer lives continue unhindered within our homes, just like the earliest Christian communities. We are blessed with a postal service, telephones, mobiles, iPads, and computers, which on a moment by moment basis hold us in a web of love and care even when separated from loved ones and friends. Ceasing to meet as a Christian Fellowship is an important means of contributing to a safer community, protecting those who are most vulnerable.

Coronavirus is reminding us, sensitising us, to how our lives in a globalised world are so intimately connected: Only good can come from such a realisation of interconnectedness – as Paul wrote of the Church: ‘God has so composed the body ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.’ (1 Corinthians 12 : 24 – 26).

I write to you as sisters and brothers in the faith., when we feel our anxiety levels rising, recall the many times we read the words ‘Do not be afraid!’ throughout the Bible – a constant message, reminding us of God’s sovereignty, whose presence fills everywhere: past, present, and times to come, whose infinite love underpins all. There is so much in Scripture that brings us guidance in such times.

May God’s hand be guiding virologists, frontline health care workers, and all who continue to serve the common good with a selflessness and unconditional generosity which is inspiring, and can be honoured and undergirded through our prayers and our changing our behaviour as much as we can to help them to help those who are poorly.

Writing of prayers, you can join the whole Church in prayer each day at 7pm (set an alarm now, to remind you), no videoconferencing or web-streaming or wi-fi required - just open hearts and minds as we commend one another, our neighbours and communities to God’s love. May our prayers inspire acts of kindness. As St David said in the 6th Century: ‘do the little things’; this we can do. I invite you to share in a prayer from the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, the Revd John Proctor:

Lord Jesus,
In the midst of a storm,
You said, ‘Peace be still.’
Bid our anxious fears subside,
Sustain your church in faith, hope and love,
Bring our nation through this tumult,
Grant wisdom to those with heavy responsibilities,
And healing and hope to those who are infected.
Amen

As ever, and in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'David Herbert'.

Revd David Herbert
Northern Synod Moderator