

Dear friends,

It is a few weeks since I have written a minister's letter and since then the season has changed from summer to autumn! We are already well into October and we are journeying towards the season of remembrance with Advent and Christmas (dare I say it?) on the horizon! I wanted to write to you all about a couple of matters.

Firstly, I'm sure that you are well aware that cases of Covid-19 are on the rise again across the country and whilst this is probably to be expected we are also aware that as we enter the end of autumn and then the winter months we need to be vigilant about keeping ourselves, our loved ones and our church family safe so to enable as little disruption as possible in our own lives and in church life. So a few reminders about what we are doing when we gather together in our church building for worship:

* Please continue to wear face coverings when you are moving around the building at all times and only remove them (if you wish) when you are seated. *NB If you are attending the United Reformed Church on Remembrance Sunday you will need to wear your face covering all the time whilst on their premises as this is their current policy.*

* We will continue to remain seated for singing as this encourages us to sing a little more quietly than usual.

* Please continue to use the one-way system that is in place in church.

* Please use the sanitiser that is available when you enter and exit the building.

* We need to ventilate the building as much as possible and to this end the church will not feel as warm as usual especially as the weather is getting cooler. Please come dressed appropriately to keep warm (pop an extra layer on!).

* We are aware that there are some in our church community who feel more nervous and anxious about the virus than others. Please respect people's space, especially those who feel more vulnerable.

* Additional to the above, we are now providing refreshments at the end of morning services. This is the time for those who wish to stay to socialise and chat together in a less socially-distanced environment. It is helpful to everyone to not engage in too much conversation with others before the service begins as there are some folk who feel less at ease with this regarding the virus.

* Lastly, please remember to stay at home if you are feeling unwell.

I am aware that for some, the above restrictions may feel onerous and for others they may not go far enough! We are trying to respond to what people are saying and also have an eye on the local picture with regard to the rising numbers of cases. It is important that we show a care and concern for the most vulnerable in our midst especially as the winter months approach.

Secondly, many of you will be aware that at the Methodist Conference in the summer resolutions were passed to permit, in principle, for same-sex marriages to take place on Methodist Church premises and for ministers, and others who might be authorised, to be able to apply for permission to conduct same-sex marriages. An important part of the resolutions are conscience clauses that mean that no church or minister/authorised person has to comply with this and each minister/authorised person and church council (as managing trustees) is able to make the decision for themselves and their church. At the October meeting of Fareham's church council it was decided that it would be helpful to give all members of our church community an opportunity to express their views about this matter before the church council meets again in January 2022 to discuss and then vote on this issue. Using the same material for both sessions, there are two opportunities to participate:

In church on Sunday 21st November 2-3.30pm

On Zoom on Tuesday 16th November 7.30-9.00pm

These meetings are entirely optional but it would be helpful if members of Church Council were able to attend one of them.

Stay safe and well everyone,

Blessings,

Claire