

3rd March 2021

Liverpool District statement concerning the opening of Methodist churches for public acts of worship over the Easter season, following the 'Roadmap out of lockdown' announcement.

On February 22nd 2021 the Government announced the cautious easing of lockdown restrictions, stating that, "...even though absolute case numbers remain relatively high, we will be able to begin relaxing the current strict lockdown. While we must all remain vigilant - in particular against the threat from new COVID-19 variants - and continue to protect the NHS, a safe exit from lockdown can begin."*

Of course this is really good news, and the hopes and spirits of many are lifted by the prospect of being able to meet in person with family and friends (in small groups, out of doors) over the Easter break.

For the Christian community, gathering in person to worship on arguably the most important day in the Christian calendar, Easter Sunday, is deeply significant. Of course we have been free to gather for worship throughout this lockdown, but many of us have decided not to exercise that privilege for the sake of the greater good. The Liverpool District would like to suggest that now is not the time to change that decision, despite the real and understandable temptation to do so. Managing Trustees are encouraged to be very cautious about altering their arrangements for worship 'just for Easter' bearing in mind the need to act in the best interests of the whole community, not just their own preferences.

In suggesting this, the District notes that the Government is maintaining the first step of the easing until April 12th, well after the Easter break. The big change (Step 3) will not happen before 17th May, when, "...legal restrictions on meeting others outdoors will be lifted - although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal. Indoors, the Rule of 6 or 2 households will apply - we will keep under review whether it is safe to increase this."* Presumably this process is deliberately designed to restrict the possibility of people gathering over Easter, and the risk of a consequent rise in the infection rate (R). In fact, just opening schools might add as much as 0.5 to R, which is now about 0.7 — requiring a pause before the next moves.

Consequently, despite our longing to open for Easter, the Resourcing Mission Group's recommendation is for a more strategic, measured, and gradual approach to the re-opening of church buildings for collective worship at this time. One that seeks not to inadvertently undermine the wonderful advances the vaccine roll-out offers us.

We pray for God's continued guidance and wisdom through this Lenten season



*<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

District Chair
The Revd Dr Sheryl Anderson MA DThMin
T: 0151 722 1219
E: chair@liverpoolmethodist.org.uk

PA to the Chair
Margaret Sadler
T: 07442 164 690
E: admin@liverpoolmethodist.org.uk

The Manse, 49 Queens Drive, Mossley Hill, Liverpool L18 2DT

Registered Charity No: 1134011