

Churches Together in Kent

A Christmas Message from the Church Leaders for the people of Kent and Medway

Since the Prime Minister's announcements last Saturday, people across Kent and Medway have reacted in different ways. Very understandably, some are very anxious about the high and rising levels of infection in our area and are relieved that tighter restrictions are now in place. Others are angry, perhaps because all their plans have been thrown into confusion, perhaps because they think that decisions should have been made earlier. Very many are upset because they will be unable to meet with close family and friends – indeed looking forward to such meeting is what has kept some of us going through these difficult times.

There will be empty seats at our tables, and some of the presents under the tree won't reach their recipients for a long time. And now there may also be disruption due to the port closures, though hopefully the most vital supplies (especially of medicines) will be maintained. The sense of being cut off becomes increasingly real – and for a good number that will be very literal as they spend unexpected time on their own, isolated and lonely.

As we face these difficult times, we want to assure you of our prayers and the prayers of the churches across our communities. Many churches are finding creative ways to walk alongside people and to meet their physical, practical and spiritual needs at this time. Meeting for worship over Christmas is still permitted and possible. In some places this is in person – albeit with great care and reduced numbers; in many others, online services are offered. Whether in person or online, attending a Christmas service may help you to know that you are still part of a wider community.

The message of the Christmas angels is one of 'good news for all the people'. Wanting 'all the people' to receive something good at Christmas is why many choose this time of year to give something to a charity or to volunteer in their community. And many will still be doing that this year, including keeping an eye open for isolated neighbours who may need support. But this year also we have another important way of showing and sharing our concern for each other and especially for the very vulnerable. That is to make sure that we do all we can to avoid putting other people at risk of catching the virus. And of course that is the more important because our hospitals across Kent and Medway are already under huge pressure.

The Christmas message tells us that Jesus is the one who was foretold to be "Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'". He is also God's Word to us who "was made flesh and made his home among us". Whatever our individual situations as we face these difficult days, and perhaps especially if we are on our own for some or all of

the time, may we come to know that God is with us and that Jesus comes to make his home in our homes.

Rt Revd James Langstaff, *Church of England (Co-chair, Kent Church Leaders)*

Revd Helen Hollands, *Methodist Church (Co-chair, Kent Church Leaders)*

Revd Bridget Banks, *United Reformed Church*

Rt Revd Simon Burton-Jones, *Church of England*

Revd Dr Paul Dean, *United Reformed Church*

Revd Stuart Davison, *Baptist Church*

Major Mark Herbert, *Salvation Army*

Revd Dr David Hinchliffe, *Methodist Church*

Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, *Church of England*

Revd Paul Kerley, *Baptist Church*

Revd Mgr Canon John O'Toole, *Roman Catholic Church*

Most Revd Justin Welby, *Church of England*