

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Hello to you all,

I am reminded of the first words in Dickens story 'A Tale of Two Cities' as I start to write: 'It was the best of times: it was the worst of times...' Those words might be used to describe where we are at the present time. Much has already been said in the media, via social media, over the hedges and across doorways about the current Covid-19 crisis, and no doubt much more will be said for a long time to come as we all attempt to come to terms with what has happened, how it could have come about, and how history will analyse it.

Day to day life was suddenly and dramatically altered, for some slowing the pace while for others increasing it. For those who engage with social media there continues to be daily messages of encouragement, light relief and inspiration. Within my own friendship groups messages have been shared which make us all laugh and help to lift the mood when we start to feel a bit 'down'. Many of us have learnt to Zoom or facetime to keep issues which we consider important moving on, and/or to help keep in touch with those close to us, in lieu of actually spending physical time together. It's not quite the same, but it helps to keep us up to date. I have had a concern all along for those people who do not, or cannot, link with these kinds of communication systems. It is an ongoing challenge to reach some of them. One hopes that radio and television provide them with some support. Throughout these days I am aware of the myriad of small and not so small things that Methodist women are involved in to support and encourage others, as well as working hard to maintain positive attitudes.



Thankfully, there has been some recognition that home is not a safe or happy place for everyone, as we have seen the numbers of women and children (and a few men) suffering abuse and violence rise to more than double. We need therefore to maintain the momentum of #Thursdaysinblack, by wearing black each Thursday, encouraging others to join the movement, and work towards a world where gender-based violence is no more.

It has no doubt helped that the weather has mainly been kind, enabling those of us with access to outside spaces to enjoy the season's changes, the warmth of the sun and the facility for exercise.

This has certainly been a help to many families seeking to contain lively children and encourage their learning. The changes from winter to spring have been a focus and provided ongoing pleasure as new growth and colour has emerged. My own garden – pictured right – has gone from sparse (needing some tidying) to rather lush (nearly worked my way around it all) in the past couple of weeks.

Many of our churches have risen to the challenge of closed buildings by sharing thoughts and services in various online forms, and it appears that there has been a significant rise in the numbers of people watching these mainly weekly events, as well as engaging in prayer. It will be interesting to see how these actions and interactions develop when church buildings can again open their doors.



Last Sunday morning we (my husband and I) tuned in to our church's pre-recorded service via YouTube. Various members of our normal congregation had contributed, and all the parts knitted together into a

whole. It was a good service. However, we unintentionally had the automatic subtitles running – the kind which add the words as different people speak. There were quite a number of instances where the wrong word was displayed... – and we dissolved into fits of laughter!

It is hard from a place of reasonable comfort, to imagine what restricted life is like in areas of poverty and deprivation: in refugee camps and for migrants trapped in unsavoury and unsanitary conditions. Charities have increased their efforts to help both at home and abroad, but in order to maintain existing partnerships and extend their work more funding will be required. We are still hearing that the disease has not yet really taken off in most of Africa. There is a way to go.

Amongst all of this we have recognised much that is good in society: the thousands of people who work hard, care for others, endeavour to be good citizens, and whose contributions to the welfare of others is being seen, and applauded. I really hope that there will be ongoing recognition for those often 'hidden' or taken for granted by some sections of the community.



Since I visited northern Mexico last year, I have endeavoured to follow events in that country and the countries of South America. There is much of concern, but the limited amount which reaches our news means that we are often unaware of what is happening. I did come across a very positive story a few days ago. Somewhere in southern Mexico they have started to build houses by 3D-printing them. An idea for our own housing shortage?



It is also heartening to read of the reduced pollution in cities across the world and see the pictures of wildlife walking city streets, from goats in Llandudno to wild boar in Corsica. The natural world would, I'm sure find an equilibrium, and recover territory if given opportunities to do so. Therein lies much food for thought.



One of my grandchildren is really interested in wildlife. Recently she had seen a report about sea eagles – a bird of prey with a 2.5 metre wingspan, that have not been seen in England for years. She badly wanted to see one in reality, and one had been seen over the hawk Conservancy near Andover. She may have to settle for her back garden chickens for a while yet though. I did see someone's attempt at a photo of one however (right). The comment alongside it was that some photos are so bad they are good!



As we begin to look to the future, plans are starting to be put together and priorities defined for what is being called 'a new normal'. Some of this will restart or reschedule previous intentions. Some will enact new approaches and ideas. It is certain that there will be long term effects as yet to be ascertained for individuals and for local, national and global communities. It is certain too that whatever plans are put together there needs to be recognition that change across the so-called developed world is needed to conserve the resources of our planet. There is a challenge within this for each one of us, and there is much that we can do. I firmly believe that small things added together can have significant effect and influence. I try to hold the quote from Margaret Mead in my head, 'Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has'. This thought, and the verse which can become a prayer, from Philippians 4:13 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me', are, for me, two of the 'drivers' for seeking to move forward with Methodist Women in Britain.

Hilary

EXECUTIVE MEETINGS: 1st June 2020 *(via Zoom)*

FORUM MEETINGS: 25th–27th September 2020 *(date subject to change!)*

If you have any issues to raise or questions to ask, please speak to your Forum Rep.