

Covid – 19 Special Edition of Easter Offering Service

Summer 2020

Introduction

This is a year unlike any other! Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdown, our 2020 Easter Offering services have sadly had to be postponed. We hope that the resources on the theme 'Into all the world' will be used next Spring so that none of the time spent in preparation nor the resources in printing will be wasted.

In consultation with the Global Relationships team, we at Methodist Women in Britain felt it may be helpful to produce a simple act of worship that could be printed off and used during the Autumn by individuals in their homes if they are shielding, by small groups together or more generally by churches and circuits as restrictions continue to ease. The idea is that we raise awareness of how Covid-19 has affected some of our World Church Partners, discover how grants from the World Mission Fund have been helping people in our partner churches, learn how we can pray for our sisters and brothers affected by this virus and to encourage giving to this fund which won't this year receive the usual generous donations from the Easter Offering Service. We suggest that alongside the distribution of this act of worship, you give out some Easter Offering donation envelopes to encourage people to give to the World Mission Fund as they are able. Financial advice is appended on the end of this service outline.

The Coronavirus outbreak has affected us all in different ways but for those around the world already struggling to make ends meet and living in densely populated areas where social distancing is an impossibility, the virus has made already difficult situations almost unbearable. The Methodist Church in Britain continues to support its partners in this time of epidemic: in solidarity, prayer and financial support for their work. To date since the beginning of a global lockdown in March, the World Mission Fund has dispersed over £500,000 in support for the work of our global partners and continues to offer help where it is needed.

Service

Call to worship from StF 24

Come, now is the time to worship.
Come, now is the time to give your heart.
Come just as you are to worship.
Come, just as you are before your God, come.

StF 57 Let all the world in every corner sing

Opening prayer

Let us pray together.

Faithful God we offer you our praise and thanksgiving for your constant presence with us during these recent difficult days. We thank you for all the ways in which we have seen your love in action through your people across the world and in our own communities.

Though there have been feelings of loss, grief, confusion, loneliness and sadness, we have also been encouraged by the signs of life and hope around us and by the knowledge of your hand guiding and sustaining us.

We give you thanks for all the ways in which your church globally have come to the aid of those who struggle and suffer the most, demonstrating the love of Jesus in practical ways.

As we continue to seek our strength and refuge in you, help us to rest in the knowledge and shelter of your unending love. Amen.

Readings:

Psalm 46 - StF 810

2 Corinthians 8 vs 8-15

Story 1 - Brazil

Brazil has the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and, very sadly, the highest number of deaths in Latin America. While there has been no state coordination for a nation-wide lockdown or self-distancing measures some federal states have implemented their own lockdowns in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus. The lockdown in the Amazon region is gradually being lifted, but the region has had some of the highest numbers of cases and deaths, and neither the hospitals nor the morgues in the city of Manaus have been able to cope with such large numbers of victims.

Manaus is located within the Methodist Missionary District in the Amazon Region, known as *REMA*. This new District is part of the Methodist Church in Brazil's expansion strategy, as they plant churches in areas that do not yet have Methodist presence. The work

of *REMA* missionaries in these communities has been severely affected by the closures of local Methodist Churches across the nation. The Methodist Church in Britain is coming alongside our partners in *REMA* by supporting discipleship development, family support and children and young people's work through an emergency grant from the World Mission Fund in these new church plants. This grant will help strengthen the great work that God has begun in these communities, as well as support the missionaries who are responsible for developing the work.



Blessing the children at a church plant in the Amazon region (picture taken prior to Covid-19)

StF 633 My soul finds rest in God alone

Story 2 - South India

When the lockdown was announced, many labourers were caught in their workplaces, usually towns and cities, far away from home. With no work and no pay to send home or to support themselves, they and their families at home were left to starvation and only a few found any place to turn for help. As millions of migrants tried to return home, frightened due to the news of life-threatening pandemic, the state machinery treated them like criminals and often did not allow them to return home using the highways. When they finally arrived home, tired, despairing and famished, what they found was often serious and abject poverty.

Those who have not returned to their villages are also facing hunger and homelessness. As they continue to face starvation, many are looking to the church in the locality for help.

A grant from the World Mission Fund has enabled the Church of South India to bring relief and support to some of those hardest hit by the pandemic. They have set up community kitchens to distribute food and essentials and youth groups have prepared hand sanitizers and masks, and spread awareness on public safety. The church continues to support vulnerable people whose livelihoods have been greatly impacted by the Coronavirus, helping them with emergency food packets.



Covid response by the Church of South India

StF 696 For the healing of the nations

Story 3 – Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone recorded its first case of Covid-19 on 31st March 2020. Despite initiatives by the government in a bid to prevent and control the disease, the outbreak has affected all segments of the population and this is particularly detrimental to members of those social groups in the most vulnerable situations. The majority of their church communities including the ministers and their family members are also being seriously affected by the economic impact of the disease.

A grant from the World Mission Fund has supported the Methodist Church of Sierra Leone in providing food packages and distributing hygiene kits including buckets, bowls, face masks and soap to more than 160 Methodist family heads including Church Ministers across the Connexion. This will help support those unable to provide for themselves during the pandemic lockdown and alleviate hunger and hardship.



Women gathering for worship in Sierra Leone (photo taken prior to Covid-19)

Questions for reflection (individually or as part of a small discussion group)

- How has the Coronavirus pandemic affected you personally? Physically; emotionally; financially; spiritually?
- What or who has helped you through this difficult time?
- Are there any Bible passages that have been a help to you in these days?
- Do the words of Psalm 46 bring you comfort? In what ways have you found God to be your refuge and strength during this time?
- Are you able, as the Psalmist exhorts us, to 'Be still and know that I am God' right where you are today?
- 2 Corinthians 8 vs 12 encourages to give according to what we have so that the needs of others can be supported. How has the generosity of others impacted you? How does God's call to generosity speak to you today? How can you work that out in a practical way even if it is not financially?

Responsive private prayer

Listen to song on YouTube or read StF 635 My troubled soul

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=vmn_HngqBsU

Prayers of intercession (using StF 761 as a read or sung response)

Let us pray together.

We pray for those affected by Covid-19 around our world.

For those who struggle to feed their families, those who are unable to socially distance from others, those who are unable to access healthcare and those who have suffered unimaginable loss and deprivation.

We pray for the work of All We Can and other agencies seeking to bring help and relief to those in greatest need and our World Church partners seeking to work locally to help their communities.

Merciful Lord...

We pray for those affected by Covid-19 in our local communities.

For all those who work and live in Methodist Homes for the Aged and other care homes. For those who are struggling with financial insecurity and the threat of losing a job or a home. For those struggling with domestic abuse, difficult home environments or mental health issues.

We pray for those who provide medical and social care, for Foodbanks and debt agencies, refuges and charities and churches working to bring help to those who are suffering.

Merciful Lord...

We pray for those known to us who are affected by Covid-19.

For those who grieve the loss of a friend or relative, especially for those who have not been able to attend the funeral of a loved one. For those who have struggled with ill health or loneliness and for all those who feel fearful, confused or anxious.

We pray for those who stand alongside those who suffer and seek to offer support in their time of need.

Merciful Lord...

We pray that you will show us how we can practically show the love of Jesus to those in need of support amongst our families, friends and neighbourhoods.

May we know God as our refuge and strength, our very present help in time of trouble.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Lord's prayer

StF 706 Christ be our light

Blessing

Appendix - Finance/Gift Aid

Please read through and ensure these instructions are passed to your church treasurer, Gift Aid secretary and, importantly, the circuit MWiB treasurer.

Easter Offering collection envelopes are available in English and in Welsh. You can order them through Methodist Publishing
www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/

Instructions for collecting Gift Aid and sending in donations using the Easter Offering collection envelopes can be downloaded as a separate sheet from the Methodist Church website: www.methodist.org.uk/giftaid

These instructions apply to individual church collections.

HMRC guidelines on church collections and Gift Aid are available on the GOV.UK website via www.bit.ly/churchcollections

In keeping with the HMRC guidance for best practices on handling and banking donations, we recommend the following options for collecting and sending in donations.

Collecting donations and Gift Aid

Preferred income route: where possible, we encourage all churches to claim Gift Aid on donations.

- People donating money should make cheques payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund' (not 'Methodist Women in Britain' or 'MWiB'), and put the cheque or cash in the Easter Offering envelope completing their details.
- Collect and open the sealed Easter Offering collection envelopes.
- The treasurer should pay cash donations into the church bank account. They then write a cheque payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund' for the equivalent amount.
- Give the opened collection envelopes to your church or circuit Gift Aid secretary (or equivalent) so they can process the Gift Aid claim.
- Give the cheques to the circuit MWiB treasurer. They will bank them using the 'O2' paying in books. Do not send cheques to Methodist Women in Britain.
- Alternatively, the donation can be paid by BACS transfer directly into the Methodist Church World Mission Fund account using the following

Information:

Sort code: 40-02-06

Account number: 70951706

If making a payment using this method, be sure to include your circuit reference followed by 02.

So for example circuit number 18/9 would use the reference 180902. If there is space, please also include your circuit name to ensure that your donation is attributed to the correct circuit.

If your church is not set up to collect Gift Aid

- You should send the cheques you have collected and the Easter Offering envelopes they came in (which include Gift Aid information) to the circuit MWiB treasurer.
- **Do not send cash.** Bank the cash you have collected in the church bank account and write a cheque payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund' for the equivalent amount and give it to the circuit MWiB treasurer.
- The circuit MWiB treasurer will bank the donations using the 'O2' paying-in book or through BACS transfer.

If the circuit MWiB treasurer is unavailable

- If churches cannot get in touch with their circuit MWiB treasurer, cheques may be sent to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House with a covering letter indicating the circuit's name and ID number, so that those donations can be properly attributed.

If you have any queries, need further assistance or would like to order a paying-in book, please contact Finance at Methodist Church House by calling 020 7486 5502 or emailing circuit.income@methodistchurch.org.uk

For more information about claiming Gift Aid, Gift Aid rules, and frequently asked questions on Gift Aid, please contact your church Gift Aid secretary.