Good Morning, Here is a NEWS ROUND-UP FROM SOUTH WORCESTERSHIRE CIRCUIT

Our Circuit is just 9 months old and we were just beginning to find our way around together, when we were locked down! But we have a Circuit Service planned when the techies will be bringing together contributions from across the circuit. This should have happened in real time and would have been another milestone in establishing our new circuit identity.

In our churches and local communities, we have some people behind nearly every news story that reaches the headlines, and we are all affected. Probably the main difference to other circuits is that we are not as ethnically diverse, but have many Europeans working in the agricultural and care sectors, and a BME population in several communities who are mainly Moslem. We do have a large elderly population, with Malvern being one of the oldest districts demographically in the country, and our towns and villages have areas of deprivation made worse by this situation.

It sounds as though we have met the challenges of Covid 19 in similar ways to other circuits, so I’ll talk about a few of our people.

At the beginning of lockdown, Dot, from Ombersley Rd church Worcester should have received Royal Maundy money at Windsor, for which the Circuit had nominated her – for work in pursuing peace and justice, especially with the Jubilee campaign and Christian Aid.

Then we were glad to hear that Samantha from Bromyard Road, was recommended by the Connexional Candidates committee to proceed for training to become a Presbyter.

Judy joined Sarah, as the second part-time Children’s, Youth and Family Worker in the circuit. They are busy connecting with the families who churches knew them through groups such as toddlers and Messy Church. Recruitment for another Lay Employee in the Evesham, Broadway and Willersey churches has had to be put on hold.

Rev Israel and Rev Gary serving in the circuit have close family in India and South Africa respectively. They have had to field questions about this government’s handling of the crisis, and the large numbers of deaths here. Many other circuit members have family connections around the world too.

Most of our churches are facing significant financial issues, with the reduction in lettings income. St Andrew’s in Worcester city centre, having used its building as the focus for mission has been the most badly affected. However we are managing to pay our bills and presbyters, but our treasurer has had to renegotiate our telephone contract.

We have a lot of supernumerary ministers and they quickly got together on Zoom, for their fellowship meeting. Others are continuing to work on refugee support, tax justice and a new group called Green Christian Worcester.

Our members and ministers have been working to connect with their communities, ecumenical partners and with the wider world, seeking to spread the love of God and to encourage one another. As well as making services, cell groups and prayer meetings available on YouTube and Zoom, we have Zoom coffee meetings, email quizzes, newsletters and websites with uplifting stories, prayers and photographs. We are being together as a body where God is, and many have expressed thanks to their presbyters for their inspiration and leadership. Thanks too to Rev Helen for the sunflower seeds – the competition is hotting up.

Fund-raising for Christian Aid and other charities has continued. I hope some of you were able to see the OmBrom Readathon of Luke’s Gospel, raising over £800 for Christian Aid. Others are continuing to knit squares and blankets for refugees or sewing scrubs and face masks for the Worcester scrub hub. Whilst Sheila’s porch is full of contributions for the local food bank, collected weekly.

It is Local Preachers Meeting soon. We have sadly had the deaths of three local preachers from different parts of the circuit – June, David and Pam. All our preachers in training have been adversely affected in their studies because most are continuing to work harder than ever in their day jobs.

At a Circuit Meeting on the last night before lockdown, we consulted on a draft Circuit Mission Statement. We have agreed not to try to finish it, as there are new challenges now and some of the issues we highlighted then have been thrown into sharper focus.

We are delighted that since lockdown we have 3 new Circuit Stewards – Cynthia, Christine and David – and we have straightway had to set them to work on stationing, as 2 of our ministers, including our superintendent, finish their appointments in summer 2021.

Soon we will have to ask what it is we haven’t been doing, and yet we haven’t missed it! Will we need those things in the “new normal”?

I think we are mostly in good spirits, and we are continuing to discover that “The best of all, is God is with us.”