

### **Methodist Churches in the Liverpool District to Remain Closed**

Following the recent announcement to allow churches to open for private prayer from the 15th June, the Superintendents of the Circuits of the Liverpool District conferred together to agree a way forward.

Whilst recognising that some of our buildings have been open throughout the lockdown for essential reasons, such as hosting the foodbank or providing meals to vulnerable people, the decision was made not to open the Methodist Churches across the District for individual private prayer even though we have the permission of the government to do so.

There are several reasons for this:

1. The Methodist Church in Britain has decided not to make any change to its position until after the Methodist Conference has met at the end of June so there is no change in the connexional guidance.
2. Methodist Churches are primarily places where we gather in community to worship God. The practice of individual private prayer is something Methodists take very seriously, but it does not require a church building for it to happen. In fact, the Methodist tradition encourages believers to develop the practice of regular personal devotions, recognising that prayers can be offered and God encountered at all times and in all places.
3. To open buildings requires comprehensive risk assessments for churches and these have not yet been carried out. Without these, Managing Trustees might be held personally liable (that is, not covered by insurance) if there was a claim against them for negligence.
4. There are procedures concerning cleaning and sanitising, distancing, and movement through the building, that need to be in place and enforced when we resume meeting together, and these have not been agreed at this stage.
5. We need to ensure that those opening and managing our buildings are not those in the 'highest risk' categories and, at present we cannot guarantee this to be the case. Furthermore, there are concerns to protect not only those who are vulnerable but also those who live in households where someone is shielding. We need to act in the best interests of the wider population, which is a more complex matter than the opening up and managing buildings.
6. The Reinfection rate (R Number) in the North West is the highest in the country at the moment and we remain cautious about the spread of infection in our region.