Dear Friends

After just a few days in lockdown we approach another weekend with a difference, with many ministers and leaders of worship preparing to livestream a reflection or service on Sunday rather than preparing to gather and meet with their regular worshipping congregation.

Since writing to Ministers, OLMs, Deacons, Readers, Locums, Interim Moderators, and Session Clerks at the beginning of this week a number of you have sent to Julie Dunn (Communications Coordinator) links to your online worship and reflections. Please continue to do that in order that all our congregations and parishes can benefit from the work being done to connect and encourage and share faith at this time. If you are looking to set up some online presence then advice is available via our website, the Church of Scotland website, and Ascend. It is now permissible to use your church building to record or livestream a service, but that is on the basis of no more than two people being in the building and observing best practice on distancing.

One of the questions coming up this week is about funding and finance and whether online donations can be made as people engage with a worship opportunity. There are a number of means for setting this up, but if you have advice or good practice to share, or have found a particular means of receiving donations useful, then please be in touch with Julie, me or Karen Campbell our Finance Convener so that we can pass on the wisdom. On the wider question of finance an email has just been sent by the Assembly Trustees to Presbytery Clerks, Ministers, Session Clerks and Congregational Treasurers which we will also post on the Presbytery website.

Since writing to you this week I am also very grateful to those who have expressed a willingness to conduct funerals in place of ministers and locums whose health means they must be more isolated. This is an invaluable service and your support is much appreciated. As said before the conduct of pastoral and bereavement care should be done by phone or online as we all work to keep ourselves and others well.

As we expressed last night with the 8pm applause, we feel a deep sense of gratitude for all the work and sacrifice of NHS workers at this time. The demands upon them are huge and growing and their response is vital to our wellbeing. There is also around the country a great wave of volunteer support and ministers and Session Clerks have received an email this week asking them to share information about volunteer services being provided to help local communities. This information is being gathered in by Edinburgh Churches Together to be sent to MSPs in order that they can pass on the right information to the people contacting them. Please do send in the information you have to Edinburgh Churches Together.

Over the last few days new ways are being explored to keep in touch and to have meetings. Parish Ministers now have access to Teams and should have received an email from the IT department on setting this up. As the Presbytery office staff are all working from home we meet every morning via Teams to keep in touch with each other and plan the work for the day, and we’re finding that very useful. I have also had video and online chats with some of you on Teams, and we have had a number of meetings using Zoom, which is again an accessible platform and useful where not everyone in the group has a Church of Scotland email account. It’s a steep learning curve but we are fortunate to have this technology to hand.

This Sunday is the fifth Sunday in Lent and the Gospel reading is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Before he travels to Bethany he tells his disciples, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ In this time of anxiety and fear when many are sick and the future uncertain we put our trust in the one who is the resurrection and the life for us and we look to all the ways in which we may help bring fullness of life to others.

Wishing you every blessing.

Marjory