

MEETING IN LOCKDOWN DURING COVID-19

Guidelines for Local Preachers' Meetings

Reasons to Meet

Our Standing Orders¹ require us to meet together as Local Preachers, and list six reasons for meeting. At first sight, it may seem that these would be difficult to fulfil in times of epidemic, when meeting physically is not possible. However, there are alternatives to meeting in person. A quick review of the reasons for our meeting is helpful:

Worship & fellowship - this is the first purpose of the meeting, and all the more important because of lockdown and lack of opportunity to share worship in person.

To review the work of God – in these unprecedented times, all the more important for us, as the local theologians of the church, to watch for signs of God at work around us.

To be accountable – this isn't just about keeping each other in line, it's about encouraging each other and sharing ideas and insights – especially valuable in strange times when we're unsure what our role should be.

To support training of new Local Preachers and Worship Leaders - many are still pressing on with their studies and finding innovative ways to engage in leading worship. Indeed lockdown for some has provided new opportunities for study. We need to support and encourage those whom God is calling.

Continuing Development - there are so many excellent resources available online, to say nothing of the shelf of books you've been meaning to read for months. What better chance than for each of us to decide on a piece of CLPD to do, and then share it with the meeting?

"Deal with the business" – there is surprisingly little that actually needs to be done, but there will be news to share, friends to support and prayers to pray.

All of this provides good reasons why we should continue to meet, but in a different way.

Practicalities

Whilst not all may have the technology, a surprising number of us have been discovering new ways to communicate out of necessity. [Zoom](#) is perhaps the easiest program to use and is free to use for calls up to 45 minutes. It works on any smartphone, tablet or computer and just requires one person to set up and host the meeting. The Learning Network have produced a [helpful video](#) about using Zoom.

There are alternatives, such as [Google Hangouts](#), and [Microsoft Teams](#). None of them require participants to register or pay subscriptions, although the meeting convener may choose to take up a subscription in order to make setup and management of meetings easier.

Using video conferencing does require internet, but this need not be a fast broadband connection, as most will work with any internet connection, or from a mobile phone signal.

Meeting by video may take some getting used to, but here are some guidelines to help:

1. The convener should send out invitations and joining instructions a few days in advance, and check by phone with everybody that they understand the joining instructions. If people try the technology for the first time in an actual meeting and get confused, they might not try again.
2. The convener (or someone else) could set up a simple "try-out" meeting with anyone who wants to. It doesn't cost anything, and will build confidence in the technology.

¹ Standing Order 561, CPD 2019 volume 2, p.498.

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3. For those who don't have the facilities to participate by video, it's possible with most of these products to set up a phone-in service so that people can listen in to the meeting on the phone. This should be offered as an alternative to avoid people feeling excluded.
4. Keep meetings short and simple – online meetings can be tiring because they require intense concentration watching a screen. Half an hour is fine to start with, an hour is more than enough. It's best to have a few significant topics than to have a long agenda to get through.
5. Follow some simple rules for engaging in the meeting. For example keep your microphone muted when others are speaking and raise your hand (Zoom has a button for this) if you wish to speak. It's good to explain these first, to avoid confusion.
6. Don't assume that the meeting needs to be at the standard time. At present, people's schedules may be very different, centred around child care, unusual shifts, volunteering, or caring for a vulnerable person.
7. Allow a little time too for those who want to share some thoughts and insights about the current time. This can be a social occasion – bring your cup of coffee along with you!

Remember – we meet in the presence of God, so quietness and prayer are very appropriate.

There may be those who can't (or choose not to) join in with an online meeting. It's vital to keep them included in the community, and a phone call afterwards to update them on the meeting would be much appreciated. This may even be an opportunity to reconnect with people who've not attended a Local Preachers' Meeting for a while.

What to include

The choice is yours, but here's a few suggestions to choose from:

- Embed the meeting on worship. Prayers can be put on PowerPoint or Word and shared using the "share screen" function. People can be asked to read and contribute reflections and prayers, and the [Methodist website](#) has a growing list of suggestions. The [National Methodist Choir](#) is worth a listen too!
- Have a focal point – perhaps a short item of CLPD prepared by a member in advance, and include some conversation.
- Invite people to share their experiences of being a preacher or worship leader at present, with questions like: What outlets are you finding for exercising your gifts? What is lockdown doing to your sense of Call? Remember to include those on note and on trial.
- Share what the circuit is currently offering for worship at home, and review some examples of best practice. Seek suggestions (and offers of help) and explore other possibilities.
- Discuss: what difference will Covid-19 make to our life and mission of the church in the future?
- And, if you're unsure about conducting interviews with those on note or on trial online, consider doing this as a separate small Zoom meeting, recording it and showing the recording during the main meeting. Discussions about progress of those on note or on trial are fine but it may be appropriate to defer decisions if many are not able to join the online meeting.

We welcome ideas and suggestions for updates to this guidance² as we navigate these challenging times together.

² Other information to support the ministry of local preachers can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/lp.