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To friends and colleagues in the Wales Synod of the Methodist Church

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Dear Friends,

Last Christmas was a strange one for all of us, as plans for celebrations, family gatherings and even church services had to be changed or put on hold because of the Coronavirus lock-down.

This Christmas, although we’re still living with some restrictions, I’m hopeful we will be able to do many of those things again; to rejoice with loved ones, to share in services and (for some of us perhaps most precious of all – even if still wearing facemasks) to sing Christmas carols.

As I began writing, I noted that this is the 15th such Christmas letter which I have written since becoming Synod Chair. Over this period I have reflected on a range of different events in the run-up to Christmas, but I’m struck now by the sense of living in a time of greater uncertainty than I have experienced before. This seems to me true in all kinds of ways; in our living with the pandemic, in the pressures placed on our health care system, education and economy, in the tensions across the United Kingdom, and with Europe and the wider world after Brexit, and in facing the huge challenge of the climate crisis as focused at the recent COP26 meeting.

I reflect on how in and through all these things, good colleagues have found ways of helping us to continue with our shared life in witness and worship. We’ve become familiar with Zoom meetings and streamed services and begun to find ways in which we can physically meet for worship and open up our premises again to the life of the wider community. And in all these things, as guided both by Methodist Insurance and the Wales Government, we’ve become very familiar with the need to undertake a Risk Assessment first, not that all risk can be entirely eliminated but so that we can try to identify and manage it as safely as we can.

This seems particularly meaningful at this time, because in preparing for the coming of Christ, we are welcoming the God who takes the risk of coming into this our world in the midst of all its trials and uncertainties; and who comes in the most vulnerable of forms, as a baby, born in a manger to a young family travelling far from home in response to economic pressures.

That’s the risk which God takes in Christ to come amongst us, to be the light that shines in the darkness and to reassure us of his presence in our time of uncertainty. So however you may be sharing in services this Christmas, whether online or in person, may you meet with the one who is willing to take the risk of coming to be ‘God with us’, Immanuel.

***Stephen***