

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As I move around the Circuit it has become clear to me that there is an important fact that many have not realized. Two years ago we dropped to three ministers from four. This has affected the plan but also the work which our ministers are able to do. The effects have been masked by some of our supernumeraries and minister without appointment who have generously taken pastoral care of some of our churches. Nonetheless I would encourage all our churches to look at what they expect from their ministers and consider whether this is realistic under the new regime. A number of issues across the Circuit have made me aware that churches have the same expectations as they had when we had four members of staff, this is clearly unrealistic, and I encourage churches to hold discussions with their ministers about how best to fulfil the ministry of Christ in your situation. We cannot continue to sustain what we have been doing if it is solely dependent on our ministers.

This shortage of ministers is a reflection of what is happening across the Connexion, and so this discussion is taking place in many places. It would be irresponsible to pretend that this is not happening. This plan is a case in point. On Easter Sunday we had 10 churches which were likely to expect a service of Holy Communion at 10.00 or 10.30 a.m. and there were only 7 ministers available. I am grateful to those churches who have willingly forgone their normal morning Holy Communion and to the supernumeraries without whom we would have struggled far more.

On a practical note, and as I have suggested in the past, I encourage all churches to contact preachers at least two weeks in advance. This enables a reasonable length of time if the preacher has forgotten, if the church has certain requirements, or if the preacher is unable to fulfil the appointment. This is not hassling the preacher but building a relationship which most preachers would value, it demonstrates that the church takes worship as seriously as the preacher.

If Holy Week and Easter are about anything they are about passing through suffering to find new life. To gain new life we need to accept (suffer) death. To move from where we are we must be willing to die to what we have been, how we have behaved, what we have done, and move forward trusting that our loss will lead to new life. If we cling onto how things have been we will never discover what new life is like. This is the message of Easter.

Your brother in Christ,
David