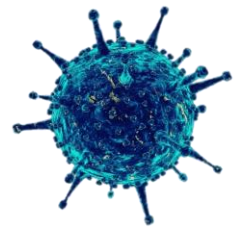


Covid-19: Acting Faithfully and Responsibly

Update 3: Six priorities for our response – 22nd March 2020



Some years ago, when we launched our vision as “Unlocking the Potential” – we could not have imagined the circumstances in which we would be seeking to fulfil that now. Yet this remains a statement of purpose that serves us well in these present times. Our churches have potential to be Beacons of Hope and agents of good in current circumstances, and our task as NWBA is to support them in fulfilling that.

Our founding vision as an Association in 2001 was

Committed to the values of Christ's Kingdom, NWBA exists to support and enable our member churches in their worship and mission.

We have reviewed that many times since, and have always concluded that it remains a defining statement of our vision and purpose. We see our primary role in these unprecedented days as supporting and equipping churches and leaders as you seek to respond to the circumstances that unfold.

At the moment, we are facing a Tsunami of concerns and questions, as churches and leaders seek to respond faithfully and responsibly. This is inevitable, but there is a danger that we all become overwhelmed if we try to address everything at once. So after a few days in which we have pretty much sought to respond to whatever has come our way – I want to offer a PRIORITY FRAMEWORK to our churches and leaders that I hope might help us work together well and for the greater good of all. You do not have to adopt it, and your own unique local circumstances may require different things, but we offer it so that you can move forward aware of the sort of resources and responses that NWBA is seeking to develop.

1. The wellbeing of Church members and congregation: I would argue that our first priority has to be to take care of each other. This is likely to include practical steps to care for the vulnerable and at risk, but also to think about how we maintain healthy Christian discipleship in a situation where not only are people cut off from familiar avenues of support, but are experiencing heightened concerns, questions and uncertainty. This is the frontline task of the local church, and I know has been a priority for many in recent days. As an Association, we want to determine together how best we can provide and co-ordinate necessary support. This is an immediate and ongoing task.

2. Equipping and supporting leaders: At our recent ministers' conference I made the point that “*our wellbeing as leaders, the wellbeing of our church communities and our effectiveness in the wider world are deeply inter-related.*” As servant-leaders, we will inevitably focus on the needs of others, but we also need to TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES. This includes taking the necessary steps to protect our health, but also building networks of support with other leaders and ministers. Many are also having to learn new technologies and significantly adapt under extreme pressure. This will be the key priority for our Church Life team from Monday 23rd March. We will do all we can to make phone contact with every NWBA church by the end of that week.

3. Caring for our communities: I would also encourage that as the first two elements above begin to take shape, local churches think seriously about how we can support our local communities more widely. We cannot do everything, but we can be a key catalyst in bringing our communities together and helping develop effective and safe networks of support. There may also be practical things that your church can do, which could be as simple as allowing key workers to use your car park, particularly if you are near to a hospital or local transport hub. We may also need to think about how we provide funeral services and bereavement support if the virus takes hold in the way that some fear. We are called to be a missional and outward looking people – now more than ever we need to ask ourselves why God has placed us in the communities that we have the potential to serve.

4. Ministry and Mission: Although this overlaps with the element above, our distinct calling to be proclaimers of Good News is undiminished by present circumstances. We have a specific role and opportunity to be a spiritual presence and to communicate the message of Jesus with sensitivity and hope. As things move forward, I would encourage that we do not just think about how we can use new

technologies and approaches to serve our church community, but how we can reach out in effective and new ways to the many people around us who will be concerned about their own wellbeing and struggling to cope with living and functioning in very different ways from what they are used to. We are particularly keen to hear from local churches about ways in which they have supported and connected with those living around them.

5. Church Practicalities: Alongside all of this, we will have practical concerns about how our church functions and operates in the days ahead. These have ranged already from questions about building and grounds maintenance, finances, holding online leaders meetings and ministerial settlement. These are important issues, and work is going on nationally to address them. For the present, we would ask that unless these are particularly urgent matters (e.g. you do not have the finances to pay your minister) that you await information from BUGB. If there are particular issues we may overlook, please email these to the Association, but as much as possible look for national responses from BUGB, as we feed your concerns into the national conversation. **IF YOU HAVE AN URGENT NEED, PLEASE CONTACT US STRAIGHT AWAY.**

6. Thinking about the future: While this is not an immediate priority, people are already recognising that life is unlikely to return to “normal” for as long as 12 months – in fact, there is a growing sense that life will never quite be the same again. It feels important that we do not simply focus on “getting through” the current circumstances, but also ask what role we have to play in helping to re-form our communities once this is over. We will have learned much in the coming weeks – how will those lessons affect the way we function and operate as churches going forward? It is important that we use this time of isolation to think through together what our role and calling is in the world that emerges and emerge **READY TO RESPOND.**

We are all having to adapt and learn quickly, so we offer this framework not because we have a clear and thought-through strategy to develop each element, but in order to provide the basis for further reflection and interaction. We cannot do everything at once, but by offering the basis of a shared approach, perhaps we can work together on different elements within it, harnessing the ideas, expertise and experience that no doubt exist across our Association.

We will work next, to produce a fuller exploration of each of these elements which we will produce and publish in priority order. We will probably circulate these as a series of separate documents. We will also offer some online video messages to support this so that you can engage others in the conversation.

We hope you find this helpful as a starting point. I want to be clear that this is intended as strategic framework not a catalogue of activities. So, for example, you might be concerned that we haven't included “prayer” or highlighted “ecumenical initiatives.” This is because we envisage these things being present in every element – prayer is vital to the spiritual wellbeing of our congregations; it is an essential element in our leadership; it is a gift we can offer to the community, and indeed we might have the opportunity to help some people pray who have never prayed before. And yes, praying through the practicalities of the situation and taking a prayerful approach to discerning the future are central too.

I hope this framework helps you to work through the current situation making the most of the resources that NWBA seeks to offer in the weeks ahead. We hope too that it enables you to offer your own gifts and insights into our shared response, and therefore focus the resources and capacity that you do have on the tasks that can only be done in your local context.

May we all know God's wisdom and presence in these difficult days.



Phil Jump – NWBA Regional Minister