

**Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District**

**Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse**

**May 2021**

Dear Friends,

I sat down the other evening with Jean to watch the film *A Long Way Down*; loosely based upon the novel by Nick Hornby of the same name. It tells the story of four desperate characters who find themselves drawn together through the common pursuit of seeking to commit suicide on New Year's Eve – each of them makes their way to the top of a tall building expecting to die in solitude. Consequently, their plans for death in solitude are ruined when they meet as they decide to come down from the roof alive, however temporary that may be. The story continues as the four strangers gradually get to know each other and become more accepting of each other's vulnerability. Through their mutual acceptance of one another they create a surrogate family in which they feel loved and accepted for who they are. They create a common pact or bond that neither of them will commit suicide certainly until they reach New Year's Eve again! The film closes a year later at New Year's Eve when they contact each other through video conference – each character has moved on with their life and has found a renewed purpose for staying alive and facing the future with hope! It is a touching story that demonstrates the virtue of human community – particularly when the quality of that relating is vulnerable, honest, and authentic.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the invitation to relate deeply to a loving God in Jesus Christ and to our human neighbours who are made in the image of God. This deep relating finds its grounding in a particular community – the Church; the Body of Christ – a community made of many parts, but a community called to be one in Christ. The Apostle Paul puts it like this.

***'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.'* (1 Cor:12)**

At its best this community will be an openly broken community, where in grace and love, we can wear the bright sorrows of our humanity and know that we are held in the love and prayers of God's people. This kind of relating takes us below the superficial and the surface reality of our lives, to the deeper matters of the heart and soul.

From Creation through to the New Creation we are called to be deeply relational beings who find joy and fulfilment in the company of God and in the company of each other and of course in the Methodist tradition this finds a particular resonance in our focus upon being a *connexional* church.

I hope and pray that we will find both the joy and the gift of this kind of relating as we begin to emerge from the current crisis and recover our way of life,

With deep peace and blessing, Julian