

Dear Friends

Our Superintendent Richard is on sabbatical and his absence has highlighted for colleagues how much of a well-deserved break that will be for him. I was delegated the task of chairing a Circuit Meeting and, by association, have over recent weeks been asked to help with interpersonal difficulties that have arisen in the Circuit. Reading some of the email trails between brothers and sisters in Christ left me shocked at how brutal we can be, and unsurprised that individuals have been left in tears as a consequence.



When people meet over a coffee, they approach a problem together. When they speak over the phone they are more likely to have a full and frank exchange of views. When they email, there seems to be permission for their deepest frustrations to be vented on a computer keyboard, and before they know it the send button is hit and someone gets hurt.

This failing in communication is exacerbated by the inherent ambiguities of the written word. To

illustrate, and at the risk of offending someone, I'll share with you a phrase taught me on a training day at Methodist Church House recently: "I didn't say she slept with him." Try reading the phrase several times, putting the stress on a different word each time. The received meaning is totally different –as are the critical comments in a letter or email we think we have phrased so carefully and gently "in love". So, brothers and sisters, I wonder if I can use the flawed written word to share some guidelines we might agree upon? If we have something difficult to say, let's say it face-to-face. If we're to telephone let's be friendly and respectful. Let's keep emails or letters for less sensitive matters. Let's be careful about who gets copied in, and let's pause, read, re-read, reflect and re-read before sending - next day is often best. Perhaps you have other suggestions.

Let's take the good advice of Paul (what would his emails have looked like?) "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5.11) and "let your gentleness be known to all" (Philippians 4.5) and above all let's take seriously the words of Jesus: "love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13.34)

Finally, lest there be any doubt, I have absolutely no person or group of people in mind as I write this! And I am very sorry for the times when I have failed to follow my own guidelines.

With love in Christ

Kim