

The Christian Community

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

Forest Row Congregation

20th March, 2020

Dear Forest Row Community,

By now you will probably all have read the letter from Tom Ravetz, which went to all the congregations in Great Britain and Ireland. As a response to the Government's advice, the priests saw no other option than to cease all public events in the churches. Some members have asked us to share more about what led to that decision. As individuals, we may feel a certain equanimity in the face of infection; we may not be in an 'at risk' group. We might even feel that the healing power of the sacraments might help us to weather the storm of any illness. Our decision to follow the Government's advice came because we can identify with the intention of preventing the spread of the illness. Our concern is not primarily for ourselves, but for those with less resources, or more at risk, whom we might unwittingly infect. In this sense ceasing services and other events is a sacrifice, a deed of renunciation that we are taking for the sake of those more vulnerable and in need.

As always when we have to give up something that we love, the situation presents us with challenges and opportunities. We will need to find ways of keeping what sustains us alive even when we are not gathering together as a community in front of the altar.

The first thing that we wish to emphasise is that the beating heart of our community, the Act of Consecration of Man, is not ceasing. Every Thursday and Friday at 9am and every Sunday at 10am, one of the priests will take the service. We would suggest that those who would have been attending the service on those days take the time to send their thoughts and prayers towards the altar. Members of The Christian Community are entrusted with a copy of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer for their inner work. These, together with the Gospel Reading of the week, can create an inner substance to deepen what we experience at the altar. We will be sending suggestions about working with these elements in the coming weeks. Having taken services for the last two days, we can affirm that the empty church felt full. The thoughts and prayers being sent towards the altar were palpable. Beyond that, the presence of those who have died could be felt most deeply.

Spiritual support – The priests will send out a package of materials each week. At the moment our plan is to send a short sermon or homily and some study notes for working with the week's gospel reading, along with a pastoral letter. We hope that we will be able to intensify this towards Holy Week and Easter. Those who do not have email will receive their communication by post. If you are receiving this in the post but you could receive it by email, please send us your email and permission (see below). If there is someone living close to you who does not have email for whom you could print out what we send, please let us know.

Children's work - Families will continue to receive emails. Updates will continue on our Facebook page. Our aim is to provide up-building stories and images and nourishment for our families who will need much support in the coming times.

Update - We will continue to send out the Sunday Update, even though the events detailed in our current programme will be cancelled. We want to encourage an on-going consciousness for all the programme and festival items nonetheless. In some cases we may be able to send out related programme material and encourage your inner support for certain items. For instance the monthly Gathering for the Dead could be something that some may wish to continue in their own private spaces on behalf of the community. Talks may appear as articles that can be read and pondered. Please feel free to email one of us with your own news, announcements, needs, poetry, thoughts, verses, etc if you wish it to be included in the weekly news.

Social Support – Many of us may need to stay at home and limit their usual social and community engagements. We are aware that this could be very challenging and could give rise to needs that require support from others (shopping, someone to talk to, staying in touch, maintaining connections, etc). We are very willing to act as the liaison for any such needs. If you have such a need or know someone else who has, then please do not hesitate to email or phone one of the priests. Alternatively, for those of you who live locally, if you need information on the Forest Row Village Support Group, please contact Evelyne Muller on 01342 823959. It would be wonderful if people took the initiative to maintain the connections with each other. We hope in this way that together we can experience the common substance that unites us, perhaps even deepening our Christian Community as a community of social trust, confidence and warmth.

On a personal note, Luke Barr is staying at home for the time being (as recommended) due to coughs and sneezing in the family. Tom Ravetz also has to be careful because Deborah, his wife, would be at risk if she were infected.

The Perspectives editorial team have decided to offer a free one-year “E-Subscription” to any new subscriber who would like one. This means that you are sent a PDF of the magazine. We can also give free subscriptions to the hard copy for the next two issues. Our intention with this offer is to reach people who are unable to attend events that would nourish their spiritual life. Please let Tom know if you would like to receive one of these offers, or you know someone who might benefit.

A form to fill out to update your contact information and /or request to be included on our email list is attached to the first edition of our Newsletter, which should come to you with this mailing.

Wishing you all much strength for these coming weeks, and looking forward to seeing you soon,



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