

The Christian Community

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

National Coordinator (Lenker)

Revd Tom Ravetz

18th March, 2020

Dear congregations,

As you may be aware, the UK Government has reviewed the advice about dealing with new Corona Virus, Covid-19, in the light of projections based on how the epidemic has unfolded in Italy, which is going through the crisis a few weeks in advance of us.

The guidance is not entirely clear and for the moment it is discretionary. However, the intention is clear: if these guidelines are followed, the NHS will be able to cope and the number of fatalities will be far lower than would have been the case if the guidelines had not been changed. It seems likely that the Irish government will soon follow suit.

What pertains to The Christian Community is the request that individuals avoid 'unnecessary gatherings' and the parallel request to organisers of such events not to put them on. In the terms of the advice, our groups are 'unnecessary gatherings' – even though we may know how very necessary they truly are!

Our community life rests on autonomy: individuals decide freely to attend our services and join in communion; congregational priests decide on their programme together with their communities. The international leadership of The Christian Community supports the regions in their work.

There are however situations in which individual choice reaches a limit. My decision not to self-isolate if I am at risk of spreading the virus could have grave consequences which I cannot control. In a number of conversations that I have held with my colleagues and others, including an NHS consultant, we have looked long and hard at the question whether we as the priesthood of The Christian Community can responsibly continue to put on public events of any kind. We have realised that we cannot because we wish to support the efforts to contain this epidemic.

This means that with immediate effect there will be no public gatherings of any kind in our churches and community spaces. All study groups, meetings and talks will be cancelled.

In regard to the Act of Consecration of Man, the priests will continue to celebrate but they will do this behind closed doors. Your priests will be in touch with you about what we can all do to bring these celebrations to life within us even when we cannot be present physically. It will also be important to foster our community networks and make sure that we are aware of each other's needs in the congregation.

The nature of the situation makes it impossible to predict how long it will last. We will of course keep it under review and keep you updated when we see a possibility of resuming normal congregational life.

Last Sunday, a number of congregations had the experience of an Act of Consecration of Man at which the communion was not shared out individually. Many members commented on the extraordinary intensity of that experience. Whilst what we are doing now is far more serious even than that, I have taken some comfort from that experience. If we can embrace this loss, which comes to us from factors outside our control, and fill it with our good thoughts, our interest in each other and our prayers, we may find that our community life is not diminished but intensified.

With my very best wishes for all of your health and for your spiritual strength in this challenging time,

