

The Christian Community

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

National Coordinator (Lenker)
Revd Tom Ravetz

12th May, 2020

Dear congregations,

I am writing to update you on our plans for the next phase of the current public health crisis. The priests are in regular conversation about developments. In the first phase of our response, it seemed important that we have a uniform approach across the Region.

In March we had to comply with the guidance on ceasing public gatherings. This has been very hard for us all. It has been heartening to hear many descriptions written by members who have accompanied the service inwardly and have had quite profound experiences. We priests have certainly been aware of invisible supporters, co-carrying the services. However, there is no substitute for our coming together in the same space and celebrating at the altar. Although it seems a long way away, it is good that places of worship have been named in the UK guidelines issued on 11th May. There, the plan is to allow them to open in the third phase of loosening the restrictions, hopefully at the beginning of July.

The Government recognises that 'religious staff' are providing a key public service. This has given us the confidence that priests on their way to celebrate in church could not be deemed to be making unnecessary journeys. We have, however, been celebrating without lay servers. This was a real compromise, as our service is a collaboration between priests and members. I know that this was a difficult decision for some of you to understand and accept.

Now that the government is looking ahead to the next phase, it seems right that we do too. As local circumstances are very varied, we have resolved as a circle that we will discuss the national regulations and overall situation together and set out parameters within which it will be up to the priests in their congregations to decide what is appropriate for the local situation. The Republic of Ireland has always had its own policy, of course; now there are differences emerging between the nations of the UK.

We have now decided that as of Wednesday, 13th May, it will be up to the local priest(s) in each congregation to decide whether lay servers should be invited to assist at the Act of Consecration of Man, depending on local circumstances. The congregational priests will be making arrangements in the vestries and in the conduct of the service itself so that physical distancing can be maintained as far as possible. For now, the communion will not be shared out. No-one should feel under any pressure to serve if they do not feel comfortable doing so, even in cases where they might be the only server available. For the moment, the services will not be open to others.

Looking further ahead, we will be discussing every step in the loosening of the lockdown to see how it bears on what we can do. You will be hearing about this from your local priests.

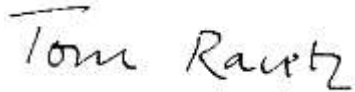
We also had to postpone the Confirmations that were planned for these Easter weeks. The international leadership has determined that Confirmations may be held for the remainder of the church year, which ends the last Sunday before Advent. We will be looking for the first opportunity to reschedule the Confirmations in that time.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support in these difficult times. I have received many messages and I know that many more have gone to the congregational priests. I am also aware of many members and friends of the Community who have expressed their support by increasing their

standing orders and making one-off donations, as they wished to support our finances in this time when there are no collections or fundraising events.

Speaking for myself, I have found this a time to reflect deeply and ponder on many things. I have the feeling that the conversations that we will have in the weeks and months ahead will be particularly important. I even wonder whether holding the space for questions and deep reflection will be one way that we can provide a service to the world, which may soon be caught up in hectic everyday life again. I hope that I will be able to be part of some of these conversations with you.

With very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Rawtz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the first letter of "Tom".

PS we are publishing some of the content that we have all been sending to our congregations online at www.thechristiancommunity.co.uk/topic/blog/