

The Christian Community

Movement for Religious Renewal

Hollywood Congregation

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Newsletter for the week of Sunday, 25 April

Dear friends,

We can be very glad that the pandemic, in Northern Ireland at least is now well under control. Very few people are testing positive and even fewer are now getting seriously ill or dying from covid.

Our government is very slowly allowing people to return to some kind of normality.

They have set out plans for the gradual reopening of the retail and hospitality sector and for allowing people from different households to mix outdoors and later on indoors.

I searched the website very carefully but I did not find any indication as to when we might be allowed to loosen our precautions but while there are some specific recommendations for weddings and funerals the regulations for places of worship in general remain the same as before.

This means that for the foreseeable future we will be required to continue disinfecting and ventilating our spaces and only meet with limited numbers to allow for social distancing.

We also have to continue wearing masks when moving round. And it is recommended to keep a record of attendance for contact tracing.

I hope that as confidence grows the restrictions will also gradually be lifted for us and that our government doesn't go ahead with plans to introduce some sort of certificate to allow people access to churches as they are intending to do for sporting and entertainment venues.

A letter, signed by thousands of priests, ministers, pastors and other church leaders has been sent off to Westminster to protest against such plans and I have added my name to it last week.

I quote a part of that letter:

“As Christian leaders we wish to state that we envisage no circumstances in which we could close our doors to those who do not have a vaccine passport, negative test certificate, or any other “proof of health”. For the Church of Jesus Christ to shut out those deemed by the state to be social undesirables would be anathema to us and a denial of the truth of the Gospel. The message we preach is given by God for all people and consists in nothing other than the free gift of grace offered in Christ Jesus, with the universal call to repentance and faith in him. To deny people entry to hear this life-giving message and to receive this life-giving ministry would be a fundamental betrayal of Christ and the Gospel. Sincere Christian churches and organisations could not do this, and as Christian leaders we would be compelled to resist any such Act of Parliament vigorously.”

I sincerely hope that it doesn't come to this but it's good to be prepared and make sure that it doesn't happen and that we can return to a normal community life in the not too distant future.

Ben van Lieshout

Hollywood

For the Sunday services please ring (02890424254), text (07974960570) or email (benvl@onetel.com) to book a place as we can only seat 11-13.

Easter

Thursday 22 th April	The Act of Consecration of Man	10.00
Thursday 29 th April	The Act of Consecration of Man	10.00

Mourne Grange (in Dawn Hall !)

Saturday 24 th April	The Act of Consecration of Man	10.15
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Clanabogan

Easter

Sunday 25 th April	The Act of Consecration of Man	10.30
Saturday 1 st May	The Act of Consecration of Man	10.30

The gospel reading for Sunday 25 April is John 15: 1-27



I AM the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean, so that it will be even more fruitful. You have already been purified by the power of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me and I in you.

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit out of itself unless it is given life by the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you stay united with me. I am the

vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains united with me so that I can work in him, bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not remain united with me withers like a branch that is cut off.

Such branches are gathered up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words live on in you, pray for that which you also will, and it shall come about for you. By this my Father is revealed, that you bear rich spiritual fruit and become ever more truly my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Ground your being in my love, just as I have taken the aims of my Father into my will and live on in his love. These words I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is the task I put before you: that you love one another as I have loved you.

No man can have greater love than this, than that he offer up his life for his friends. You are my friends if you follow the task I have given you. No longer can I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I call you my friends because I have made known to you all that I have heard from my Father.

You did not choose me, but I have chosen you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruits should live on after you, so that what you ask the Father in my name he should give it to you. I say to you out of the fullness of my power: Love one another.

If the world hates you with hatred, remember that they hated me first. If you belonged to people in general, they would love you as belonging to them; but you do not belong to them, because I have chosen you out of mankind. That is why people hate you.

Remember the word I spoke to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master'. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have held on to my word, they will hold on to yours also. Everything that they do to you they will do as though they did it to me, for they do not know Him who sent me.

If I had not come and had not spoken to them, they would be without sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who turns in hatred against me turns in hatred against my Father also. If I had not done deeds among them, deeds which no one else has ever done, they would be without guilt. But now they have seen me, and have still hated both me and my Father. But it was to fulfil what is written in their law: 'They hated me without a cause.'

But when the Comforter comes, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bring knowledge of me and will be my witness. And you also will be my witnesses, because you have been united with me from the very beginning.

A homily on John 15: 1-27



The wild grape vine will spread its many branches far and wide, climbing over fences and up trees. A cultivated vine is trained up on stakes and cross-wires. The vinedresser prunes it back to restrain much of the growth. Thus the vine sacrifices some of its wild abundance in order to produce better fruit.

Christ calls himself the True Vine. He is the Life the living entity of the earth and all on it. Our lives are branches off of His Life. And He tries to convey to us that both He and we are not to remain wild and uncultivated. Rather we are to contain ourselves on the cross-wires so that the Father, the vinedresser, can concentrate and strengthen our growth to produce excellent and abundant fruit.

The goal of our lives, the fruit we are trying to produce, is love. We are to produce the sweet and abundant fruit by remaining connected with the True Vine, the one whose very being is love. We are to remain connected with Him, living in His life, out of our own freedom of choice. To do otherwise is to risk bitter even diseased fruit.

To love means to offer our own life forces, our thoughts, our time, to others for the furtherance of the world. Offering ourselves is a habit into which we can train ourselves. We can prune away our more selfish and lazy habits, our soul's deadwood. And this matters not only to us, but to the world.