



CHRISTIAN
LIFE COMMUNITY
SOUTH AFRICA

March 2020

MASITHETHE

A message from the National Exco: Living CLC in the time of COVID-19

We are sure, for many of you, this week has been one of big adjustments as our country has readied to face our portion of the global pandemic of COVID-19. We would like to encourage you to take our President's call to action seriously: to practice social distancing and to self-isolate if you have any symptoms or reason to believe you have been in contact with someone who has. On this note, **we encourage you to cancel all regional events** planned for the coming weeks, and to seriously consider **taking your small group meetings online**. We also encourage you to make use of online mass options (consider, for example, the Sunday 9am Jesuit Institute Mass available on their website), and to work together in your groups to consider ways you can support more vulnerable members of your group and surrounding community. Above all, we ask you to join us in prayer for our world, and for the courage and love required for people throughout the world to act now for the common good.

Quarantine

In the run-around of our daily lives, what could bring more joy than the prospect of being blessed with a fortnight of contemplative time? Some of us will be given even more to be alone with our thoughts. Although this may at first seem to be any spiritual contemplative's dream come true, the circumstances which have led to many of us self-isolating and up-ending the general routines of our lives hardly allow one to settle into the space of mind which allows an examination of conscience. And for good reason.

After an initial outbreak in China late last year, the SARS-CoV2 virus has gone on to infect more than 250000 and kill 10 000 worldwide, with many countries (including South Africa) still facing exponential increases in infection rates, disease and death in the coming weeks. Italy has been particularly badly affected, with the numbers of deaths there recently eclipsing that of China. The scene of an empty St. Peter's Square for a Papal blessing on the City of Rome is a stark symbol of the abnormality of the present time.

Since confirmation of the first imported case into South Africa on the 5th of March, we now have 150 active cases, with expanding community transmission set to soon start. Projections are that we will have 4000 cases by the end of March, that 40 million citizens will eventually come to be infected, and that approximately 8 million people may suffer severe illness. Mortality numbers from statistical models reach into the 100 000's. This is almost unbelievable and will be unlike anything our health services have ever had to face.

Online Resources:

Follow reflections & masses with the Jesuit Institute South Africa (<https://www.jesuitinstitute.org.za/>)

There is daily mass broadcast on Radio Veritas, 12.30pm.

Fr James Martin, SJ is running daily reflections on his Facebook Page.

CLC Europe is putting together online groups through their Facebook Page (Christian Life Community in Europe)

@cobbleworks on Instagram & Facebook for beautiful Ignatian resources & illustrations of grace.



To combat the spread of disease, World bodies and National government have followed the dictum 'Prevention is better than Cure', by social distancing and practising good hygiene. Even if we cannot stop the virus from infecting a majority of people we can still slow it down, so that our health services are not overwhelmed, and that the minority of those who need critical care can have access to it when they require. Panic-buying (and worse, theft) of essential groceries and hygiene products is unnecessary and serves only to disadvantage others in need. We must desist from destabilising the country in this way.

The level of fear this has introduced into our daily lives is sobering, chilling and paralysing. This has rattled every sphere of life in every country in the world; our politics, economics, international trade and travel, worker productivity, business margins and sustainability, food supplies, social scenes and even religious activity. The Church has been forced to cancel Masses, events and even small group meetings.

Having the wherewithal during this period to remain centred on our personal relationship with God at this time, can be taxing. Within the practice of social distancing and quarantine, the need for more information is overpowering, addictive even. Of course, it is important to be kept abreast with the news, but this can significantly limit our ability to concentrate on the presence of God in our lives.

Whilst physically cut off from each other and the activities of the Church, it is all the more important to make time for daily Examen. To probe our thoughts, fears, anxieties and to bring this to God, often, and with purpose. To find ways in which we can strengthen our resolve to remain calm and support those around us, during a time in which every person in the world feels vulnerable and uncertain. With the World at chaos, we must connect with the inner peace we all carry within; that of God-with-us.

Dr Shrikant Peters (reporting from quarantine!)

Living CLC Community Online

It is tempting to keep focusing on the ways that virtual communication is not the same as in real life experiences. For years, we have been encouraging ourselves to remember that personal, in real life, relationship cannot be replaced by social media and the online world. This is true. But for a small group of us, our online Virtual CLC group has been a wonderful grace of connection during years of our lives where stable community was not always possible. Now, in the time of COVID-19 and a shift to online connection for the coming weeks, we'd like to share on our experience.



The vision behind "VCLC", as we call it, was to provide a stable CLC community during a transition period as many of us moved away from Oxford. Most of us also managed to join a 'in real life' CLC community in our new homes, but VCLC remains an important connection to those with whom we have walked many years of our faith journey. The group began in late 2015 and seven of us meet monthly on a Sunday evening.

Meeting across four countries is often a strain on technology and we have learnt to take the challenges in our stride. Personally, I often marvel at the success of this project: it is not often that we manage to create a group or space that is self-sustaining. It is a sign to me that we have managed to create community, even in this strange online space. There is always someone offering to lead, reminding the group of the meeting, or suggesting small projects to do together.

As we sit in silent prayer, each before their own screen, there is a sacredness to the space. And there is a wonderful grace in bearing witness to our attempts to discern God in our work, our local communities, and relationships. There is something especially beautiful to witness the similarities despite such distance and often disparate circumstances.

There is of course great joy when we manage to meet together in person, as many of us did this last December (some for the first time!), but it serves to enrich the online encounter rather than shed light on its inadequacy. So as we begin to meet with our local community in a virtual format, we encourage you to hold hope for its value: while it comes with challenges, our experience is that when we hold space for each other – in person or online -- we create space for God to show up in a special way.

Below are a few tips from our experience:

- Try to hold “holiness” lightly – your meeting will feel different, and have occasional interruptions, but can still create moments of real encounter.

- Take turns being the meeting leader – it is a larger responsibility when online than in person, and so takes a bit more from one’s experience of the meeting. The leader takes responsibility for checking on people who have lost connection and trying to re-connect etc.

- The leader should email or whatsapp the reading/input beforehand so that everyone can access it in written form during the reflection time, in case they cannot hear well.

- It takes some time to get used to different visual cues, especially a lack of eye contact – for some, this is quite liberating in sharing, others have learnt to notice other visual indications of listening, such as quiet nodding or attentive posture.

- Try to use a platform where you can mute yourself when not speaking to limit extra noise for others. This doesn’t help you with noise from your own home however, and this can be distracting. Try, if you can, to use headphones and to ask your family or housemates for consideration, but where this fails (which it does for us often), just return your attention back as best you can, as you would in prayer.

- Find a platform that works for you. We use an old platform called VSee which is still available but more targeted for online medical care. Others use Skype, Google Hangout, or Zoom.

- If you don’t already have one, a WhatsApp group is a big help to keep in touch during the meeting if there are technical difficulties, and in between to keep the community active.

- Don’t (or do!) try to say prayer out loud together. It is a constant amusement to us how difficult it is (or how poorly we manage) to coordinate saying the traditional opening and closing prayer of CLC England & Wales, or even a very short Glory Be, together.

If you need some help setting your group up online, you can contact Christine on christianlifecommunitysa@gmail.com

I’m surprised how prayerful a long time in front of a screen can be! Even if the silence isn’t perfect (my flatmate always seems to be Hoovering when we meet), maintaining the connection with the group over time means that I have continued to receive the graces from being part of this community of prayer and sharing, even though we’re not able to meet in person.

Olivia



With greetings from VCLC: Christine (SA); Imogen (Oxford), Nikki (Oxford), John (Manchester/London), Olivia (London), Cindy (US) & Ana (Madrid).

WORLD CLC DAY 2020

Our name of grace encapsulates our call to “ DEEPEN our identity..., to SHARE humbly with others the gift of Ignatian spirituality as lived out in our lay vocation, ... (and) to GO FORTH to serve those most in need and sow the seeds of mercy, joy and hope in the world.” As members of CLC, we “view Discernment and the Ignatian tools ... as precious gifts we cannot keep for ourselves.” (FINAL DOCUMENT, Buenos Aires, 2018).

As we stand on the threshold of World CLC Day, we find ourselves in a state of high alert. More than ever, we need the gifts of discernment and “seeds of mercy, joy and hope” amidst the uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed in the world.

This year, our celebration of World CLC Day will be very different as regional gatherings have been cancelled in order to comply with restrictions hoped to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus and safeguard the well-being of the Common Good. As we observe World CLC Day on the 25th March, may we be consoled by the fact that Ignatius, too, was alone at the moment when he laid down his sword at the foot of the statue of Our Lady of Montserrat. He made a conscious decision to isolate himself from behaviour that undermines the Gospel message of hope and salvation for all people. His commitment to a life of faith and service was an intimate moment and in no way diminished by the fact that he stood alone before the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat.

How inspiring are the postings on social media of people throughout Italy united in isolation as they sing beautiful hymns and folks-songs from the balconies of their homes while living under the COVID-19 lockdown! As each of us stands alone yet united with God and our Lady on World CLC Day, may we make time to pause and consider the following questions prayerfully:

1. How can I deepen the gift of CLC in my own life?
2. How may I share the gift of CLC with others? Think especially of how to share our CLC gift with the young people we encounter.
3. What does God require of me at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic?

After our time of prayerful reflection, let us sing “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam”! May our song be a hope-filled rendition of praise to our God of love and healing who is with us at all times. A Happy and Blessed World CLC Day to all of you!



Colleen Callahan

Community Banking Details

National Account

CLC National Secretaries
Standard Bank, Newton Park.
Branch Code: 050017
Acc No: 004874625

Education Project Account

CLC National Secretaries
Standard Bank, Newton Park.
Branch Code: 050017
Acc No: 044323921

Eastern Cape

Christian Life Community EC
Nedbank, Savings Account
Acc No: 2447009798

Gauteng

Christian Life Communities
ABSA, Savings Account
Acc No: 630465901

Western Cape

CLC Western Cape
Nedbank, Savings Account
Acc No: 2250025088