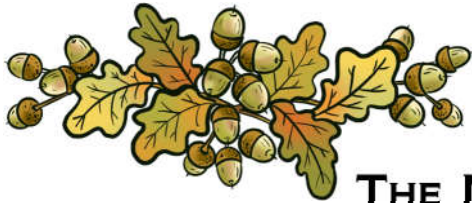




ECHO



OCTOBER 2023 EDITION



THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE

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PRESIDENT MACRON ANNOUNCES NEW FUNDING FOR FRENCH VILLAGE CHURCHES

President Macron has launched a fund to raise €200 million to help pay for the renovation and upkeep of 3 - 5,000 churches in small communities of less than 10,000 people.

Under the 1905 religious laws, the French Government can only subsidise maintenance work on church buildings which have national heritage status. Smaller, local churches belong to local councils, many of whom do not have access to enough funding to meet the repair bills for maintaining them let alone to undertake restoration work, even though this is their legal responsibility.

The President has announced that donations to the new fund would be eligible for a tax deduction of 75%, up from the normal 66% which would apply at present. He also expressed the hope that more 19th and 20th Churches would be given heritage status, thereby bringing them under the French Government's scheme.

The announcement has been warmly welcomed by French Catholic bishops. Father Gautier Mornas, director of the French bishops' conference department for sacred art said "We are pleased that the president has so clearly restated the importance of our religious patrimony and its need for special care"

In the meantime, the President has also shrugged off criticisms that he attended a church service in Marseille presided over by Pope Francis in late September and so defied French rules of laïcité, saying " "I think it's my place to be there. I won't be there as a Catholic, I'll be there as President of the Republic, which is indeed secular."



President Macron and the Pope together in Marseille on 23rd September after the Pope celebrated a massive communion service in the Marseille Velodrome attended by 60,000 people



Thanks to technology, replacing the worn-out hymn books didn't cost a penny



French Government pledge an additional €15m to support Restos du Coeur in the face of massive new demands for their assistance

For the first time in the 38 years since they were founded by the French comedian and actor, Michel Colucci, also known as Coluche, the French charity Restos du Coeur (RDC) have been compelled to ask for additional help after a substantial increase in the number of people coming to them for help.

In response, the Minister for Solidarity, Personal Independence and Disabled People of France, Aurore Bergé, has pledged to increase promised support of €10 million to a new total of €15 million.

The crisis has been triggered by rising demand for meals in the RDC centres which has jumped by 30 million meals served in 2022 to an estimated demand of 140 - 170 million this year.



RDC operate both food banks and meal centres and are estimated to provide one third of all food aid in France, and the current gap between demand and funding was estimated by RDC'S President, Patrice Douret, to place them at risk of having to close within the next 3 years.



Restos Du Coeur is one of the charities supported by ECO, and at our service of Harvest Thanksgiving in the Lot Valley on 5th October, we are inviting those who are attending to bring gifts of dried and tinned goods, bottles of UHT milk or sealed toiletries (soaps, shampoos, toothpaste etc) , which will then be passed to the local branch of RDC (there are 1,959 nationally).

You can also donate to Restos du Coeur via the website, and thanks the *Loi Colluche* named after their founder, tax relief on donations to RDC has been extended beyond the usual limits in recognition of their humanitarian objectives.

<https://www.restosducoeur.org/faire-un-don-financier/>



Your Baguette Is About To Change

Baguettes are the fuel on which France truly runs. It is estimated that 320 baguettes are consumed every second. That is almost **28 Million** each day!

Now, however, the taste of baguettes is about to change, albeit only very slightly.

The problem is salt.

Each baguette is currently permitted to contain up to 1.5 grams of salt per 100 grams of bread. From 1st October that limit will be reduced to **1.4** grams per 100 grams.

This forms part of a strategy by the French Government to cut salt consumption in France by 30% by 2025. World Health Organisation global guidelines suggest that we should not consume more than 5 grams of salt per day. However, in France, the daily consumption is estimated to be between 7 and 8 grams. Bread is thought to contribute 20% of the average French citizen's daily salt consumption.

The French National Confederation of Bakers are fully supportive of this change, but have acknowledged a "real challenge" to adjust their recipes to minimise any change to their bread. Live sourdough, additional yeast or yeast extracts are all potential additions to the bread to maintain its flavour.



Other breads will be similarly affected, with the salt limit reduced to 1.3 grams per 100 grams of 'pains spéciaux'.

A new national testing regime will be introduced to ensure that the new limits are being honoured.

ECO prepares to give thanks for the Harvest

As we did last year, ECO will give thanks for Harvest and at the same time celebrate the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi at an in-person Communion Service on Thursday 5th October

This is the time of year for many churches to hold their Harvest Festival services. There will be displays of food, some grown in local gardens. While gardeners have pleasure growing fruit and vegetables, it can be hard work tending to them.

On the 5th October ECO will give thanks for the hard work of farmers and growers and will gather produce to donate to Restos Du Coeur.

Jesus knew about the hard work of cultivation, and in particular the care given to vines. In John 15:1-8 Jesus compared Himself to a vine and referred to God as the gardener. In this parable, God is responsible for pruning the vine. He sees which parts are useful, and which parts useless. The unproductive parts are cut away, so that growth is encouraged. Jesus is telling us that God will prune our lives, not to harm us, but to encourage our spiritual growth.

God's pruning cuts away wrong attitudes and wasteful behaviour, all of which serve no useful purpose in our lives. This pruning is required so that we become more fruitful. And the fruit God wants is love, joy, patience etc. (see Galatians 5:22-23) These holy qualities are intended to influence the world to change it from the bad to all that is good.

To encourage its growth, a vine has regularly to be cut back. The effect looks drastic, but it is still essential. When God cuts away the dead wood in our lives, He does it because He knows how our lives can grow. The pruning knives are in the hands of our Father God who only desires the best for us. This pruning process can be painful, but Jesus says that it is vital if the Holy Spirit is to flow through us to produce the fruit that God wants.

Also in this parable, Jesus said He was the Vine, and we are the branches. We have no existence apart from Jesus. We can do nothing for God on our own and must be joined to Jesus. In the same way a vine utilises the life-giving sap to flow into the branches, so we need the Holy Spirit to flow His life into us. It is only by us remaining in Jesus, that He can give us the inner resources for an effective, fruit-producing life.

The preceding day - 4th October - is the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. Francis started life as a wild young party-goer, whose attitude changed completely after spending a year as a prisoner of war. Upon his release, Francis had abandoned his wild lifestyle and dedicated himself to helping the poor and the lepers of his area.

Disinherited by his cloth-merchant father, Francis dedicated his life to preaching and spreading the Word of Jesus, travelling as a pilgrim Francis went as far as the Holy Land in an unsuccessful attempt to convert the Sultan to Christianity.

Around him there gathered a community of followers, all committed to following Francis' simple lifestyle. In this early stage of what would become the Franciscan Order, followers were already going out on occasional preaching tours

Francis is of course famous for his close rapport with animals, and the image of him preaching to birds is perhaps one of the most well-known. His affinity for creation has linked him with all elements of the Physical Universe and is therefore regarded as a patron of nature conservation.

Tragically, Francis died at the relatively young age of 45 in 1126. In 1228 Francis was canonised.

And so it is appropriate that we celebrate all aspects of Creation and nature while seeking to minister to others in need.



"Er... vicar – does the church have a position on the donation of GM vegetables for the Harvest Festival?"

LOUDfence Organisers Received by Pope Francis in Rome

Pope describes charity as a “sign of hope”

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors met in Rome from 20 to 22 September, and welcomed two representatives from the LOUDfence UK organisation which works with victims of church abuse.



Antonia Sobocki and Maggie Matthews had been invited to attend the meeting of the Commission and opened the plenary session by giving testimony about dealing with abuse in churches.



As part of their visit, Antonia and Maggie were also received by Pope Francis in Casa Santa Maria, to whom they presented a LOUDfence ribbon which he hung on his walking frame.



The Pope then described the work undertaken by LOUDfence as a “sign of hope”.

At the same time, a report published by a Commission appointed by the Catholic Church in France has estimated that over the past 70 years 330,000 children were victims of abuse within the church.

The figures include allegations of abuse against 3,000 priests and other people involved in the Church.

The President of the Commission which has published this report, Monsieur Jean-Marc Sauvé, has accused the Church of covering up this abuse in a “systemic manner”. The Commission has urged the Church to take strong action, and also to help to compensate abuse victims.

“We consider that the Church has a debt towards victims” M Sauvé said.

The Archbishop of Reims, Monsignor Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, who is the Head of the French Bishops’ Conference, is meeting with his colleagues to decide how to respond to the report but has already made a public plea for forgiveness from the victims and has said that he and his colleagues “are appalled” at the report’s findings.

The head of the victims’ group La Parole Liberée has declared the publication of this report to be a “turning point in our history”.

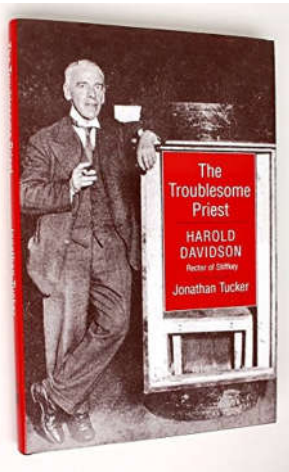
In the United Kingdom, the Church of England has announced the appointment of a leading barrister, Sarah Wilkinson KC, to conduct an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the controversial decision to close down their Independent Safeguarding Board and terminate the contracts of its members. She will identify what lessons can be learned from these actions and events. She is expected to publish her report by the end of November 2023.

At the same time, Professor Alexis Jay, who was appointed by the UK Government to conduct an independent inquiry into Child Abuse (IICSA) in the wake of the Jimmy Savile scandal, has been asked to conduct a review to develop proposals for the creation of a fully independent structure for the scrutiny of safeguarding within the Church.

Professor Jay, who is working with her former colleague Mr John O’Brien (who was the Secretary to the IICSA) will publish detailed options for consideration in early 2024.

Both inquiries are being conducted under the strictest conditions of independence.

Professor Jay has issued public assurances that her work will be “fair, impartial, objective and rigorous” and that “if I detect any attempt to interfere with or to hinder my work [by the Church], I will withdraw from this programme of work immediately”

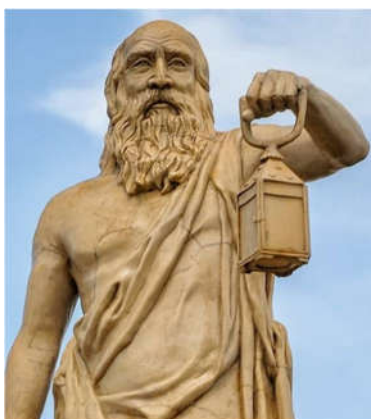


FOOLS FOR CHRIST ?

Neil Batcock considers the concept of being 'A Fool For Christ' from the Greek philosopher Diogenes to the controversial Revd Harold Davidson, Church of England Rector of the Norfolk parish of Stiffkey

It is probably not what St Paul had in mind when he wrote about being "fools for Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:10), but throughout history people have feigned foolishness in order to draw attention and make a point. These - Diogenes, Symeon and the Rector off Stiffkey - are but three, but they connect with one another, as I hope to show.

The earliest is Diogenes of Sinope (c.413-324BC), a Greek who spent much of his life in Athens and Corinth. He was a Cynic philosopher ('cynic' did not then mean



what it does in modern English), which involved wandering from place to place wearing only a cloak, following a very ascetic lifestyle (think someone like John the Baptist), and pointing out the hypocrisy in people's lives, and in society as a whole: think the little boy pointing out the Emperor is

wearing no clothes in the tale by Hans Christian Anderson.

Diogenes would also draw attention to himself in somewhat vulgar ways: eating loudly and causing a disturbance at public lectures, breaking wind very loudly in crowded places, and even defecating in the market square.

By this stage you may be feeling a little surprised that I am writing about someone who lived some 350 years before both Jesus and St Paul - and I imagine his behaviour would have surprised both of them (although you can never be completely sure). However, the early Church rather liked him.

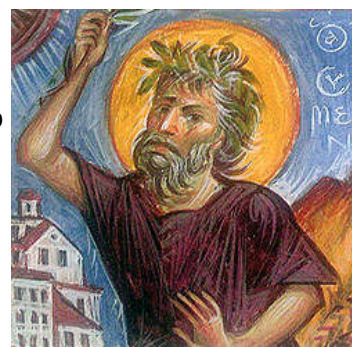
Many of his sayings ('chreiai') have come down to us, and are not a million miles from some of the sayings of Jesus: Diogenes 'mocked those who lock up their storehouses with bolts, keys, and seals, but who open up all the doors and windows of their bodies, through

their mouth, their genitals, their ears, and their eyes.'

Indeed, a number of writers in recent years have noticed the strong links between the sayings of Jesus and those of Cynic philosophers (but I shall write about that on another occasion.) Some of the great Doctors of the Church in the 4th century AD, such as Basil the Great in the East and Augustine in the West, wrote of their admiration of Diogenes - how he didn't care about food or clothing, and spoke truth to power. He also lived in a barrel, or perhaps a large clay jar, which may have links with the third 'fool' here. It would seem that the early Church saw Diogenes as an honorary 'fool for Christ'.

Diogenes also plays an important part in the story of Symeon the Holy Fool.

Symeon was believed to have lived in the mid-6th century AD in Syria; his 'Life' was written by Bishop Leontius of Cyprus in the early 7th century. Symeon lived as a monk for 29 years in the desert before returning to civilisation, to the town of Emesa (present day Homs).



His entrance into town caused quite a stir: finding a dead dog on a dunghill outside the town, Symeon tied the dog to his loose belt and dragged it through the middle of town, followed by a crowd of shouting children.

At church on Sunday the next day, he pelted the congregation with nuts and put out the candles (alas it's true, I have felt like doing that sometimes). There are also close parallels with the life of Diogenes - defecating in public, for example.

Symeon would also eat lots of lupine beans, well known for their capacity to produce extreme flatulence. He also caused outrage by removing his clothes and running into the 'women's only' section of the public baths (the women chased him away and beat him!)

However, when Symeon was not being observed, he helped and healed many of the citizens of Emesa. Most people only saw the apparent madman, but his good deeds (like those of Jesus, especially as recorded in Mark's gospel) were kept secret. It was only later that the good burghers of Emesa realised that they had been in the presence of a saint. The madness had been an act, to give himself a platform. Symeon also spent much time with the prostitutes of the town - which brings us on to the Rector of Stiffkey.

continued overleaf.....

Stiffkey is a small village on the north Norfolk coast only a few miles from where I worked as Rector of Blakeney.

In the churchyard at Stiffkey is the grave of Harold Davidson, formerly Rector of Stiffkey, who died in 1937.

The headstone is inscribed with the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, 'For on faith in man and genuine love of man all searching after truth must be founded.'

Harold Davidson started out as a comic actor, and a certain feeling for showmanship which he displayed throughout his life is reminiscent of Diogenes and Symeon the Holy Fool. He later was ordained as a priest in the Church of England, and became Rector of Stiffkey with Morston in 1906.

Not unusually for clerics of his time, he would take services on Sunday and set off by train on Monday morning to London, where he would stay in his Club before returning to Stiffkey on Saturday. All quite normal for the time. What was less usual was what he did during the week in London.

He styled himself as the 'prostitutes padre' (echo of Symeon there), seeing it as his mission to help them, sometimes bringing them back to the Rectory at Stiffkey to work for him.

Eventually this scandalised a vocal and powerful minority back in Norfolk - most of the ordinary parishioners loved him, but the powerful, those with a sense of entitlement, ganged up against him (I can assure you that people like this are still alive and well in north Norfolk).

After reporters supplied them with what seemed compromising photos of the Rector, the case was taken up by the diocese of Norwich, and he was publicly 'defrocked' (decommissioned as a priest) in Norwich cathedral in 1932.

For the rest of his life he protested his innocence - which is where the showman in him kicked in, and he joined in with various circuses, wearing only a barrel to

draw attention to his situation (I see here an echo of Diogenes and his barrel).

His eventual demise came with a circus act he performed at Blackpool, where he would act out being Daniel and then enter a cage containing two lions. Unfortunately, as in 'Albert and the lion', while performing this act in Skegness, one of the lions, called Freddie, took exception to Davidson, and the poor man was mauled to death.



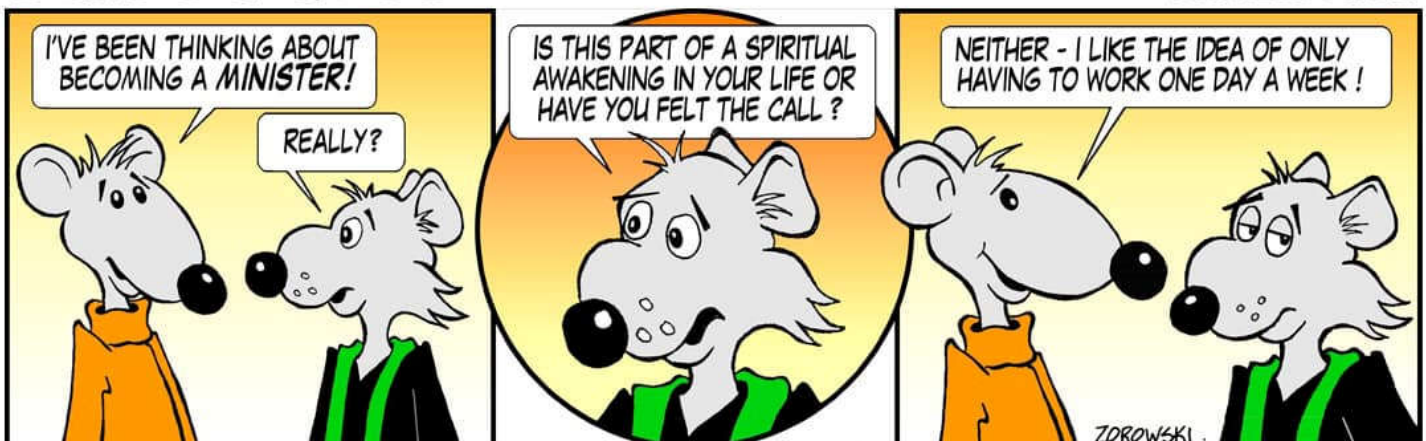
It is notable that at his funeral in Stiffkey, over 3000 ordinary people from the area attended. He may have been a fool, but people remembered him as a good man. Perhaps one of the problems of the Church today is that we are not foolish enough.

The 1982 film "The Missionary" which starred Sir Michael Palin as a Church of England priest who is given a mission by the Bishop of London to save the 'fallen women' of the London Docklands area is very loosely based on the story of Harold Davidson.



Church Mice

Karl Zorowski



Lot House Group - September 2023

lot.group@ourchurch.fr

Janet Varty



Our group met this month in Puy-l'Eveque—despite the efforts of local workmen who hijacked our parking spaces! We were able to gather for the Iona Service of Prayers for Healing which

reflects our belief that God's purpose for us all is life and wholeness, as expressed in the life and teaching of Jesus.

The ministry of healing is an integral part of our Christian witness. We each stand in need of healing, and in turn named out loud the person to our right for God's blessing. Knowing that our prayers are complimentary to the work of medicine and other forms of healing, we also offered the names of this weeks absentee group members.



In a moment of silence we held the 'imaginary hand' of a loved one, friend or family member in need of healing grace and offered it symbolically to Christ.

The pottery cross was gifted by Rev Mary before she returned to the UK and the almost matching dish was gifted by Judy, ECO's most recent bride.

Our discussion based on the service led to chat, planning and general excitement about the upcoming Harvest Service in the barn on 5th October. A really convivial afternoon was enjoyed by all.



Our Services of Prayer for Healing are broadcast each Thursday evening at 20h00. If you would like us to include someone by name in our service, please send their first name only to healing@ourchurch.fr by the evening of the preceding Monday.

The next meeting of our group will be on **Thursday October 26th**



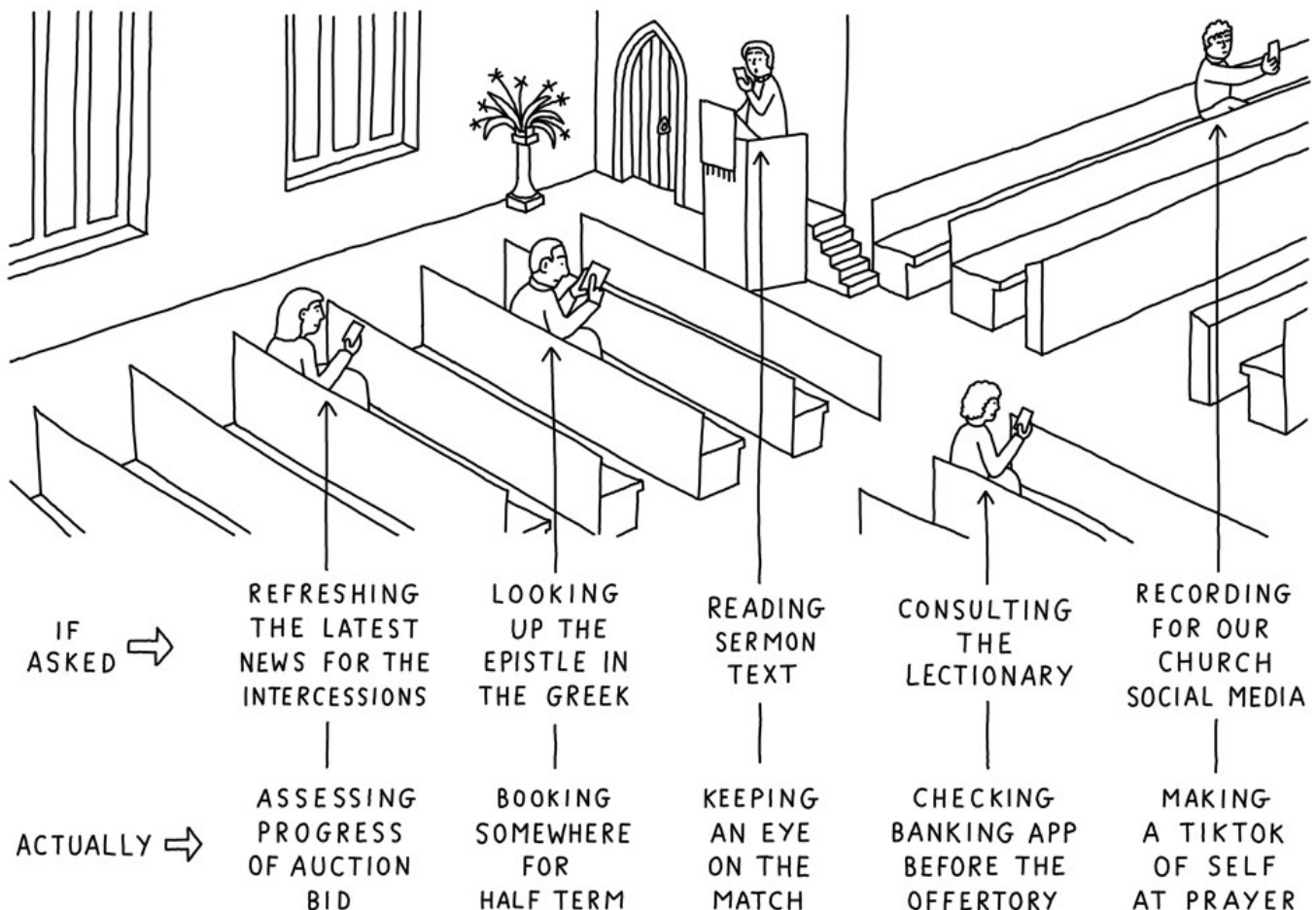
After the Harvest Festival Service, as was customary, Rev Binns distributed the harvest produce amongst the residents of the parish.....

ECO WORSHIP CALENDAR OCTOBER 2023

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
1	10:30	2	20:00	3	20:00	4		5		6		7	
Online Morning Prayer for Trinity 17		Live Evening Worship on Zoom		Online Service of Compline				<u>15:00</u> In-Person Communion for Harvest and Feast of St Francis <u>20:00</u> Online Service of Prayer for Healing					
8	10:30	9	20:00	10	20:00	11		12	20:00	13		14	
Broadcast of In-Person Communion Service Recorded in the Lot on 5th October		Live Evening Worship on Zoom		Online Service of Compline				Online Service of Prayer for Healing					
15	10:30	16	20:00	17	20:00	18		19	20:00	20		21	
Online Morning Prayer for Trinity 19		Live Evening Worship on Zoom		Online Service of Compline				Online Service of Prayer for Healing					
22	10:30	23	20:00	24	20:00	25		26		27		28	
Online Communion Service for Trinity 20		Live Evening Worship on Zoom		Online Service of Compline				<u>Daytime</u> LOT House Group Meet <u>20:00</u> Online Service of Prayer for Healing					
29	10:30	30	20:00	31	20:00								
Online Morning Prayer for Trinity 21		Live Evening Worship on Zoom		Online Service of Compline									

With thanks to Dave Walker...

ON YOUR PHONE



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