

We will wait!

We have noted the President's announcement that as of 1st June churches are allowed to gather under stringent requirements. In light of this the leaders of St John's Parish Wynberg make the following statement in solidarity with others supporting the call **#waittocelebrate**.

As Christians we **value deeply being able to gather** for Sunday and weekly services of worship and fellowship. These times of corporate worship connect us with God and one another. They renew our spirits and strengthens us for witness and service. We are enriched through our wonderful diversity and the connectedness we have in Jesus. We worship a God of abundant life and we experience some of that life when we are together.

But we are charged **to protect and value life**. Life is sacred and a precious gift from God. In these unprecedented times of COVID-19, we must do everything we can to limit the spread of the virus so that we protect the lives of our communities and congregations.

While we welcome the President's declaration of religious leaders as essential workers and his call for a National Day of Prayer, we have decided to **not hold or attend church gatherings at this time**, at least until after the peak of infection has passed. We recognise that not everyone will agree with this decision so we ask that you are kind, graceful and honouring of one another where there are differences on this matter.

With church gatherings identified as accelerators of transmission leading to outbreaks and hotspots globally, **this poses a high risk**, especially amongst the elderly in our communities, who are so valued in our congregations. Added to this the requirements for meeting safely at this time is expensive, complex, and time consuming. We believe our resources, energies and efforts need to be directed in **acts of service and care of those in need**. We are committed to continue to worship together in our homes and online.

The church does not need to re-open because it has never closed. To quote Walter Bruggeman, "**The church has left the building**". We, the followers of Jesus, are the church. And we have been given an opportunity to reimagine and step into a new way of being church.

We give thanks for the numerous acts of sacrificial generosity and kindness not least of all through gifts to the "Love Our Neighbour" campaign. We urge continued support of this campaign especially as we enter the winter months. Many are living the life of Jesus in daily feeding their neighbours, counselling the bereaved, accompanying the lonely, offering shelter, and caring for the most vulnerable in our communities. Some of our church buildings are being used as temporary microsites to give shelter to the homeless, distribute food, run testing facilities, and provide rest for healthcare workers.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4ff). As we celebrate Pentecost this Sunday, **we will pray for a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit** power to sustain and renew us to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

We urge all our members to join the call to prayer for the healing of our land and protection of our people on Sunday. Our prayer is that God will sustain us and protect us through this period so that we will be able to gather together again after the COVID-19 infection peak. **We look forward to celebrating** with our families and friends and worshipping God, and giving thanks for the immeasurable acts of kindness that have expressed the love of Jesus and sustained us through this difficult time.

We pray that everyone will be there! That will be a true celebration, and **it will have been worth the wait**.

Duncan McLea

(Parish Rector and Team Leader - with the Parish Leadership Team and the Parish Wardens)

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