



**Image of the day - St Patrick's Catedral,
Dublin**

200+ Presbyterian clergy make time to be refreshed

In what would have been the week of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) General Assembly, over 200 of its active ministers took part in a service of worship and morning conference on June 9 as part of the Church's 'Refresh Week' initiative.

Organised by the Council for Training in Ministry, the socially distanced event was held in PCI's Assembly Buildings in Belfast, and livestreamed to four satellite locations around Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. 'Refresh' is an initiative that the church hopes will provide ongoing fellowship and encouragement to ministers on the front line of pastoral ministry after an unprecedented year in the life of the all-Ireland denomination.

Rev Niall Lockhart, who is the convener of PCI's Pastoral Care for Ministers and their Families Panel, said that he hoped that today, along with the weeklong initiative itself, when ministers would normally have attended the General Assembly, would be an important time of reflection, rest and refreshment. "This past year has been a tough year for many people in their working environments. It's been tough for those who work in healthcare, in education, in retail, in business, and it's been tough for those who work in churches."

"Covid has turned things upside down, with sustained periods of time when our church buildings could not open and new skills having to be learnt quickly. It was also time of profound challenge in the context of ministry, with how we have preached, pastored, and journeyed alongside others in



times of illness, anxiety, and loss, all having had to change. People in any working context grow through encouragement, and we felt that this was something we wanted to take time to speak into through ‘Refresh’,” he said.

Wearing face coverings, over 100 ministers took part in Assembly Buildings with more than 70 joining via livestream in the four satellite venues - Presbyterian churches in Drogheda, County Louth, Ballymena, County Antrim, Armagh City and County Londonderry. PCI’s Moderator, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, and Mr Lockhart led a time of worship, which included 30 ministers, their wives, husbands and children from across the island, reading pre-recorded verses from the Bible. The Clerk of the General Assembly, Rev

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Trevor Gribben, led those in Assembly buildings and in the satellite venues in prayer.

Mr Lockhart, who is minister of Ballyhenry Presbyterian Church in Newtownabbey, said that in April and May of this year, as part of the initiative, ministers had been encouraged to join what he described as 'Refresh Groups', organised by each of PCI's 19 regional presbyteries in keeping with their pastoral care responsibilities. "These have played an important part in bringing our ministers together for fellowship, a safe place where they can talk honestly, encourage and pray for one another. Christian ministry is something we do together and we trust that these groups have encouraged everyone who has taken part in them."

This morning's time of worship, teaching and reflection also heard from the Dr Bruce, who explored the theme of spiritual resilience for his colleagues in ordained ministry, taken from Matthew's Gospel (chapter 9), with local consultant psychiatrist, Dr Andrew Collins, setting out the need for self-care and practical strategies for keeping going in leadership. While not able to attend in person, in a recorded message Jonathan Lamb, of the Langham Partnership in London, spoke from the Bible helping those in the hall and in the satellite venues to reflect upon the times that they are called to preach, pastor and lead and how God gives strength for their ministry, even in the most testing of times.

Speaking about 'Refresh Week', Dr Bruce said, "I genuinely hope and pray that this service of worship that has brought us together today, for a brief time of teaching, biblical reflection and fellowship, coupled with the thoughts and

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insights of our guest speakers, will have been a time of blessing and encouragement to our ministers.

“The past 15 months have increased the considerable pressures on our ministers, who have in many respects, also been on the frontline during this pandemic. As part of this ‘Refresh Week’, it is also my prayer that they will be strengthened, have their spirits lifted and their eyes focussed on the work that God has called them to do in the days and weeks ahead.”

Rev Nigel McCullough, convener for the Council for Training in Ministry and minister of Hill Street Presbyterian in Lurgan, thanked all those who took part. “The men and women who serve as ministers in our congregations across Ireland, come to this ordained task as whole people – people of body, spirit and mind,” he said.

“To enable them to care well for others, we need to care well for one another. My hope is that in these unsettled times, Refresh will contribute to this. I would also like to take this opportunity to everyone who took part and pray that they would know God’s richest blessing and the plans that he has for them.”

C of I resource for marking centenary of the end of the War of Independence

The Liturgical Advisory Committee (LAC) of the Church of Ireland has published a resource for use in parishes marking the Centenary of the End of the War of Independence, which will take place on Sunday, 11th July 2021.

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The published resource includes (in PDF and Word formats): an introduction setting the historical context, written by Dr Marie Coleman (Reader in History, Queen's University Belfast, and a member of the Church's Historical Centenaries Working Group);

a Service of the Word to mark the Centenary of the End of the War of Independence;

a wide selection of suggested Scripture readings; and

a range of prayers in contemporary and traditional language.

This follows the publication of similar liturgies in recent years to mark the centenaries of the First World War, the Easter Rising, the Battle of the Somme, and most recently the Opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament. Liturgical material for use at centenary events in parishes and local communities, and a Service of Light for the reconciliation of local communities, has also been produced.

The Rt Revd Dr Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and Chair of the Historical Centenaries Working Group, stated: "The primary roles of the Church include worship and prayer, and to bear witness to the Christian message of love and reconciliation. These liturgies commissioned by the Historical Centenaries Working Group and devised by the Liturgical Advisory Committee, are designed to assist members of the Church of Ireland to do exactly these things as we commemorate the events of this Decade of Centenaries."

In her introduction, Dr Coleman remarks that it cannot be denied that the War of Independence had been "a difficult

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period for church members many of whom were victims of personal, sometimes fatal, injuries, or damage to their property.” A number of prominent members made a significant contribution to the achievement of Irish independence but the subsequent Anglo-Irish Treaty and the creation of the Irish Free State “was a wrench for many Church members in breaking ancestral ties with Britain.”

A contemporary editorial in the Church of Ireland Gazette (on 13th January 1922) noted honestly that many would not “regard the change which is impending with any great enthusiasm” but recognised the community’s willingness to accept the new situation and to “give their whole-hearted and active support to the Irish Free State.”

The resource is available on the Church of Ireland website at this link: <https://bit.ly/3gmudXp>

Churches in Scotland to benefit from hate crime security fund

Christian campaigners have welcomed plans to protect places of worship from religiously-motivated attacks.

The Scottish Government's £500,000 Hate Crime Security Fund provides grants to install security measures to help protect places of worship.

Places of worship deemed particularly at-risk of attacks are eligible for 100 per cent grants. This is higher than in England, where buildings are only able to receive 80 per cent funding.

Individual places of worship can receive up to £20,000 in funding to install up to three separate security measures.

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The fund opened this week and will run for two months. Grants are expected to be paid out by the end of September this year.

Michael Veitch, parliamentary officer at CARE for Scotland, a Christian public policy charity commented:

"In recent years, there have been alarming attacks on places of worship in Scotland including churches, synagogues, and mosques. This money will enable congregations to install security measures to act both as a deterrent to criminals and a reassurance to worshippers.

"Whilst the maximum grant available to individual places of worship is less than in England, the fact that 100 per cent grants are to be provided to the most at-risk settings is especially welcome. We hope that this assistance for places of worship will become a regular feature in Scottish Government budgets.

"We also call on Ministers to send a strong message that religiously-motivated hatred has no place in modern Scotland including hatred against Christians, which often receives less media coverage."

Young people on climate change walk from Cornwall to Glasgow dragging a boat

Hundreds of young people are walking from Cornwall to Glasgow to draw attention to the effects of climate change on the world's poorest communities.

And they are dragging a boat with them!

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Young Christian Climate Network (YCCN) and Christian Aid have joined together to ask people across the UK to help them cover every inch of the near 1000-mile route they are taking from the G7 in Cornwall to the COP in Glasgow.

The walk will be a symbolic act of faith and hope with walkers praying for climate justice as they go. A launch event will be held at 2-3pm on 13th June at Truro Cathedral, after the service 25 walkers will lead a procession from the cathedral to Truro Train Station.

People can visit the website www.yccn.uk/ and sign up to join one of the sections of the route. (Full route details below.) Walkers will carry and drag a purpose-built boat which represents the idea that we are all facing the same climate storm, but we are not all in the same boat when it comes to resources to face those challenges. The boat will display messages from people around the world who are affected by the impacts of climate change.

With both the G7 and COP hosted by the UK this year, Britain is in a unique position to set the tone for the discussions between world leaders. Prime Minister Boris Johnson can use these meetings to put pressure on the international community to pursue an agenda centred on climate justice.

Many of the world's poorest are facing the double threat of a global pandemic and the ongoing effects of climate change through extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. While governments in the Global South try to fund relief measures from domestic budgets, they are saddled with crippling debts from both governments and banks.

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The UK's pivotal role as host to the G7 and COP offers the opportunity to push for an inclusive green and just economic recovery plan which addresses the impacts of Covid, debt and climate change.

Pete Moorey, Head of Campaigns and UK Advocacy at Christian Aid, said: "The relay from Cornwall to Glasgow is a chance to demonstrate to our political leaders that people across the UK want ambitious action to deliver climate justice and tackle the climate emergency that is hitting the world's poorest and most vulnerable people the hardest."

Rachel Mander, YCCN Relay Co-Lead, said: " We stand in solidarity with people and places that are being plunged into debt and poverty because of climate change. More carbon emissions mean more disease, more food insecurity and more poverty. We will be in our 30s when the world reaches 1.5 degrees warming. We will not let the UK Government host summits on our doorstep only to hear more talk and no action."

Relay route

The full route can be found here: <https://www.yccn.uk/>

The first leg is as follows:

Between 13 and 23 June, the boat will be moved on foot, by bike and on public transport through Cornwall. People will walk through the following locations:

People and places

New premises for Eglinton parish's New Beginnings thrift shop

There was a new beginning of sorts last week for St Canice's Church's 'New Beginnings' thrift shop as the Rector, Rev Canon Paul Hoey, cut the ribbon on new premises, in the Benbow Industrial Estate, on the outskirts of Eglinton village (Diocese of Derry & Raphoe).

"At 1,750 square feet," Canon Hoey says, "the new premises offer much more scope for this part of our ministry. We still have our original premises in Main Street, for the time being. That building served us really well when the project was launched last December, but these new premises are far more spacious and offer us much more potential.

"Our coordinator, Roberta [Sinclair] and her daughter, Melonie, have loaned a professional eye to the lay-out and from an aesthetic point of view – and from the shopper's perspective – the new shop offers a far more enjoyable experience."

Six shoppers arrived within fifteen minutes of the formal opening. The new shop has lots of items for sale, including giftware, jewellery, clothing, handbags, crafts, books and lots of decorations – all donated by local people. "I'm immensely grateful to the people who have given us items for sale, to the people who come and buy things in the shop – supporting our ministry in the process – and grateful, too,

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to our wonderful volunteers who staff the shop. I would encourage people to come along and browse. They might just stumble across that special gift they've been looking for for someone special."

The new premises are just outside the village, less than quarter of a mile from St Canice's Church. All proceeds will be ploughed back into the local community – in helping to replace St Canice's Hall which was badly damaged in the August 2017 flood – and in supporting local charities.

Canon Stanley Baird

Dublin & Glendalough Diocese - "It is with great sadness that we share news of the death earlier today, Saturday June 12, of the Reverend Canon Stanley Baird.

Canon Baird served the United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough in a wide range of capacities and became synonymous with The Ministry of Healing in the Church of Ireland".

New issue of Search

In the forthcoming issue of the Church of Ireland journal, Search, there will be a review of the new book by Belfast-born historian Dr Alan Parkinson, A Difficult Birth. The Early Years of Northern Ireland. 1920–25, which has been published in Dublin by Eastwood Books.

Rector employs his sheep shearing experience

Outside, in the delightful summer sun at Timoleague, County Cork, Geoffrey Hanbidge had his lockdown beard

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and hair cut off by his rector, the Rev Kingsley Sutton, on Bank Holiday Monday, 7th June.

Witnessed by a small crowd of amused, socially-distanced, onlookers, the unique deed took place on the public pavement in front of the Church of the Ascension. This was a fundraiser for the urgent conservation work on the church.

The event captured the imagination of both local and

national press, for example – ‘Rector to shear one of his own flock to aid church renovations’ – was the headline in The Farmers Journal.



Geoffrey’s two

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young children were watching with bewildered delight as they got ready to feel and kiss their daddy's fresh white face again. Even Geoffrey's wife Susan seemed more than delighted to see her husband's youthful complexion return!

Those gathered there seemed surprised to see the great job Kingsley was doing. The new mayor of Clonakilty, Anthony McDermot, commented that Geoffrey was 'getting a great new sharp look'.

Maybe it was all down to the many years Kingsley actually used to shear his own sheep on the Wicklow hills before he was ordained. No skill should ever be wasted in life!

The estimated cost of the restoration work on the iconic church is €400,000 – a very big ask for a small rural parish.

Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars

Kings College organ recording

"I do not recall ever having been so excited by this music before. We have here a genuinely exceptional organ release." – Gramophone

Listen now to this brand new recording, out this month on the college record label! 👉 <https://smarturl.it/ThomasTrotter>

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A Shetland Pilgrimage - Pentecost challenge 2021

Shetland is the most northerly location for parishes of all denominations in the UK. The distance from south to north on the main island is similar to the virtual journey in the Holy Land mapped by our Pentecost Challenge. Partly inspired by this, a fundraising team lead by Fr Ambrose Flavell but supported by all denominations have joined our Pentecost Challenge, walking from the extreme south to the far north of the main island of Shetland.

They are also celebrating the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St Columba. They are remembering their common debt to the Celtic monks from Iona and elsewhere who brought the faith to these islands in the 6th and 7th centuries. As they walk, they hope to experience the peace and solitude which brought these early monks closer to God, and at the same time raise funds for the children of the Holy Land.

At the end of their journey, the team plan an ecumenical service to commemorate the anniversary of St Columba. We are most grateful for their efforts.

You can follow their experiences and see their beautiful photos on their fundraising page; maybe also sponsor them: <http://ow.ly/rciH50F78z6>

The love of God doesn't just forgive and restore us. It doesn't just invest us with a value and worth beyond our comprehension: it is a love which turns us towards others so we can truly love them as well.

Archbishop Justin Welby

Opinion - Banning Conversion Therapy must “Focus on the Victim Not the Perpetrator” - Bishop David Walker

The Church of England General Synod debate on Conversion Therapy was easily one of the hardest it fell to me to chair.

We were allowed something like 75 minutes in which to deal with the substantive motion, several amendments and even one amendment to an amendment.

So many members wanted to speak that it was vital not to lose sight of the thrust of the motion amid the practical issues of moving of amendments, motions for closure, and voting. When I came to leave the chamber, I could hardly move for members wanting to thank me for having managed the debate with pace, clarity and good humour. Not everyone was happy; there are always some who think a balanced debate is one where half of the speakers are advocating their particular view, and the other half cover all remaining possible views. But, outshadowing the process, was the outcome. Synod called for a ban on Conversion Therapy by massive majorities in all three Houses.

It has taken a while for the proposal to go further, but in the recent Queen’s Speech, opening the new session of Parliament, the UK government has given a clear commitment to progressing matters. When the debate on the Speech took place in the House of Lords, I took the

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opportunity to remind Parliament of the Synod vote and was delighted when the government minister responding to the debate, Baroness Susan Williams, endorsed my comments.

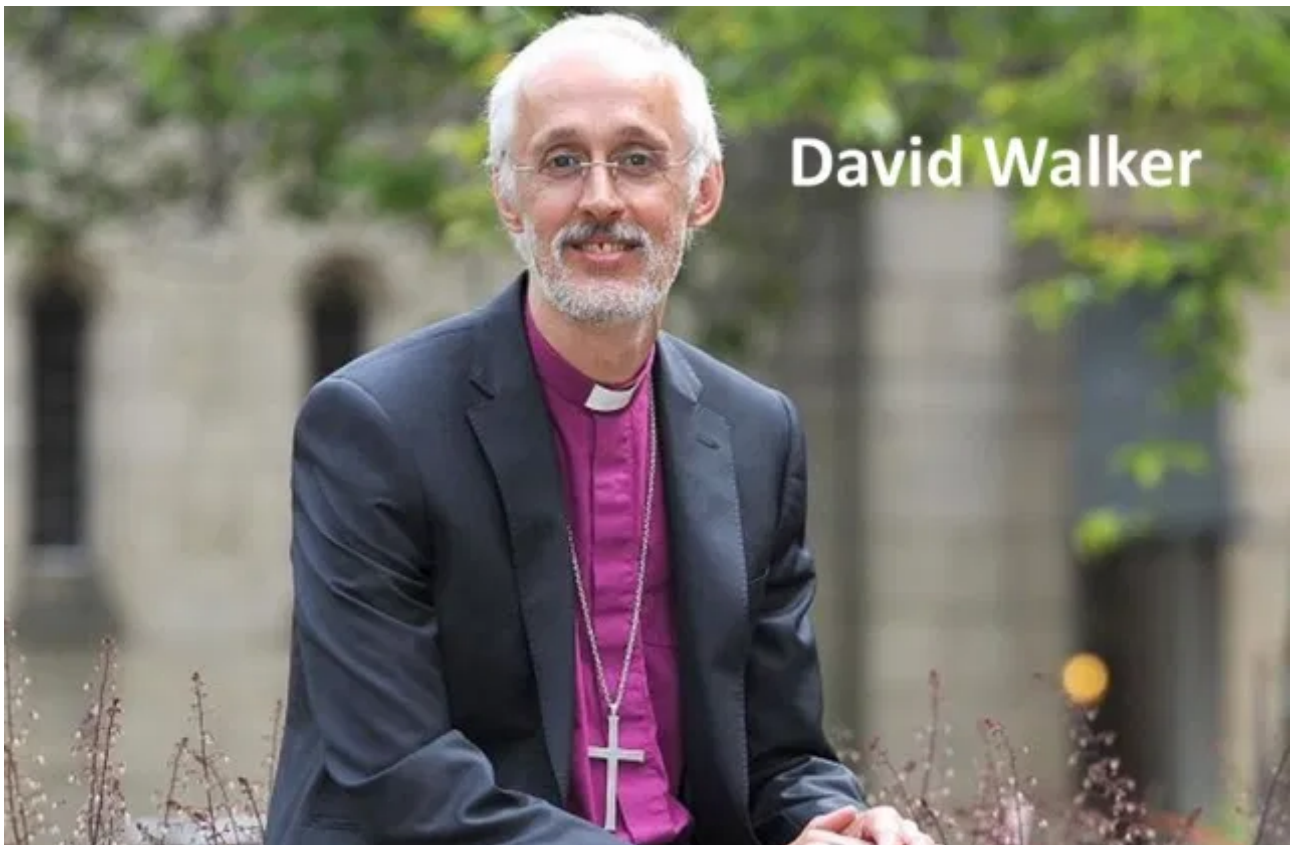
Progress, but not as yet victory. The government have continued to send out mixed messages, saying there will need to be consultation before legislative proposals are formed. Consultation, of course, but that has all too often been a phrase used to excuse foot-dragging. We are never going to achieve legislation that everyone agrees is perfect, especially when balancing potentially conflicting human rights. Sometimes we need to just get on with things, and make any necessary changes later, in the light of experience.

So, if there's going to be consultation, let's make it as short and snappy as we can. In which spirit, let me offer a couple of starter points, to see if we can get the conversation going. I've shown my theological working, but you do not need to agree with all my beliefs in order to engage with the rest of the argument.

First, let's focus on the victim not the perpetrator.

As Mary's wonderful song, the Magnificat, illustrates, our God does not side with the powerful but with the weak and outcast. He is the God who seeks remedy for the oppressed not protection for the strong.

In the nineteenth century, when Parliament raised the Age of Consent to 16, it did so in the teeth of considerable opposition from members who were worried that their attraction to young girls would land them in trouble, for



failing to distinguish a 14 year old from a child of 16. If the children featured in their conversation at all, it was as temptresses, looking to lure unwary older men into criminality. It never occurred to them that the onus to ensure their proposed partner was of age fell on them, and if in doubt, to refrain.

If the consultation on Conversion Therapies (and I confess I'd rather call it Conversion Abuse, rather than dignify it with medical terminology) spends too much time and effort on trying to define exactly how far a perpetrator can go, or what procedures they can use, before breaking the law, then we will have lost that vital victim centrality. We need to focus on the wounding not the weapon. What matters in a victim centred approach to law is the severity and durability of the harm done, not whether that damage was done by prayer, hypnosis or psychological techniques.

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There is now a massive pile of evidence to support how damaging these abuses are in general. When it comes to the particularities of an individual trial and conviction, the discretion of judges to sentence at an appropriate level provides ample scope to distinguish between levels of severity of abuse. Let it remain the responsibility of those who wish to carry out “therapies” to ensure their actions will never cause harm.

Secondly, consent is only consent if informed and freely given.

At the heart of the Gospel lies the love of God, shown fully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This love, freely given, invites every person to respond equally freely. Love forced or coerced is not love at all.

The harrowing stories of those damaged by attempts to change their sexuality usually begin in the victims’ early or mid teens. Pressure from parents, or from church leaders, has all too often played a major part in them feeling they have to change. The procedures to which they are exposed are then often led by those same individuals who have applied the pressure. There is a deep irony in the fact that the voices who argue most stridently that a teenager cannot give consent to life changing gender therapies, in the highly controlled and monitored environment of the NHS, are often the very voices who believe that same teenager can give free and informed consent to Conversion Therapy, in the far less transparent and accountable environment of a prayer meeting or attempted exorcism.

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Putting it bluntly, I struggle to see how any child judged not old enough to make an informed and free enough judgment to place a cross on a ballot paper can be considered capable of giving informed consent to attempts to change their sexual feelings, outside of a setting at least as managed and monitored as that provided by public health services.

Finally, we don't have to get everything right in a piece of legislation prior to publishing a Bill. Parliamentary process allows many opportunities to reflect and consider, and for those interested to lobby for amendment to this or that clause. Even when a Bill becomes an Act, it doesn't have to be the last ever word on a subject. If a law is not working well enough, it can readily be amended or repealed. Meanwhile, whilst we fail to press on with draft legislation, young people are continuing to suffer abuse disguised as therapy. Their harm is real and immediate. For their sakes we need to make this consultation both short and to the point.

The Right Reverend Dr David Walker, is Bishop of Manchester. Article courtesy of Via Media News

Pointers for prayer

O Lord,
we beseech thee mercifully to hear us;
and grant that we, to whom thou hast given
an hearty desire to pray,
may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted
in all dangers and adversities;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus' homecoming was attended by enthusiastic crowds
but also by dissenters, who attributed his good works to
Satan. That we might be faithful to the One who calls us his
"family", blessing his goodness and striving to follow his
example, we pray "True Son of God and Son of Man," and
respond, "Keep us faithful, keep us true."

That the Christ's church would remain faithful in its witness
to the truth of the gospel, we pray: True Son of God and Son
of Man.
Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That where the church of Jesus Christ finds itself a minority
in the midst unfaith, it may not succumb and accept defeat.
True Son of God and Son of Man.
Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That homes of the church that are afflicted with violence,
anger, or abuse, may find refuge and counsel in God's
Word. True Son of God and Son of Man.
Keep us faithful, keep us true.



That our congregation may be enabled to embrace the lost, the fallen, and the wayward of our community. True Son of God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That those who participated in baptismal and confirmation preparation , may be blessed with increasing faith and strengthened in continued, regular worship we pray: True Son of

God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

Pardon us, O God, when we are so concerned with ourselves and those near to us that we fail to pray for others. Instill within us your compassion. True Son of God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

Let your loving Spirit, O God, announce again the "Abba" word of our divine parentage and our sure inclusion as members of your family. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

“Gamaliel said, “My advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

Acts 5:38-39 NLT

The success of Peter and John’s healing and preaching ministry was deeply irritating to the Jewish authorities. They were anxious to silence them but nothing seemed to be working. They tried imprisoning them but even that didn’t work as the apostles miraculously managed to escape and carry on their preaching ministry in the Temple. So, once again, they were hauled before the Jewish leaders who had become so furious that many of them wanted to put Peter and John to death.

Rabban Gamaliel suggested a different approach. Gamaliel was one of the most prominent rabbis of the time and was greatly respected by everyone. He was the apostle Paul’s rabbi and was so revered that he had the title rabban which literally means our teacher, to distinguish him from the title rabbi which was used for ordinary teachers. Gamaliel suggested that it would be wise not to take action against the apostles for the simple reason that if the new movement was not of God it would fizzle out anyway. But on the other hand, if the new Jesus movement was of God then the authorities could find themselves fighting against the Lord, and that would be a foolish thing to do. The decision was to flog the apostles and let them go.

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Rabban Gamaliel, the wise Pharisee, got it right. It is impossible to stop God. Last century there were many organised attempts to banish Christianity particularly under communism. The church in China has been placed under massive pressure. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 thousands of Christians were imprisoned and subjected to humiliation. But the church was merely driven underground and since that time it has grown enormously. It's impossible to know how many Christians there are in China today but it is likely to be about 100 million! When God is at work it is impossible to stop him, however hard people try.

QUESTION

In what way do Gamaliel's words encourage you?

PRAYER

We praise you loving God that ultimately no one can stand in the way of your plans. Amen

