



Andrew's story

Rev Andrew Gibson, Donaghcloney Methodist Church

In Donaghcloney the four churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Elim) in the village have been working closely together for the past few years under the banner of "Donaghcloney Together." We have held events, church services, prayer meetings, breakfasts and missions. When the restrictions were beginning to be eased all the ministers had the same idea – let's have an ecumenical Drive-In Service!



The churches were used to working together so this felt like a natural fit and we all felt that the people in the village would almost expect it. The Presbyterian Church car-park was the biggest in the village and had two levels and could fit 80-100 cars adequately. We planned to have four Sundays initially, with each of the ministers taking a Sunday each to preach on the first four “I am...” sayings of Jesus in John’s Gospel. We organised a set-up team, were able to secure a lorry container, sound equipment and stewards to direct cars.

On the first Sunday we waited with trepidation – would people come? It happened to be a very sunny afternoon and almost 90 cars came. It was so hot that the keyboard leading the worship overheated! Over the course of the next few Sundays we had every possible weather condition – from torrential rain and wind to cloudy and overcast – we had them all! We didn’t drop below 70 cars every week. We kept the format very simple – one of the ministers would lead, we would sing one/two hymns at the beginning, the minister would pray; whoever was preaching would read their passage and preach and we’d sing one final hymn to finish. The whole service usually lasted around 40-45 minutes.

When the four ministers had taken a Sunday each to preach it was now into July and we wondered whether we should keep going. But the feedback was very positive and we decided to complete the series with the other three “I am...” sayings. Our own District Superintendent Rev Dr Stephen Skuce spoke at one of these.

What have we learnt from these? People were hungry for church, online services are ok and reach many people but folks were also looking for interaction, contact and fellowship (albeit socially distanced!). Drive-Ins are a great way to do this and are not too difficult to organise. Through technology we were also able to live-stream these as well for folks not able to physically be there.

People are looking forward to returning to church, (if they’ve not already done so) but many others are unsure about what that may look like. We also found that in conversations through car windows, etc that people were, and are, hungry spiritually, perhaps in a way that they haven’t been for some time. In these uncertain times folks are turning to churches and God for hope, comfort and direction.

As we now move back to Sunday Services inside buildings hopefully that same hunger is still there within our own people and visitors as well. In Donaghcloney we have Prayer Meetings and other events planned between now and Christmas. How they’re impacted by COVID-19 remains to be seen, but hopefully can still run and reach folks. Colossians 4: 5 declares, “make the most of every opportunity.” May we all do that in this unusual season.

