



*a Faith Community in the
Anglican Church of Canada*

March 16, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

The health crisis situation has unfolded much more rapidly than we at first anticipated, so I thought that I might offer an up-date on where we are at in the midst of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) situation. Although we cancelled the public worship gathering at Gathering Table this past week, I met with the parish corporation and parish nurse Sunday morning to confer and prayerfully discern our ongoing response.

I know that cancelling our gathering for worship has a significant impact on our life as Gathering Table. Indeed, it seems somewhat paradoxical to say that we are not 'gathering' for the time being. It also feels paradoxical to suggest that we are a 'community of faith' at this point while putting in place 'social distancing' measures.

I had planned to speak about what it means to be community during these difficult realities this last Sunday but instead offer a few words now via this media. Although practising community (koinonia) and observing 'social distancing' appear incompatible, they are not.

I received this quotation in an email this morning. John Lombardi said that 'Lent is about a relationship, the most important one, with God and our neighbour.'

Loving one another and caring for one another don't always look the same. We are called to love one another so deeply and care for one another so much that we are willing to temporarily give up meeting together to protect one another and our wider community, seeking by limiting the risks of exposure to minimize the lifespan of this 'pandemic'.

Panic buying and fear are very real responses, even within Thunder Bay where there have, as of yet, been no known cases of infection. Our immediate responses and decisions are based neither on panic nor fear. They are based in faith – in trust in God, in the wisdom of our episcopal leadership and our own commitment to God's mission of bringing healing and wholeness (salvation).

In addition to the immediate threats to physical health, the long-term impact of this experience needs to be recognised. Not only has the worship life of our churches been disrupted, but both individuals and organisations will have to deal with the economic, educational, social and psychological implications.

Even as we begin prayerfully considering those bigger picture implications, our immediate responses take priority. Here are some of those responses:

- physical gatherings for worship will be suspended at least until Palm Sunday, though the possibility that this situation could extend beyond that exists;
- nevertheless, we are putting together a 'virtual worship gathering' which will be live-streamed, as well as made available through the website and our Facebook page, for those with internet access;
- phone calls will be made to as many of those we can identify as not having internet access;

- regular office hours will be kept to facilitate communication and enable the virtual worship experience to occur;
- all weekly and special events gatherings (e.g. Table Talk, Craft Group, Man Alive, Choir, etc) are temporarily suspended as well;
- realising that many of our extended family rely on the ministry of the Food Cupboard, we will continue this service in a modified form which, we hope, will continue to meet ongoing needs while also minimizing group contact;
- pastoral care visits will be restricted to emergency situations – please call the office or the Rectory if such a situation arises;
- telephone prayer ministry will be ongoing;
- prayers are requested for those who provide medical and emergency services;
- if you are not part of the EOP program, information on alternative offering methods will be provided.

I'm sorry that this all may seem like – in fact IS - a significant disruption. Nevertheless, we believe we are acting responsibly as we try to embody the love and care for one another to which we are called as a community of faith – part of the Body of Christ.

Lent is indeed about our primary relationships – to God, one another and our neighbours. Please continue to observe a prayerful and holy Lent, knowing that our Lord walks with us through these trials – ‘at our very elbow’, as the apostolic writer said to the Philippians.

Godspeed.

George+