



*a Faith Community in the  
Anglican Church of Canada*

228 Pearl Street, Thunder Bay, On. P7B 1E4  
Email: [office@gatheringtable.ca](mailto:office@gatheringtable.ca) Phone: 1-807-345-6898

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Dear Sisters and Brothers ~

Can you remember back to March – to a time shortly before of St Patrick’s Day? I think few of us thought that these new words we were hearing – ‘COVID-19’, ‘Coronavirus’, ‘pandemic’, and others like them – would become part of our vocabulary. I think most of us were expecting that this time of shut down and social [i.e. physical] distancing – and along with that the ‘extended Lent’ and ‘Eucharistic fast’ – would only last a few weeks, or a couple of months at the most. We envisioned a joyful return to normal life and familiar worship, and some of us were even anticipating a joy-filled celebration and feast.

I hardly need to tell you, of course, that those expectations were dashed by the harsh realities of this crisis. Our gathering as the body of Christ appeared a bit skeletal, to say the least. Many of us have not only been ‘socially distanced’ but even left feeling pretty isolated. Some have had to deal with sickness and death. Some have faced loss of jobs. Anticipated celebrations of graduations, birthdays anniversaries and weddings were truncated. In short, we were pretty much feeling cut off from the community of the beloved when we most needed to grieve and celebrate together.

Nevertheless, we have endured and persisted, carrying on as best we could. Technology took on a new importance as we worked hard – some of us very hard – to keep focused more on what we **could** do rather than on what we **couldn’t** do. Zoom, social media, emails, phone calls and letters became our obvious ways of connecting with one another. The less obvious ways of staying connected took on new importance for us, especially prayer and reading scripture.

More than half a year on now, some of us have begun to cautiously return to reGathering for in-person worship. Within the guidelines and restrictions of the church and civil governments we have worked out protocols and procedures that allow us to gather. These are undoubtedly imperfect, but we believe they are the best we can do to insure that we are as safe as possible.

It’s a bit like learning to walk again, and these things are our baby steps to that end. We hear more about a ‘second wave’ of this pandemic crisis, and so we realise that the situation needs to be continually monitored. Adjustments or new directions are always possibilities.

Through all of this restriction and uncertainty, however, the promises of God to never abandon us – the echo of Jesus words that he would not leave us alone – have been sources of

strength and comfort. For various reasons of course, this has been more difficult for some of us than others. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, we have mostly found strength and courage that we didn't know we had. Sometimes the stubborn refusal to give up is a spiritual gift!

It has been a real joy for me to hear voices I have not heard for many months. Seeing again the (masked) faces of dearly loved friends in Christ has caused my heart to light up. Breaking the sacramental fast as we have begun celebrating the Eucharist together, even though not the jubilant 'late Easter' many of us hoped for – it's perhaps more like the subdued and uncertainty of the first Easter morning – has nevertheless been a time to 'lift up our hearts'.

Not everyone has, however, felt that it would be safe to return to in-person gathering at this point. There are really good reasons for not doing so. It has been my hope and prayer that no one would feel 'guilty' about this choice. Instead, as a community of the beloved, we not only respect these choices, but we affirm them – and affirm those who make them. The sacred bonds of love in Christ still hold us all within the one body of Christ.

As this time of necessary caution extends into the unknown future – and with eyes wide open to the possibility that things will get worse again before they get better – it is more important than ever that we hold one another in our caring thoughts and persistent prayers. It is more important than ever to stay connected with one another in whatever way we can, making contact whether by the internet, notes or phone calls,

As the fall of the year sets in and we celebrate a very different kind of Harvest Thanksgiving this Sunday, I hope we can find renewed hope in the steadfast love of the Lord that never ceases and, because of that love, the heart of a community of the beloved that continues to hold one another. While not ignoring those things that we **can't** do right now, we will continue to focus on what we **can** do. In our imperfect ways we will realise that our God really is, as Martin Luther said so long ago, *ein feste Burg* – 'a mighty fortress' – a refuge of safety, a source of strength and a fountain of hope.

Godspeed. George+

*PS – If you do want to gather in person, please call or email the office by 2:00 on each Thursday before the Sunday when you wish to attend. If you aren't in that place, we make the service available on-line and continue to try to improve that experience for you. Pastoral visitation – including hospital visits – are still quite restricted, but please message or call the office or the Rectory in situations of emergency. Sheila Chisholm is also facilitating on-going prayer support.*

