

The Parish of St. Paul's/Trinity Anglican Churches
“Our parish is a caring, welcoming family dedicated to God and Community”
And, with God's help, hopes to become: “One in God in Community”

Mar. 18, 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ;

Recently someone complained on social media that they are giving up more for Lent than had been expected. We are finding ourselves in extraordinary times. Faced with a global pandemic which too easily can overwhelm health care systems we are called to engage in social distancing. As a result, schools and businesses have closed, restaurants are offering take out only and churches have paused corporate worship. All of these measures are efforts to 'flatten the curve' in the hopes of reducing the potential impact of COVID-19. They also require increased isolation for many.

We are in extraordinary times. Four weeks ago, when we started Lent, I invited folks to consider how our chosen Lenten disciplines can help us strengthen our faith and deepen our relationships with God, each other and the world. As this global crisis surrounds us, this challenge becomes even more important. For the moment, we can no longer rely on the familiar presence of our church family as we gather in our beloved buildings each week to worship. Thus we must continually ask ourselves what we can do to engage our faith, experience God's presence and support one another. We need to continually ask how, in the midst of this crisis, we can continue to *be Church*. To that end, I offer the following invitations and challenges:

1. Be grateful: If you don't already have one, create a gratitude journal and take time each day to write down 3-5 things for which you are grateful. It can be as simple as recognizing that you have toilet paper. Give thanks for food, for sun, for continued health, for phone calls, for social media, for books, for neighbours, whatever makes your life easier and meaningful, write it down in your journal as a reminder on those days when things aren't so easy. And then, thank God who is the giver of all good gifts – including giving us the resources we need to have that toilet paper.
2. Reflect: As you offer thanks, take a moment to consider those who may not have the same blessings. Can we imagine what it might be like for those who worry that there won't be enough food for tomorrow? What about those who are isolated because they may have COVID-19 and are experiencing anxiety about what that will mean? How many people are facing income insecurity as businesses reduce hours or close altogether? Are there those who find isolation stressful? Consider how you might share that which you have with those who are struggling.
3. Stay connected: We may not be able to gather in our church buildings at this time, but I am continuing to work. I will continue to stay in contact via phone, mail/e-mail and social media. If you want to talk, call the office, messages will be picked up regularly. I also encourage you to call each other. Consider making one call each

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day. Reach out to one another. Remind each other that our Church family exists beyond the doors of our buildings. Once a week, consider calling someone from the sister Church. We are one big family that has been together for some 138 years!

4. Remember stewardship: Folks within these church communities are generous in the ways we share our gifts of time, talents and treasures. Our ministries, our collective worship, indeed all that we do exists thanks to this generosity. The buildings may be closed, but opportunities for stewardship continue. There will still be bills to pay. Those who are not on pre-authorized payments are encouraged to consider switching or perhaps sending in a cheque to the office to support the ongoing work. Those with the gifts to do so are encouraged to continue work on cleaning and mending clothes for the clothing cupboard, creating fidget blankets and muffs and offering inspiration through social media posts. Everyone is invited to prayerfully reflect on how God might be calling you to share your gifts during this time.
5. Engage your faith: I will continue to offer resources for prayer, worship, and personal devotion in a variety of ways. Some of you have already watched the video created with Ann Dresser and myself performing “Make Me Whole”. For those who haven't seen it, you can find it here: <https://youtu.be/zLIMafzVPVE>. Those who have access to Facebook can watch for a livestream service on Sunday, Mar. 22 at 10am. I will explore other streaming opportunities over the course of the next few weeks and will try to provide resources via our website and social media. I have also included some resources with this mailing – prayerful colouring pages and the outline for what would have been the next evening on “Women who trusted God”. I expect to send out other mailings as time goes on. If you haven't already done so, add your cellphone number to the parish list as I will also be exploring sending resources via text message. Technology offers a good variety of options for engagement. I will be exploring as many as possible to keep us connected. Let me know if you have any suggestions. It is time to get creative as we seek to be people of faith in these extraordinary times.
6. Read: As schedules shift and change, we may find ourselves with precious time on our hands. Consider reading books that you may find meaningful. I've found anything with Desmond Tutu to be powerful. “The Book of Joy” chronicles a week he spent with the Dalai Lama. You could also read the Bible. This year we will be focusing on the Gospel of Matthew. Consider journaling as you read. There was a time when I read the Book of Psalms. Admittedly, many of my journal entries had to do with what song came to mind as I read. If you have questions as you go – let me know. We can have a chat via phone, messenger, text, e-mail or whatever makes sense. Who knows, you may inspire our next study.

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7. Remember: We are in extraordinary times. In those moments when it feels overwhelming, remember who we are and *whose we are*. Look for God's presence. Look for the ways we can be signs of God's presence. The church is not simply the beautiful buildings in which we gather once a week. We are the Church. We are the Body of Christ. May we continually seek ways to embody that truth not only in these extraordinary times but in every moment of our lives.

We are in extraordinary times. St. Paul's and Trinity is also an extraordinary Church family. May we embrace this moment as an opportunity to strengthen our faith and our relationships with God, each other and the world in meaningful ways.

With prayerful hope I remain a fellow worker for the Master Builder,

Rev. Chris