

Sisters and Brothers in Christ at the Parish of the Ascension,

The full effects of the result of the COVID19 Pandemic are still being realized locally, provincially, nationally and internationally. As we all have seen and experienced in varying degrees, these effects are changing the landscape of how we live our lives as human beings in this, God's world. It is challenging for us not to enter states of anxiety, confusion, and fear as we all try to find the path forward. Though this reality is upon us, we believe that we have a deeper reality: God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier will not abandon us in this time of trouble.

As the Psalmist offers,
'For God alone my soul in silence waits;
from him comes my Salvation.
God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold, so that I shall not be greatly shaken.'
(Psalm 62)

We believe in a healing, reconciling, hopeful God, that brings us grace and mercy. We are called through our baptism to join with Jesus in offering worship to God, and serving the world. These statements, and our daily prayer will be strengthening foundations for us, as we begin to navigate this uncertain time.

I remind you that all public gatherings at the Parish of the Ascension, both for worship and all other gatherings are prohibited until further notice. This was outlined in the Bishop's recent Pastoral Letter. This has repercussions on our parish life, and on our continued parish viability.

Please note:

The only worship that will be in person will be pastoral offices, in particular, pastoral care to the dying and grieving, funerals, and commitments of partnership - weddings. We have been given instruction from the Bishop that these should involve only immediate family. We believe that the canceling of public worship will have a negative effect on our financial resources, as few may avail of pre-authorized debit in the short term.

To address this drastic change in our financial position the clergy and wardens have approved of the following:

- An examination of essential costs for a three month and full year period.
- The reduction of temperatures at the Parish Centre to cut down on energy costs.
- The cessation of our contract with the cleaners effective the end of this week.
- The approval of access of a portion of our current investments (\$103,000) as a contingency for a three-month time period (to be reviewed).
- The postponement of all scheduled renovation work at the Parish of the Ascension as was planned regarding the installation of the washroom and upgrade of the Nave. This will be reviewed as and if finances are available.
- A review of the costs of staffing at the Ascension for salary and contract staff, for the short term and the longer term.
- An appeal to all parishioners to continue to examine ways to support the parish through prayer, action, and financial means such that the ministry to which we are called will not diminish.

Due to the cancelation of all meetings and gatherings, we will not be having our AGM in the near future. As a result, the current Wardens, Treasurer, Vestry and Synod Delegates will be continuing on. This may mean that some individuals (especially the outgoing vestry) may wish to re-evaluate their commitment. I ask you to consider prayerfully to continue in your role as leaders within the parish. We will not be having meetings, except through email, Zoom Meetings, and phone conversations (Conference Calls). The AGM may well be postponed until the fall, or perhaps until 2021. At this point we are unsure.

Our Bishop will be live-streaming worship at the Cathedral this coming Sunday, March 22, at 11 a.m. to celebrate the Holy Eucharist on behalf of our Diocese. This service will be livestreamed from the Diocesan Facebook Page - www.facebook.com/AnglicanEastNL/ - for all who wish to join in online as a church family during this time of special need and concern. I will be joining the Bishop online, and I encourage you to do also. In meetings with both the Staff, and the clergy of the Anglican Parishes of Ascension, Good Shepherd, St. Mary and St. Michael, we are making preparations to provide weekly online worship, study, and reflection including such things as weekly prayer, Bible studies, Godly Play stories, and other resources for families in their homes.

We will put a fast track on getting our new website up and running, with resources present there. On a weekly basis we will be providing the chimes online, with the Weekly Word, the Prayers of the People, the Scripture readings and collect for the week, as well as Hymns that can be sung with family.

The Parish Staff will continue with their responsibilities, and have a particular focus on how we can provide Christian Discipleship and Pastoral Care through electronic means in this period.

Rev.'d Lynn and myself will be creating a framework to check on all parishioners by phone, email or text on a regular basis. This most probably will mean contact from one of us through these ways no more than once a month.

Chaplaincy through Eastern Health has sent a letter to parish clergy indicating the response of pastoral care in Eastern Health Facilities. All pastoral care to those in Eastern Health Facilities will be cared for by the current chaplaincy staff. If you know of family or friends being admitted to Eastern Health Facilities, it is your responsibility to share this with the parish clergy.

I am coordinating a meeting with the Ministerial of Mount Pearl, and the Municipality of Mount Pearl in order to find ways for us together to respond to the needs of vulnerable families in the Mount Pearl Area. Stay tuned to these developments.

I am urging you, and the entire parish to begin to examine how we can modify our Rule of Life in light of these developments. We have to find new and creative ways to Worship, Care, Love, Pray, Serve, Forgive, and Heal, as Christ intends.

This is a time for us to respond. To respond to the love of God in Christ Jesus, and to be the body of Christ in this, God's world.

It is important that we remember our baptismal covenant, and how we respond as the people of God. Please continue to pray and care, love and serve Neighbour and Stranger, Family and Friend.

I close with this prayer, the response to Psalm 62:

Lord God, in a threatening world we look to you as our rock of hope.
Hear us as we pour out our hearts to you,
give us your grace and protection,
through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.