

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN CANADA
ÉGLISE CHRÉTIENNE (DISCIPLES DU CHRIST) AU CANADA



May 15, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Earlier this week a letter signed by over 250 congregations was sent to the Premier of Ontario urging the reopening of churches in Ontario by early June. It has been widely televised and on social media, prompting considerable debate and conversation around worship, rights, and obligations with respect to our practice.

We write to you today as leaders and members together of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada with a reminder and plea to stay the course. We have been blessed in Canada to have a number of our church leaders who are/have been medical professionals who continue to advise us to follow the public health guidelines around personal hygiene and physical distancing.

As difficult as it is to practice in this way, and as logical as the arguments sound in the above-mentioned letter, the stark reality is that we are just not ready to go back to large gatherings. The centre of who we are as children of God, Christ's church, is not our building nor is it our programs, but it is a transformed heart, a life that seeks to be Christ-like in all we do. The gospel teaches us to love one another, and in this time of Covid, the best way to do that is to prevent the spread of the virus through proven methods (mentioned above). This is a time to live the love of Jesus Christ in radical ways...by sacrificing some of what we have held dear, so that we can protect the vulnerable, our pastors and other workers in the church, and the communities around us. It is a time to lead by example.

Worship, as we know, can be done in all kinds of ways. You are proving daily that devotion to the Creator of the Universe has not been squelched because our buildings are temporarily closed. The temple of God exists within each of us and the Spirit connects us regardless of where we are. You are practicing that truth each time you pick up a phone or send a message to the kin who used to sit with you on Sunday mornings, to check up on them and remind them that they are missed. The handiwork of the Divine is all around us, and just as beautiful as the stained-glass windows of our sanctuaries. The cathedral of nature continues to be a place where we can worship with our whole bodies in safety ...and in community with all creation.

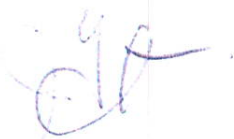
Friends, we encourage you to stay the course. We encourage you to use this time to continue to minister to one another in safe ways. Use this time to think together about what you have learned regarding what it means to be the church, what is essential to your lives together, and what may be let go of so that you can focus more fully on mission and service. Use this time to come up with a plan for how to move forward when the time comes (there are some great suggestions in the College of Regional

Ministers' letter forwarded to you a week or so ago). Use this time to pray and nurture your own spirit, something we have rarely had time to do in our distracted and busy lives. Celebrate the presence of God among you and God's faithfulness, for you are not abandoned, but the Spirit of creativity, courage, compassion, and resiliency is present and active across our shared lives.

Please know that we understand how difficult all of this is. We miss our communities and connecting with our kin across Canada. But it is love that keeps us home and leaning on the wisdom of medical professionals – love for God, the self, and especially others. If you wish to chat about how the pandemic is affecting you and your ministry, we are available to talk...always.

May God's strength and courage keep you in these challenging days. May the love of Christ sustain you. May the Spirit of peace encourage you to be at peace, trusting that God will continue to be faithful. We are one together regardless of what else may be happening in the world.

With gratitude for your ministry,



Rev Dr Jennifer Garbin
Regional Minister, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
In the US & Canada, Canadian Region
519-731-4629P



Rev Ann Stainton
Moderator
416-433-7997