



The United Church of Canada

Living Skies Regional Council

60A Athabasca St. E.
Moose Jaw, SK S6H 0L2
Phone: 306-704-0181

May 27, 2020

To the members, ministers, and staff of the Communities of Faith within Living Skies Region,

Greetings to you during this “unprecedented time.” On almost a daily basis we are reminded that this COVID-19 pandemic is beyond our scope of experience, and that we are doing our best to make our way through this time of physical distancing and isolation. Daily we get updates about numbers of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths, along with Government updates both provincially and federally. Not to mention the myriad of information that has come our way through the National Church and the Region. It feels like too much and not enough all at the same time.

The people and churches of Saskatchewan have worked hard to do their part to “flatten the curve” here in our province. It shows by the smaller numbers of infections daily. So much so that the Government has moved us to the third phase of the five phase plan to re-open. There have been many questions about how this five-phase program affects how we do church in the region now that faith communities are mentioned in the plan. The reality is that the threat of COVID-19 has not disappeared, which means that Communities of Faith will have to do careful and faithful discernment about in person ministry and outreach. **At the moment, due to the fact that many of our community members, clergy and staff fall into the vulnerable category, we are strongly recommending that communities of faith remain closed while maintaining worship and gathering on-line as possible.**

We know that you want to return to worshipping together. We know that you want to get back to your outreach programs and community activities. We also know that none of you want your congregation to be at the center of a COVID-19 outbreak. Even with the movement towards re-opening there are significant restrictions in place around gathering numbers, physical distancing, mask and glove usage, and cleaning protocols. Many of our church buildings do not have enough space to allow for 2 metres of distance between congregants. On top of all that, we (for the moment) can't even sing together when we do go back to our churches! There is a lot to consider.

Tracy Murton (Pastoral Relations Minister) and Julie Graham (Justice and Outreach Minister) have a re-opening document for Communities of Faith which offers guidelines and questions to think about as you make decisions about your community of faith. Again, we are required, for the safety of clergy, staff and members, to follow the Saskatchewan Health Authority recommendations and restrictions. Take time to become familiar with these health protocols (<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/re-open-saskatchewan-plan>), and keep checking the Living Skies Regional Council (www.livingskiesrc.ca) and the United Church of Canada (www.united-church.ca) websites for the most up to date information and guidance around COVID-19 and re-opening our communities of faith.

There is a working group of Ecumenical Faith Leaders from the province that are working together to have direct conversation with the current Government around guidance for faith communities during this time. This working group will be meeting with a member of the COVID-19 Response Team to have conversation in the hopes of having clear guidelines for corporate worship and ministry from the Government and Health Authority. More information will come to you as this conversation continues.

People of Living Skies Region, this is a challenging time to be the church, but we have witnessed you rising to the occasion with grace and faith. It is exhausting, it is confusing, and it hurts. But within all the hard emotions are moments of joy, of love and of compassion. We are a resilient church, and we are confident in our ability to weather this storm because we know that we are not alone – our God, the Holy who is our constant companion, is with us, and we are with each other.

Be safe, be strong, and have hope. God is with us. We are not alone.

With blessings,

Rev. Tricia Gerhard
Living Skies Executive Chairperson, and

Rob Reed, Diaconal Minister,
Convenor of the Regional Gathering