



The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada



First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council
Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council
Regional Council 15

MEMO

To: Communities of Faith, Ministry Personnel, Board/Council Chairs and Regional Members

From: Rev. Faith March-MacCuish, Regional Executive Minister, First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council and Regional Council 15

Date: March 27, 2020

Re: **COVID-19 Regional Update (March 27, 2020)**

It seems like such a long time ago that I wrote the letter acknowledging that it was time to shut down our buildings and have our staff work from home, and yet that was only ten days ago.

Since that time many things have shifted. The messages from our health and government authorities have gotten stronger and we have all been asked to do our part to help plank the curve, to keep each other safe and to model good citizenship for our communities, our provinces, our country and our world.

I have such a deep sense of gratitude for our Ministry Personnel, our Communities of Faith's governing bodies and our many staff both in local congregations and at the regional level. We have been and continue to be affected by this Pandemic.

Thank you to all the **Ministry Personnel**. I know how hard you are working to be present to your Communities of Faith in this very difficult time. I am aware of your tenacity, your resolve to find new ways of providing worship and connection, through social media and through a simple phone call, which means so much. I know that you are struggling when you have to say to a beloved family that the funeral of their loved one needs to be postponed, that you are sorry you are not permitted to visit them at home or in the hospital, or when you speak with a couple who are planning their marriage and ask them to consider changing the date. The feeling of helplessness in these situations is causing you so much extra stress and anxiety. I know your call to ministry is to be present for and with all God's children and that has not waived. I believe it has only been made stronger as you work hard to be the presence of Christ in ways you never knew possible.

Thank you to our **Communities of Faith**, your governing bodies, and volunteers for providing for your staff by allowing them to work from the safety of their home. You are also doing your part to be an example for the wider community. I have been hearing stories of Board members setting up phone trees and prayer chains. Communities of Faith checking in with the vulnerable and making sure they know they are not alone. I believe your call to support your staff and your congregants has also become your strength. Congregational members are also very concerned about the financial well-being of the Pastoral Charge and have found new ways to give. Thank you to everyone for doing your part in these most difficult times.

Thank you to our **Regional Staff** who are now working many overtime hours from their homes to make sure our congregations, committees, ministries and clergy have the information and the tools they need in these difficult times. Thank you as well to our **General Council Staff, Moderator and General Secretary** who, at the helm of our church, strive to keep us connected and informed.

We are truly blessed and upheld by each other and by a good, loving and ever-present God.

As we are fast approaching the first two weeks of closure and our March 30 date, we know we are not in a place to be able to open our churches or our offices. As this continues to go on, I know it is becoming more difficult. At this point, **we will continue to be closed until the end of April** and we will reassess at that time.

Thank you all for supporting this tough decision, adhering to the health and government authorities and keeping congregations and your staff safe.

Some things to keep in mind:

- Please avoid going into the church buildings at this time.
- Please have one person designated to go in on a weekly basis and check on the building, the pipes and boilers etc.
- When you do so, make sure you sanitize the door handles and the things you touch.
- If you need to check the mailboxes at the church, please make sure you are safe in doing so.
- If clergy wish to go into the building to record or livestream worship, it is permissible as long as it is a small group of 1-3 people. Again, make sure you sanitize anything you touch and make sure you are keeping the required distance apart.
- If you are able to record your services from the safety of your home, all the better.

If your Community of Faith is having **financial difficulty**, please call your Regional or Executive Minister to discuss the options available for you. If you are considering temporary layoffs of any staff, it is important that you follow employment law as well as United Church policies and therefore it is imperative that you are in touch with your Regional Minister. Our General Council staff are working with employment specialists to guide us at this time and our Regional Ministers are being equipped with this information and hope to have it by early next week. It is our hope that it will not have to come to this. As we are hoping that, with government aids as well as help from Regional Councils and General Council, temporary layoffs will not be needed.

This has been a very different Lenten journey and it will be a very different Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I know you will all do your best to honour our **Easter traditions** in new, creative and safe ways. Despite everything that is happening in our world, we know God is our strength, and we live with the promise of resurrection hope.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish