

FIRST THINGS FIRST

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, REGINA

June 2020

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

It seems like so long since I have seen you all in three dimensions! In some cases, I've heard your voice on the phone and, in others, I see you often through our Zoom video conference gatherings. On Sunday mornings when we livestream the worship service, I really enjoy reading your comments on Facebook. It is so good to know that we are still worshipping together though in a different way. Still, we are missing each other, and especially those who are not able to connect online as easily.

You will have heard that the Saskatchewan Re-Open Plan now includes places of worship in its Phase 3. Beginning on June 8th, churches and other religious groups may re-open as long as certain guidelines to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 are followed, and the safety of vulnerable people is assured. The Presbyterian Church in Canada also recently published a Session Resource for Re-Opening Churches. It too provides step-by-step guidelines for congregations that are considering when to resume in-person worship services and other gatherings.

The Session of First Church recently established a committee to study the available guidance and to recommend a re-opening plan for our congregation. It was developed to include physical distancing, and additional cleaning and hygiene procedures which will be useful for us when we decide to re-open. However, at this time, the decision made was to continue with online worship while we keep assessing the situation. Returning to in-person worship, at this time, would be very risky: those who are vulnerable because of age or underlying health conditions would need to stay home; the necessary cleaning and distancing procedures would be onerous, and participants would need to wear masks and avoid singing. In addition, the maximum number allowed to gather at this point would be 30 people.

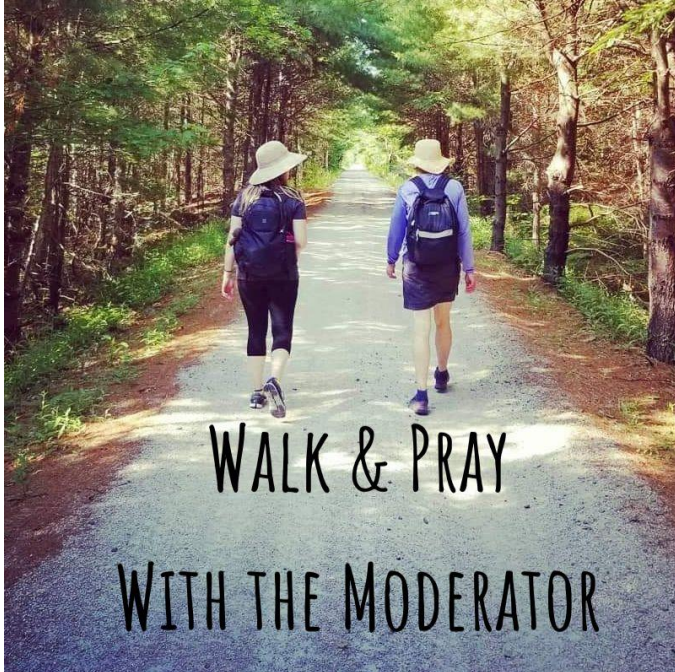
We do hope that the situation will continue to improve, and we have been assured that the Saskatchewan guidelines will continue to be updated and amended to reflect changing risk factors as the pandemic subsides (or if we get a second wave). In the meantime, we will continue to be the church in our homes, in our online gatherings, in our telephone connections, and in our daily discipleship as followers of Jesus.

This week I saw a news story on CBC about "Zoom fatigue," and I could certainly relate to the feeling. Since we cannot have in-person church meetings or programs, we've moved everything online, and my schedule has quickly filled up with meetings by Zoom every day. Despite the fact that looking at a computer screen for an extended time can be quite tiring, I still appreciate this new and inexpensive way of connecting.

Our fellowship times by Zoom are high points in my week, and our theological discussions on Tuesday evenings with "Did you ever wonder?" have been particularly meaningful. I only wish that more members of First Church would consider participating. Although it may sound complicated to get connected via Zoom, quite a few people have conquered their fear, given it a try, and have found it to be easier than they expected. Even if you choose to phone in to the Zoom gatherings, we can still hear your voice and appreciate your presence and contributions to the community.

Still, we all need to be intentional about setting aside our screens for a while each day. Partly with that in mind, and in my role as Moderator, I initiated a summer pilgrimage of prayer. I am so pleased that quite a few members of First Church are participating in "Walk & Pray with the Moderator" that began on June 1st as part of a group of about 90 people from across the national church. If nothing else, the commitment to walk every day gets us out of our homes and

enables us to enjoy the beauty of God's Creation. In addition, we are connecting with Presbyterians across the country as we pray for all the congregations and other ministries of our church, in addition for our ecumenical partners in the Canadian Council of Churches.



We set up a list of ministries, starting on the West Coast and extending to the East. Each day from June 1st to August 31st, there are 10 or 11 ministries for which to pray, and participants are invited to walk and pray for each one. My personal commitment is to walk 1 km for each ministry. Others are setting their own goals as a spiritual discipline.

If you would like to participate by walking and/or praying with me this summer, it's not too late to join in. Find all the details on the Moderator page of the PCC website:

<https://presbyterian.ca/gao/moderator/>

Consider joining the "Walk & Pray with the Moderator" Facebook group to share with others who are walking and praying this summer:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/674020656712628/>

Although First Church comes up on the list of ministries on one particular day later this month, you are in my mind and heart every day as I walk, pray, read, reflect, write, and prepare for worship every week. You're in my prayers throughout every Zoom meeting or telephone

conference call, whether I'm working on local church programs or on national church projects. And whether I see you every week on my screen or very rarely, I'm praying that God will bless and encourage you in these days and that the Spirit of God will use you and your gifts to be a blessing to others.

Rev. Amanda Currie

SESSION

As you saw in the annual report, the Session and Board of Managers (with the help of Ron Okumura and Bill Kelly) have been working to investigate possible solutions for our church foundation. A small group (Ron Okumura, Jim Doolittle and Rodolfo Omolida) met with the engineers to ask more questions and consider alternatives. They proposed a plan that was accepted at a recent joint meeting of the Session and Board. This plan involves repairs and support to the existing foundation that would provide us with stability for at least 15 years (rather than completely replacing the foundation.)

The Session has called a congregational meeting for Sunday, June 28 at 2:00 pm by Zoom, to present the plan and cost estimate to the congregation, answer any questions and request approval from the congregation to proceed. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this important meeting!

The Zoom link will be provided in Amanda's weekly email, but it is the same link we usually use for coffee after church. Please note that anyone can join the Zoom call by telephone by calling one of the numbers provided and entering the meeting ID and password.

WORSHIP

The Worship Committee met virtually on Saturday, May 23. Marianne Woods opened our meeting with prayer. It was rewarding to spend time together once again and look at the positive interactions we have had during this time of being distanced from one another.

During the three months, we have been noticing the amount of participation from both the congregation in Regina and others who have discovered us.

Our thanks go out to Rev. Amanda Currie and Bill Sgrazzutti, our Music Director, who have been central in seeing this happen. There is also a very important behind-the-scenes person involved that many of you may not be aware of - Nick Jesson, the camera and sound person. Without him there would not be an online service. Thanks Nick, you are appreciated.

Our thanks also go out to our music scholars, Gabe Omolida and Cade Eastwood, as well as soloists Graeme Mitchell, Paula Weber, Lyle Buddecke, and Marianne Woods who have provided beautiful solos to enhance our on-line worship services. Special thanks to the Omolida Family – Gigi, Rodolfo, Gabe, and Timo - you have added something extra special to the services. Thank you, Timo, good job! You are a breath of fresh air!

We are also pleased to hear that those of you who were able to participate virtually in Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, were inspired.

Bill presented his plans for music in the next few months, especially during the summer, which will give Gabe Omolida the opportunity to take the lead in the summer music program at First Church, gaining experience in accompanying soloists and sharing his musical gifts with the congregation. We look forward to Gabe's music ministry.

Some discussion was held on continuing virtual services for those not comfortable with returning for in-person worship in the church.

We also brainstormed some ideas to present to Session on the question of returning to worship at the church when it is deemed safe to do so. We do know that how we interact with one another for the first while will be very different, and we will have to adjust accordingly. Unfortunately, we will likely have to suspend coffee hour for some time to come even it is very much a part of our time of worship. Let us be

patient, and trust God that we will get back to spending time together in person.

We wish everyone a safe and happy summer, and give thanks that no matter what happens, we are still one in Christ and can get together, thanks to the gift of technology.

The Rev. Amanda Currie closed our meeting with prayer.

Joyce McKersie
Worship Committee

FAMILY SERVICE REGINA: Senior Grocery Program

This information was provided by Joel Richter, who used to be our Youth Leader. He is now working with this program.

During Covid-19, Family Service Regina is offering grocery shopping service for seniors who are unable to get groceries. This program is designed for seniors who do not have other means of getting groceries:

- they are unable to get groceries themselves
- they do not have family, close friends, or close neighbours in the city that could do it for them

About the program:

- On Tuesdays between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm, clients can place an order over the phone. The senior can call the Family Service Regina office at 306-757-6675.
- On Thursdays, grocery shopping is done at the Co-Op on Rochdale
- On Thursdays late in the morning or early in the afternoon, Gref's Delivery Service will deliver groceries to the client's residence for a fee starting at \$10.00, but could be more depending on the size of the order and where the person lives
- Payment arrangements can be made through the Co-Op Customer Service (usually Pam) - 306-791-9348

FUNDSCRIP

You can continue raising money for First Church during this COVID-19 crisis. Place an order and you can have it mailed to your home. Currently the cost of lettermail is covered, so you get it delivered free! Specials for June include Ultimate Dining Card (7%) and Golf Town (5%).

1. Go to the FundScrip website: fundscrip.com
2. Create your own account. Be sure to enter the Invitation code for First Church - 86MLRU
That way, First Church will get credit for your purchases.
3. Shop for the cards you wish to purchase. Specials for April include Walmart (3%) and Ultimate Dining (7%) - you can use this for takeout! (Note the conditions below to have free shipping.)
4. When you go to Checkout it will show that First Presbyterian Church is the beneficiary. Be Sure to edit the Shipping (or your cards will be shipped to First Church!)
Click on Edit and choose Direct Shipping. Then enter your home address. Select lettermail from the options.
5. Choose a payment method. The easiest and best is EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) where it will be transferred directly from your bank, like paying with debit! Click on the link to set up your EFT. It's easy to do - just log in to your own bank account. (You may have to click on Shop then back to Checkout for it to be an available choice).
6. Click on Checkout and you will have a chance to review your order. Then click on Place Order. It will show you how much the church will receive for your order.

Thanks for your support!

THE MODERATOR REFLECTS ON ANTI-BLACK RACISM

For many within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the celebration of Pentecost was extremely difficult this year. Certainly, our church services were affected by the fact that we could not gather together physically to remember our collective identity as God's People, empowered by the Spirit, and sent out in love to the world. But twelve weeks into the pandemic, most of our communities have actually gotten used to our different ways of gathering, and supporting each other, and worshipping together.

The bigger issue was the awareness of, and deep pain and grief associated with the terrible acts of anti-black racism over the last week in North America. It was hard to talk about the fire of Pentecost, and not think about the fires raging in U.S. cities where protests turned into more violence and looting. And how could we preach about the linguistic and cultural diversity of the church Jesus established, and not acknowledge that we have failed so completely in building societies that truly honour all people and celebrate our diversity as God's beloved children?

I know that many ministers in our denomination struggled to find words to speak to what happened to George Floyd last week in Minneapolis—a black man murdered by a white police officer on a public street, while others stood by and watched. The image of that knee on the back of his neck and the sound of his voice crying “I can't breathe” will stay with us for a long time.

As a white woman, with more privilege than I yet understand, I struggled to know what to say or what to pray. In as much as I failed to speak out sooner, I am sorry. In as much as I said (or may yet say) some wrong things, I am deeply regretful. In as much as I still don't really understand the severity and deep impact of anti-black racism, I want to repent, and to learn, and to stand in solidarity with my black siblings.

I have been learning a few things this week from my colleagues, friends, and others who are people of colour. First is that what happened to George Floyd is not new. His was the unjust

killing that sparked these massive protests, but not because it was unique. Indeed, the protests are happening because it was not an isolated incident, but almost the norm of how black people are subjected to discrimination, mistreatment, and violence without any provocation but the colour of their skin. Of course, the protests are about George Floyd's death, but they're not just about that. They are about the pervasive and systemic racism that endangers the lives of black people every day.

I've also been reminded that this is not just an American problem. Canada is not immune to anti-black racism, and the events in the U.S. have prompted many people in Canada to speak and write about their own, everyday experiences of discrimination and fear in our communities. Black parents have shared about how much they worry about the safety of their children, and how they train them to interact with police in order to keep them alive.

It pains me to say it, but I've also been challenged to see that our churches also are plagued with racism. Certainly, over the years the PCC has made statements against segregation, apartheid, racism and racial harassment. We have thought about the fact that we are a pluralistic church, and emphasized that diversity enriches our congregations and governing bodies. The [Social Action Handbook](#) includes a section on People of Diverse Races and Ethnic Origins and summarizes what the church has said and done with regard to racism. Still, our official statements have not put an end to actual racist comments, actions and discrimination that are part of the experience of many black ministers and church members. I wonder how we might take steps to shed light on ourselves, on our systems, on our practices, and then take action to correct them.

Last weekend when I considered the story of the first Pentecost after Jesus' death and resurrection, I was struck by the description of the crowd of people from every nation under heaven hearing about God's deeds of power in so many different languages. God's vision was for a church that was gloriously diverse in language, culture, colour, gender and age. And yet, we are still so far from honouring all people

and thanking God for the diverse and beautiful ways that the Spirit fills us and works in our lives.

As a church, we should know this, and take up our responsibility to speak and to act for justice for those who are being oppressed, abused, and killed. We must do something, because black lives matter.

I am not saying that "all lives matter," because that's another thing that I have learned. Of course, all lives matter, but all lives are not being threatened. Some have explained it by saying, "If your friend gets a cut on their arm are you gonna wait to give all your friends a Band-Aid because all arms matter? No, you would help your friend who was bleeding because they are in pain and in need. Or if a person's house was on fire and someone was trapped inside, are you gonna make the fire department go to every other house on the block first because all houses matter? Obviously not."

Many of our black friends, neighbours and fellow church members are hurting deeply right now. Or they're angry, or afraid, or just emotionally exhausted. Our church's [Policy for Dealing with Allegations of Racial Harassment](#) reminds us that it is our responsibility to speak and to act for justice:

Racism exists in our communities, including the church. Yet we know that the kingdom of God includes all nationalities and all races. In its calling to be a signpost to the kingdom of God, it is imperative that the church oppose racism and intentionally work toward acceptance and inclusion of all people.



Justice Ministries has posted some [helpful resources](#) on the website, and a study guide on racism and hate will be available very soon. Other opportunities for learning and transformation are open to us as well, including the programs of the [Forum on Intercultural Leadership and Learning of the Canadian Council of Churches](#) .

May the Holy Spirit of God come upon the church to burn away all that is wrong and spur us to speak and to act for justice. May the Holy Spirit of God blow through our communities bringing life and hope to all who are oppressed and living in fear so that our black siblings may breathe deeply and have peace.

The Rev. Amanda Currie | Moderator of the General Assembly – June 3, 2020

SUMMER OFFICE HOURS

Our Office Administrator, Shirley Durell, has changed to summer office hours at the church for June to August.

You can connect with Shirley in the office Monday to Thursday from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. Connect by phone (306-522-9571) or by email (firstpresregina@sasktel.net). And feel free to mail in your offering or drop it in the mailbox where Shirley will pick it up.

You can continue to reach the Rev. Amanda Currie by phone or text message (306-580-8095) or by email (revfpc@sasktel.net). A physically-distanced pastoral visit is always possible, as well as a phone call or Zoom video call.

JUNE EVENTS

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| June 7 | 10:30 am | Livestream Worship
<i>(Trinity Sunday)</i> |
| June 7 | 2:00 pm | Zoom Coffee Hour |
| June 9 | Noon | Freedom 55ers by Zoom |
| June 9 | 7 pm | Did you ever wonder? |
| June 10 | 7 pm | Board of Managers |
| June 11 | 8 pm | Tea & A Chat |
| June 14 | 10:30 am | Livestream Worship |
| June 14 | 2:00 pm | Zoom Coffee Hour |
| June 18 | 7 pm | Choir Chat on Zoom |
| June 18 | 8 pm | Tea & A Chat |
| June 20 | 10 am | Presbytery by Zoom |
| June 21 | 10:30 am | Livestream Worship
<i>(Healing & Reconciliation Sunday, guest preacher the Rev. Mary Fontaine, Hummingbird Ministries)</i> |
| June 24 | 7 pm | Book Club by Zoom |
| June 25 | 8 pm | Tea & A Chat |
| June 28 | 10:30 am | Livestream Worship |
| June 28 | 2 pm | Congregational Meeting
<i>re: Foundation Repair by Zoom</i> |
| June 29 | 1 pm | "Walk & Pray with the Moderator" Zoom gathering |

All Zoom links and phone numbers are sent out by email. Please be in touch with Amanda if you are missing the information you need to connect.