



# ST. PHILIP'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

31 St. Phillips Road, Etobicoke, Ontario M9P 2N7

April 26, 2020

Dear Friends:

Here we are into the seventh week of this “lockdown” situation, and it is still very unclear as to how long it will be before we are able to gather once again in our building as Church. The best guess at this point is that, while we may soon be able to gather in groups of 20 or even 50 in the next couple of months, it could be until the Fall (or even further) before we can fill the Church and safely include our more vulnerable members who are compromised due to age or particular medical conditions. In other words, we are in this for a while.

In light of the situation, what at first seemed to be temporary measures (from online worship to pastoral care via phone, email and internet) are now turning into a new normal. Even while we grieve the fact that we can't be together for worship, parish business and social activities, there are some good things coming out of this crisis:

We are building a strong online presence, which will not disappear once this crisis is over. Post-COVID will be different from Pre-COVID, and part of the new normal will be continuing to develop an online presence and congregation even while we maintain in-person worship, meetings, Bible studies and the like. This is good news for those who can't get to Church and it is a great evangelical opportunity.

We are reaching out to and caring for one another in many marvellous ways: phone calls, emails, help with shopping, waving through windows etc. We are being forced to realize just how important our Church community is to us. We are learning about the strength of the Body of Christ.

Our more formal parish communication is much-improved: our parish list is updated, we have far more email addresses, a new website, phone chains, and a team of people working together to make sure information gets to people when it is needed.

Our Lay Pastoral Care Team have shifted gears and have contacted every person on the parish list just to check in. They are now organized to make regular phone calls to each person without an email address in the parish (this is the group who might otherwise not be aware of what is happening in the Parish). The team, led by Greg Lane, is organized to keep me in the loop from a pastoral perspective. This crisis has forced us to tighten up procedures and be far clearer as to who our most isolated members might be.

The importance of stewardship has heightened. We can't simply count on people putting an envelope on the plate on Sunday mornings. How we give money to the Church has changed for many people. We are seeing more people choose to give by pre-authorized payment, people are dropping off donations at my rectory office, and we are now exploring the best methods for online donations. The Church isn't sustainable without our contributions, and as we move forward into the Post-COVID world, we need to be ready to both ask for donations and to receive them in ways that might look different to our usual annual request and a weekly donation in Church. We are realizing that we can't take St. Philip's ongoing presence for granted. It needs our support.

As we experiment and fine-tune our online worship, we are finding that we need to do things a bit differently at times. As we continue to livestream services even when we're back in the pews, we might find that we need to adapt a bit to also maintain a spiritually-nurturing experience for people at home.

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These are a few very positive things that are coming out of this crisis. Essentially, COVID-19 has shaken us out of our routine ways of being Church, and is forcing us to ask ourselves: Just what is Church? What are the essentials? What do we want to maintain? What now seems extraneous to our mission and ministry? What exciting new opportunities are being placed in our laps? What does it mean to be Church?

Those are all very open-ended questions that will find their answers as we dive in and re-build our Church for a new time. We are an Easter people, whose DNA is built around a core of constantly renewing life in Christ. I have no doubt that we will be stronger and better positioned to continue our ministry to one another and to our wider community by the time COVID is a thing of the past. Some things will be different and much will be the same, but I can already sense the new heart being implanted in us so lovingly by God. There is a new excitement and commitment to Christ in the conversations I am having with parishioners these days, and that is very exciting indeed.

Here's what you can do to be a part of and to support the work that God is doing here at St. Philip's in the midst of terrible pandemic:

**i)** Please pray. Set up a dedicated space in your home for daily prayer, scripture reading and for being part of online worship. Do what make sense to you to make it a holy space minimizing the distractions of your daily home life. Come and pick up a copy of the Day by Day daily Bible readings from the front porch of the rectory, or use online prayer resources like: "Living with Christ", "Pray As You Go", Northumbria Community daily offices, or use our own BAS or BCP (both available online at Anglican.ca).

**ii)** Come to our online worship services (check them out at [stphilips.ca](http://stphilips.ca)) and be part of our continuing corporate prayer or if you don't have access to internet, light a candle and pray with us at the same time.

**iii)** Check in with one another. Just a quick phone call to someone you usually see in Church to say hello is good for the soul!

**iv)** Call me and let me know your thoughts and your needs. Let me know what is working and what isn't working. Share your ideas, your dreams and your concerns with me.

**v)** Continue to support the Church financially – every dollar counts and is valued. If you want to talk about changing the way you give or the amount you give, we can make that happen – just call the office.

**vi)** Look after yourself. God loves you and so do we. Don't be afraid to reach out for help. We are, after all, commissioned by Jesus himself to love one another.

As we move our way through the Easter season, joyfully recalling the new life in Christ, let us also look forward to the season of Pentecost when we are formed anew as the Body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. I pray that the joy of Easter and the gift of the Holy Spirit will continue to sustain us all in this challenging time as we are led by Christ into the life of the resurrection.

I leave you with the Joy of the Easter season,



Yours in Christ,  
Father Mike