# Knox

# Presbyterian Church

March 18, 2020

Greetings Knox Church community,

Hello everyone. I hope you are doing well. Such simple words we often use to greet one another, which take on quite ominous meaning in the times we’re experiencing. When I began this letter last evening, it was still St. Patrick’s Day. If we had our worship service this past Sunday, we would have sung the hymn written in his memory which includes much of his rich and faith-filled prose. If you have a copy at home of one of our church hymnal’s, it’s #576, “I bind unto myself today”. Both the words and the music are inspiring, perhaps especially for our time. I’ll post a version of this hymn on our church website (knoxottawa.ca)

I don’t feel a need to update you on information readily available through the news media about the seriousness of the COVID19 pandemic, and I trust you’re also well informed by health advisories about prevention measures and doing your best to practice social distancing, plus monitoring your health and those around you. I do want to update you on some important developments related to Knox Church.

First of all, in the letter of March 14th, I mentioned Session had endorsed a COVID19 Contingency Committee. The committee consists of two Elders (Greg Fyffe, Phil Winkelaar), three Temporal Board members (Tom Burnie, Denise Losier, Scott MacKenzie) and Peter Campbell who oversees Knox investments. The Committee has worked diligently via email since early last week and presented a report via email to all Elders of Session this past Sunday evening, covering a wide range of issues ranging from pastoral concerns, worship matters, missional activities, cash flow, and in general how a variety of decisions related to the entire ministry of Knox will need to be made without availability for either the congregation or leadership bodies to gather bodily for the foreseeable future.

Regarding pastoral care, we are doing our best to make all efforts to be in contact and offer support to anyone from Knox requiring attention, whether that is a spiritual or physical need. Elders have been asked to make a special effort to connect with people from the congregation, particularly elderly persons and others with limited mobility. If you know of someone whom you especially think could be in some need, please let one of our Elders know, or myself. Clearly, there will be situations, especially in some care facilities where there will be restrictions on visits, though there are ways to be in contact without physical presence as well (email or phone) either directly with a person or through a staff member at a facility.

Regarding missional activities, I want to share some very good news. First of all, last Saturday’s Out of the Cold meal was very much appreciated by 89 guests from our community. With thanks to our Coordinator Helen Beck for organizing the evening with extra care for risk-prevention to both volunteers and guests, the evening was very well planned, filled with stories and images of grace and gratitude. While the OOTC program has two more Saturday evenings scheduled, given advisories from both health and civic leaders, plans are being worked out at this time for these meals to be ‘take-out’ only. In addition, there are preliminary plans, with thanks to a generous community donor, to extend and modify the program of OOTC beyond our regular schedule which is completed end of March. As this develops, you will hear more. There is a genuine concern among us that we do what we can to continue some form of care for our inner-city friends in need.

Regarding worship services, a decision has been made to cancel all worship gatherings in our building ‘for the foreseeable future’. Because we understand the pandemic to be serious, we do not want to create any false expectation that worship services at Knox will continue anytime in the near future. With that in mind, we are working on details to create some form of video service which can be posted onto our church website and/or even live-streamed. Stay tuned, and yes, pun intended. With this in mind, if you use Facebook or know someone who does, you are encouraged to look for a live-stream of tonight’s Jazz Vespers @ Knox, beginning 7 PM. Search for “Knox Presbyterian Church Ottawa” and you should find the event hosted there. Just the musicians and myself in the sanctuary, along with someone recording the event for your benefit. I can’t promise the production quality will be stellar, though I know you’ll enjoy hearing instruments making music in our sanctuary, and I’ll try to offer some words that are hopeful and helpful, including prayers! Please join us if you can.

Finally, finances, and to begin, I want to share a heart-felt anecdote. Yesterday, two loose twenty dollar bills were found inside at the back Centre 120 door, likely slipped through the mail-slot. I’ve never mentioned this from the pulpit before, but I’ve been met friends from our street community at that door numerous times over the years who have handed me cash donations to Knox. I would not be surprised at all if these two bank-notes were from one of these same people. Whomever it was, it seems someone remembered even the church needs funds during this trying time. How thoughtful, generous and correct they are. While Knox is not in a crisis financial situation, the Contingency Committee is very aware there will be a need for continued revenue. With this in mind, there will be a note sent early next week outlining a variety of options to forward donations to Knox and I want to encourage you to consider how you might do so.

This is another fairly lengthy email, though I’d be remiss not to offer a few notes of thanks. First of all, I hope you share my gratitude for the energy and time of the people on the Contingency Committee. There’s much more they are involved in right now than I could fully share in this letter. Please be in prayer for them and myself as we do our best to navigate Knox Church through this time.

Secondly, I’m thankful for our full compliment of Elders on Session and Temporal Board members, including though not limited to those on the Contingency Committee. All Elders are being called upon to reach out in ways they have not been required before. Please be in prayer for them as well, and be patient with them as they do their best to connect. Temporal Board members will have much to be concerned about in coming weeks related to all the changes in finances and facilities and they will need our prayers to make wise and careful decisions.

Finally, I’m deeply grateful for our Church staff. Though not everyone might be aware, Marianne, our Office Assistant is on vacation till next Monday. She has been willing and able to assist via email and text messaging regarding a wealth of concerns while away in BC. Bruce Hastings, our Church Officer, has been incredibly helpful and available to assist with all the various cancellations of groups at Knox this week, putting up signs for many of them. Daryl Durant has also been a great help with posting helpful and even encouraging messages on our ‘Big Blue’ sign. Our organist Simon Pinsonneault has also been a great support, helping to connect with choir members regarding cancellations as well as upcoming guest musicians. I sure do miss the music Simon graces us with most Sundays and the singing of the choir and look forward to when they will be able to do so again. Please be in prayer for all our church staff during this challenging time, particularly Marianne and her husband Bill that there will be no complications with their travels home from BC later this week.

I leave you this time with words from Psalm 91:1-2:

*‘Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

*Peace, in Christ,*

*Pastor Jim*

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