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Trinity Musings #44: from Rev Brian Goodings trinityminister@bmts.com
Serving Trinity United Church: Collingwood

My son Isaac, my daughter Hannah and I are training for the virtual Canadian Ski Marathon (CSM). Normally, this event is held on the trails near Montebello Quebec but this year it's completely an online event. People register with the CSM and then, using any GPS tracking device, document where they skied and when. To complete the event, sometime before March 6th, we will be skiing 100 kilometres over the course of 2 consecutive days and sleeping outside one night.

Hannah will be skiing somewhere in British Columbia and Isaac and I will be skiing at Highlands Nordic near Duntroon. Two of my friends completed the event on the trails of Kolapore last weekend and I know of at least a few people in the Parry Sound area who will be skiing over there. The virtual event has given us a chance to do something "together" all over Canada and the world, that wouldn't have been possible in years gone by.

It's opened a new chapter for the Canadian Ski Marathon and I imagine that even after the pandemic has ended, the option for online participation will continue in some form.

The virus has forced all of us to make some changes that, although initially quite inconvenient, may turn out to be for the better.

As far as Trinity is concerned, the weekly viewers of our online church services have been an increase from the number who would typically have come to the building itself.

Watching a church service online at home has a lot of advantages...you can watch it at night or any day of the week, stay in your pyjamas, drink wine instead of grape juice, go to the bathroom, turn the sound off, fall asleep during the sermon, or just turn the whole service off. What's not to like about any of that?

We're setting up cameras in the sanctuary now that will continue to broadcast our services after we have returned to using the building. I expect that people will sometimes come to the church and sometimes stay home to watch instead. It will be good to have the option.

I know that a lot of people have set up home offices to work remotely instead of commuting and I suspect that some will not be returning to the offices they left, pre-pandemic.

I wonder how far this online stuff is going to go.

Maybe marriages will become online someday too? The divorce rate would drop if relationships were primarily virtual...no bathroom to share, lots of room in the bed, no kitchen mess, no clothes on the floor...might be something to this idea.

I'm being facetious of course. I've never thought I've been one for big crowds but I really miss the company of other people in a way that has surprised me. Online meetings work reasonably well but it isn't the same as seeing others in person.

I was watching a documentary about the Rolling Stones on Netflix the other night and thought how odd it looked to see such huge crowds of people jammed together in stadiums and arenas.

Now that I'm an expert virologist and see everything through the risk-of-infection-lens, I know there were viruses having a heyday jumping from one unmasked person to the next.

But I also noticed how much joy the people were having together. I'm sure a lot of them had, as John Prine said "illegal smiles", but I was reminded of how much fun it is to be singing and laughing and dancing together. There were pheromones and emotions aplenty that come only from this kind of peaceful Woodstock-esque gathering.

I have found much of that kind of joy in church sanctuaries, especially at times like Christmas and Easter when the building is full. Something good happens in a crowd when we unabashedly belt out a hymn we all know and love.

As I watched the documentary, I felt a sudden surge of wistful longing for the companionship of others. I'm doing ok, and I hope you are too, but it's been a darn long lonely year.

As I prepare to slip off into the sunset of retirement (at the end of June now not April), I hope that we will be able to gather at least one last time in the church sanctuary to be together.

Zooming is ok and has served its purpose in allowing us to meet virtually, but when the Leaf's finally hoist the cup in June this year, it will be a poor substitute for marching down Yonge Street with you.

I remember the feeling I got years ago at the starting line of my first Canadian Ski Marathon in Quebec. It was minus 20 and well before dawn. There were hundreds of people standing quietly, waiting for the starting-gun to go off. It was a wonderful moment to feel that collective surge of energy and the gleeful shouts of joy as we began the first 80-kilometre leg of day one.

This year is certainly going to be a very different CSM but as my friend says, "It is what it is!" Bon chance to all who are skiing apart this year. Next year, just like church, we might have other options too.