

First-St Andrew's
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Tidings

Vol 30, No 2

Pentecost/Summer 2020

**THE CHURCH
AND THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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Tidings

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David Wardlaw

The focus of this special issue of *Tidings* is on First-St. Andrew's and its people during the deep disruption to normal church operations and to everyone's day-to-day life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a set of articles describing the impact on FSA's ministries, programs, and activities. Another set of articles focusses on the impact on individuals as members of society, worshippers, and spiritual beings facing an unanticipated, potentially existential crisis. There is a report on the general impact on, and response to, this situation by United Churches in Antler River Region, and a look at virtual worship services in a small sample of United Churches across southern Ontario. One of the feature articles compares the Covid-19 and climate change crises, with emphasis on the importance and power of individual actions in mitigating both.

There are several other distinguishing features of this issue. First, the regular columns and committee reports are absent—these will return for the next issue. Second, this issue is available in electronic form only, i.e., there is no hardcopy print version. The reason for this is twofold. All church committees were asked to reconsider their 2020 budgets with the aim of trimming them. *Tidings* comes under Communications & Marketing and the majority of its budget is the cost of printing *Tidings*. Since there are four issues per year, the move to an e-magazine for the June issue allowed the C&M budget to be reduced by almost 25%. Furthermore, it was not clear whether normal distribution of hard copies would be possible by early June. At the time of writing it is anticipated that the hardcopy print version will return for the September and December issues.

Typically each issue features a guest author who is not from FSA. This time it is Florence Niven, who kindly provided a thought-provoking essay. The byline following her article indicates that she is a member of Edith Rankin Memorial United Church. This happens to be the church to which Rev. Michelle has been called effective September 1st. The byline explains how the piece came to be in *Tidings*. The fact that Edith Rankin is Rev. Michelle's new church is entirely coincidental. †





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Rev. Michelle Down

I write this from my home office, where we have been safely quarantined since the outbreak of COVID-19. Ministry is different during a Global Pandemic, but the Spirit of God is so very present during these difficult and changing times. The pandemic has shifted the rhythm of our mission, our worship, our devotions and prayer time; but it could never eliminate our faith or commitment to ministry. We have been invited into a time with the Holy Spirit to really examine our core values and the ways that we live out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I write this in the afternoon of Pentecost Sunday. We have already shared in on-line worship and celebrated communion where we see the bread “break out” love, and the cup “pour out” hope. Already on this Pentecost day, we have been inspired with the gift of the Holy Spirit coming to all of God’s people.

And then we turn on the news.

And then we look at social media.

And there we see the Pentecost story and the Pandemic story being revealed in a very different way. There are two pandemics infecting us. A viral one and a systemic one. Black and brown bodies are dying in our streets, and by our very own hands, knees, policies and laws.

Protests and Marches “break out” demanding Justice; because Racism, Violence, and Power have been “poured out” upon God’s people.

Today, during a global pandemic, we are being called to examine what virus has infected our very own souls. How has the virus of discrimination and prejudice infected our own Spirits, that has resulted in the misuse of privilege and power, instead of using it to provide equity for all of God’s people? The Corona Virus does not discriminate based on skin colour, or education levels, or social status. Yet the statistics clearly show greater levels of infection in areas of higher density, lower income housing, poorer neighbourhoods; because of the systemic inequity of resources, supports, and care. The virus doesn’t discriminate, we do!

Today’s scripture reading does not tell us that the Pentecost Spirit fell upon the white, educated, rich and powerful, instead it says that the Holy Spirit did not discriminate. The Pentecost Spirit fell upon all of God’s people, so that ALL could hear in their own language, and ALL could understand in their own culture, race, religion, orientation, and truth.

This time of lockdown during COVID-19 is granting us the opportunity to be inspired by the Holy Spirit; to stand up for Justice and against discrimination; to name the misuse of power when it happens in our churches and communities; and to prayerfully ask the Pentecost and Pandemic Spirit to radically infuse our own hearts with Justice, Grace, Equity and Love.

May it be so.



REFLECTIONS OF COVID-19



*Steve Elson
Chair of Council*

Who would have thought that so much could change, in such a short period of time, impact so many, in so many places, with such profound consequences, including personal loss and grief? All of our daily routines have been disrupted and put on hold and we've had to learn new ones. FSA has not been left out by any means. Programs and services have been cancelled, as have a number of fund-raising events—until further notice. Staff is working from home. Thankfully, like many other faith communities we have joined the virtual world of communications and our Sunday services have continued with a core group of staff and volunteers working their magic each week. Volunteers have stepped up with Church School programming via Zoom, Membership and nurture has offered grocery services for anyone in need, our pastoral care staff and volunteers have been reaching out as much as they can.

The Executive Committee of the FSA Council has been pulled into service and has met on a regular basis to ensure we are continuing to do what we can to stay connected, secure and solvent. Virtual Council meetings resumed in April and will continue monthly.



S ON THE I MPACT ON FSA

Thankfully, since many FSA members are using PAR to make their weekly financial donations, we have continued to receive a steady flow of revenue to cover our expenses. Several people have joined PAR, some are donating on line and still others are mailing in cheques to the church. Thanks to everyone for your on-going commitment to FSA.

Thanks to people staying home, practicing social distancing when going out, and practicing good hygiene the incidence of COVID-19 infections seems to be getting under control. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that life will not return to “normal” any time soon, and we don’t know with any certainty what “normal” will look like.

There is no doubt that even though changes have been forced on us, there have been some that we might not want to give up—changes that have added value to our lives and others.

As a faith community FSA will continue to play a meaningful role in all our lives. We also know that this shared experience is one that has challenged us to adapt to change and to be mindful of what is really important and meaningful. As we move forward, we will do so together strengthened through our ability to adapt to adversity.

†

A photograph of four white dice with black letters, arranged in a row to spell out the word 'RONA'. The dice are resting on a reflective surface, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow gradient.

GOD IN THE TIME OF COVID



Barrie Evans

"If your understanding of the divine made you kinder, more empathetic, and impelled you to express sympathy in concrete acts of loving-kindness, this was good theology. But if your notion of God made you unkind, belligerent, cruel, or self-righteous, or if it led you to kill in God's name, it was bad theology." (Karen Armstrong, The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness)

In this time of global pandemic, many of us are experiencing existential anxiety. We are fearful of getting sick and possibly dying. We are anxious about our friends and family. We feel out of control in attempting to battle this invisible enemy. We are uncertain about how and when this will all end. Our social isolation makes it difficult to connect with the supports that we normally have to maintain our sense of well-being.

These existential concerns have made me turn to thinking about God, especially on my long solitary walks with my dog. Thinking about God is tied in with imponderables, such as why is this happening to us, what's the future of our planet, why are we here anyway, what's the point of it all, and what is our place in this vast universe? There are no answers only more questions.

The Genesis 1:27 scripture tells us that God created humankind in his image. What does it mean, that we are made in the image of God? This can't be taken to mean our physical shape, our body. Our bodies are merely the vessels that hold the essence of who we are. They are the box and not the gift. *Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you: 2 Timothy 1:14.*

In Christian beliefs, Jesus is the embodiment of God as a sentient being. *I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer. John 15:1.* Literally, this brings God down to earth. Does this signify that the quest to find meaning in life by being Christ-like makes us more God-like?

Cognitive science asserts that we create our own reality. The Chilean biologists, Maturana and Varela, argue against an objective world; instead we construct a world with others through language and social interaction. We can only know the world that we ourselves have created and which exists only through the filter of our own nervous system. The sky is blue only because we have receptors in our eye that sense blue. Other creatures do not see colours and their world is monochromatic. Does that mean that

the creator is within us?

Christopher Howse, a British religion commentator writes, "Prayer is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, and it entails, sometimes explicitly, being in the presence of God. This may at times be noticed by attending to God inside yourself." What do we expect to happen if we communicate to God through prayer? There may be people who are praying right now that they don't get COVID-19. I'm not one of them. I respect that others may have a different view. In the first place I don't believe that God has anything to do with whether or not I get COVID-19. I don't believe that God makes those decisions. In the second place, I don't feel so privileged that I should be spared while many others aren't. I don't think the purpose of prayer is to ask God for favours. At this time, I think about the many thousands who have lost their lives, especially the elderly and health compromised. My prayers are for them and also for courage to deal with whatever might happen to me and to my loved ones

Although the mysteries of God are beyond comprehension, we can witness God at work in the world. There are sacrifices being made by health care providers and the essential service workers, who are putting themselves at risk to ensure that the rest of us are safe, have food and the essentials of life. There is love in the many acts of kindness of neighbours and others towards strangers and those in need. There is joy in listening to concert musicians and singers performing together from their own homes through the magic of the internet. We are inspired by individuals such as Colonel Tom in the UK, who at 100 years of age, moved the hearts of many to donate millions to the National Health Service. There is a glimmer of hope in the collaborative efforts of many gifted research scientists who are striving to come up with treatments and a vaccine. *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:9.* This is God in the time of Covid. †

FLATTENING THE PANDEMIC AND CLIMATE CHANGE WITH SCIENCE AND INDIVIDUAL ACTION



Mike Bancroft

*Awake all human kind, the challenge now embrace,
apply your strength, your voice, your means, as
stewards of God's grace. [Voices United, Hymn
295: verse 3]*

Many countries are beginning to “flatten the curve” on the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. This has required decisive cooperative government action in Canada, with implementation of strict social distancing measures dictated by evidence-based health science. This action has required individual acceptance and self-sacrifice, combined with the very risky work from essential workers. Clearly, in a crisis, we can *all* work together to defeat the viral enemy.

In the last five years, most of us are well aware of climate change, mostly because of the increasing frequency and severity of climate related events such as fires, floods, tornadoes and hurricanes. These are caused mainly by an increase in global temperatures from increasing atmospheric CO₂ levels (the so-called greenhouse effect) due to burning of fossil fuels. Most scientists and public policy experts believe that the present pandemic is just the “warm-up” for serious climate crises *every* year in the coming decades.

In response to climate change, many countries, including

Canada, and cities have declared climate change emergencies; and the Canadian government has attempted to meet part of its 2005 emissions targets [a 30% decrease by 2030] by decreasing individual home and vehicle emissions with the carbon tax/rebate policy implemented a year ago. However, individuals have not yet significantly reduced their emissions, as evidenced by the small percentage of fuel efficient hybrids and electric vehicles (EVs) on the road.

There are a number of lessons from the pandemic that should be valuable for our looming climate change problems.

First, we must rely on facts and scientific research in both emergencies. In both, the research is produced by thousands of talented and dedicated university and government scientists, health and medical researchers for COVID-19 and physical scientists for climate change. From my over 50 years' experience with hundreds of scientists from the physical and biological sciences, I see no reason to suspect that these climate change experts are any less honest, dedicated or competent than the magnificent health care researchers that we are now relying on to produce the game-changing vaccine.

Second, both the health care and climate change professionals have emphasized that their models for predicting the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths and the increase in global temperatures, are very useful, but very imprecise for



these very complex natural phenomena. However, the climate change models all show that without large decreases in CO₂ emissions, the average world temperature could increase by 4°C ± 1°C by 2100 with dire consequences. And remember, unlike the pandemic, there is no such thing as a vaccine to eliminate the continual climate change problems.

Third, it is critical to act quickly on both the pandemic and climate change. In hind-site, most nations and provinces acted too slowly on COVID-19. And already, we have lost over 20 years to cut back on emissions. We did not act for about two months on COVID-19, and in one more month (mid-March and April), COVID-19 exploded. Assuming that one month for COVID-19 = 10 years for climate change (a very rough approximation), I suggest that waiting another ten years on climate change will have similar very negative consequences.

Fourth, climate change, like the pandemic, requires the cooperation and collaboration of individuals, governments and industries *globally* to “flatten the curve” on the increasing CO₂ emissions. Our individual actions (when multiplied by 100s of millions) can make a difference! *Can we cooperate in a similar way to avoid the worst effects of climate change?* Are strong government policies required to get people to decrease their emissions?

I give one example of the important effect that individual actions can have on CO₂ emissions and long-term climate change with less inconvenience than we have had with CO-

VID-19. Close to 25% of *total* emissions are generated by our personal vehicles. Obviously, to decrease our transportation emissions we must drive less (own fewer cars, walk, cycle, or take public transportation) and replace our internal combustion engines (ICEs) with low emission vehicles such as hybrids or EVs which have much lower emissions than ICEs. The long-term reliability and durability of hybrids is demonstrated by the large percentage of taxis that use a hybrid in Canada and abroad. The city emissions are decreased by over 40% in the Toyota Corolla or Camry hybrids versus the ICE versions. If everyone bought a hybrid car/SUV over the next five years, then this would contribute to a ~10% decrease in overall emissions. Of course, home heating, airplane travel, and some food production also result in large emissions which must be decreased.

I suggest that the obligation to buy a hybrid should rest initially on independently-living retired people with good pensions. The ~\$5,000 increase in cost of a hybrid is no more than the cost of a vacation, which is probably not available this year. And that initial expense can be recovered within five to seven years because of gasoline savings and lower maintenance with a hybrid.

Can you make this comparatively trivial change, when you buy a new vehicle, for the benefit of your grandchildren and the planet?

†



THE DISTRIBUTED CHURCH
IS OUR
NEW NORMAL



Joyce Payne
President,
Antler River Watershed Region

We find ourselves in a new reality with 2020's COVID-19 virus pandemic. Who knew!!!! Our "normal" as we once knew it is gone—forever. We are in the midst of responding to the need to be God's church in new and exciting ways. To proclaim the Gospel of Love to ALL!!!! This is GOOD NEWS.

We hold our clergy and faith leaders with prayer and support as they navigate new fields of evangelism and opportunity to share faith, hope and love. Evangelism through digital communion. Thankfully, many congregations have resources to enable them to use technology—albeit some for the very first time, to produce online worship, hold staff and council meetings, engage in online book studies,

bible studies, etc.

Many, however, do not have enough resources to be "on-line." Innovative thinking has communities of faith joining in with neighbours who are able to provide computerized services and outreach. Important, long-avoided and overdue conversations about collaboration, sharing, working together, even amalgamations are happening around how the future will be imagined in a very different way. Many, realizing together we are stronger, will launch initiatives of coming together to support and launch new ministries with new faces.

Telephone calls and personal notes are being reinstated in some areas to reach out, while in others this ongoing practice has been magnified many times over. We see many of our seniors learning and

embracing technology to be able to stay connected with family and friends.

Associate Professor of Biblical Preaching, Luther Seminary, Rev. Joy J. Moore, reminds us *"the Church now finds itself in the public square. We are, through necessity and through technology, finally outside of our doors with hundreds of viewers watching "online church," many or even most of whom are not church-goers and may not even identify as Christian."*

We have a tremendous opportunity before us to be the church of not only our neighbourhoods, but much further beyond. Our challenge is to not stop this innovation once a new normal is with us, but to harness this innovative energy and build on it to further God's mission of love in our world.

May it be so.

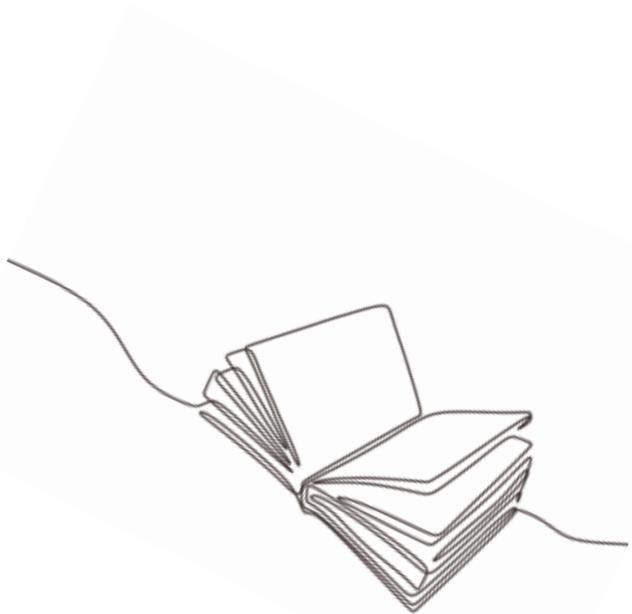
†

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Robyn Marie Butt
Writer in Residence



Catching Covid

This is the back page.

The back page where the strength is, that we never looked at where we imagined we'd put those things we tuck away with deferred hope, or simple reflex or even denial. Rejection. Back page of our life with nothing on it, the blank that feeds, space that calls forth whatever we never did there before. Perhaps we imagined it once as a list.

Here as I list into empty space, unfilled page becomes river for presence. I go still wish those I can't touch the same: that lilt when To Do's disappear and what you needed merely to keep up your life halts, no longer pertinent or possible, revealed as lacking, its value merely presumed on or thrust upon you. And its melting away has become unavoidable, and slowly seems fine, is okay, the blank page

can be loved because of lockdown and the Pandemic it turns out is a state you've never exited

and Recovery this single knowing that when it's all over, and you must return to the front of the manual, you will do so cautiously, no longer willing to forget the skills you discovered, to forgo this space you now inhabit so much more gracefully.

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Caring For Your Oral Health



David Wardlaw

THE R ONLINE

Virtual worship, online worship, worshipping remotely, e-worship: These are various terms for internet-based worship which has risen to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mid-March Ontario government order prohibiting public gatherings has abruptly interrupted the long standing practice of gathering for worship in a sanctuary, mosque, temple, or synagogue and suddenly created a need for some form of virtual worship experience.

In the United Church of Canada, many churches, but not all, have the requisite technical resources to produce an online worship service and have done so. Not surprisingly this has resulted in a range of formats, production approaches, and choices of social media. This article summarizes the results of a survey of six United Churches in southern Ontario offering weekly worship via the internet by highlighting three whose online worship offerings are representative. FSA is not included in this synthesis but a companion article in this issue describes in detail the preparation and delivery of our weekly e-service.

Bethel United Church Rideau Ferry is located in rural eastern Ontario about one hour north of Belleville. Average attendance on Sunday is about 50 and there are 120 people under its care. The minister, Rev. Lynne Gardiner, explained the church made the decision in the first week of the shutdown to livestream Sunday worship on Facebook because it was a technology already in use by the church and some of the members. The service is limited to 30 minutes and streamed live from the sanctuary, but can also be viewed on a delayed basis. The bulletin is a pdf file that is distributed via email to the majority, and a hard copy is mailed to a minority without email access. Emily Gardiner (Lynne's daughter and a Queen's music student) sings the hymns to piano accompaniment

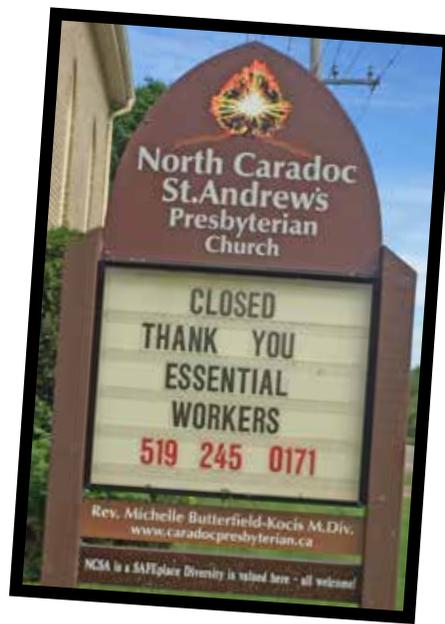
provided by the music director. Words to the hymns are printed in the bulletin. A few volunteers come into the sanctuary during the week to decorate the altar with a theme—this is the “set” for the video production. Some members cannot stream the video service because they do not have access to high speed internet.

Rev. Kerry Stover is an Associate Minister at Kingsway-Lambton United, a large church in Etobicoke (Toronto). One of his responsibilities is preparing and presiding over the weekly Fresh Start service which he describes as ‘traditional-lite.’ It is limited to 45 minutes and features a guest speaker, and includes a prayer, scripture, several hymns and a few announcements. The service segments are recorded in advance in the sanctuary, assembled, and posted on YouTube. Kerry records each segment on his own, moving the camera (his cell phone) around for a different background for each segment. A number of hymns have been recorded in advance by two people singing (Kerry and one other) and a pianist accompanying, and then selectively inserted into the weekly videos. The lyrics are shown on screen to the remote viewers while the hymn is playing. The traditional service at Kingsway-Lambton is prepared and distributed in a manner similar to the Fresh Start service.

Waterford United Church is a small congregation (similar to Bethel Rideau Ferry) in the small town of Waterford in Norfolk County. The weekly service is video recorded every Saturday morning in the sanctuary by the minister, Rev. Ed Turner, the church organist, and two choir members, with Ed's daughter being the videographer. The service is then distributed in two distinct ways: by YouTube and email. The YouTube version is simply the full video recording posted on YouTube where it can be viewed at any time. The email version is a hybrid format which can be described as an expanded Sunday bulletin consisting of text for everything that is spoken,



RISE OF WORSHIP



including Ed's message, plus embedded links to video of segments of the full service (hymns, other music, and the minister's message). For those who don't have email access, the email is printed and delivered by car (about 10 or so people). In addition, the video of the full service is posted on the church's Facebook page and a link to the video provided in the minister's "Community Check In" email newsletter.

The sudden switch to internet-based worship services has meant a steep learning curve for most ministers. I asked several of the ministers who were interviewed whether their theology education and initial ministerial training included any formal instruction or practical training on digital media or video production. The answer was no in each case. Rev. Kerry Stover describes his video production unit as "me, myself, and I" and Rev. Lynne Gardiner describes hers as "Emily," (Emily being her university-aged daughter). Typically ministers have assistance and support from their directors of music, and a few other volunteers, e.g., several choir members, lay readers, and/or a tech team. The workload for preparing an e-worship service is generally greater than for an in-person service due to the added elements of filming, editing and posting online.

The reach of online versus in-person worship services is currently unknown but there is some suggestive data. Three of the churches in my survey reported that the number of 'views' or 'hits' on the weekly video is 3-4 times the average in-church attendance on Sunday. (A similar ratio has been observed for FSA.) However, a 'view' or 'hit' is defined as staying connected for more than 5 seconds, so there is no way of knowing the number participating in a meaningful way but it is conceivable that the latter number may well exceed the average Sunday attendance. Typically there are members and people under the care of a church who are unable to attend worship in person for reasons unrelated to the pandemic but who now have

the option to 'attend' via the internet. However, access to some level of high speed internet is necessary for streaming videos. 90% of Canadian homes have internet access but not everyone has high speed service, a situation prevalent in rural Canada where 40% of internet connections are low speed basic service. In the course of preparing this article, I had numerous conversations with individuals about online worship and learned that some are viewing services from churches other than their own, the choice often based on a pre-existing personal connection.

What is the future of online worship post-pandemic as we eventually emerge from the restrictions on large gatherings? The answer will likely vary from church to church. It may depend on whether there will be new occupancy limits based on the number of people that can be in the sanctuary while maintaining a 2m separation from one's nearest neighbours. Hopefully input will also be sought from those who can now access the service online but are unable to attend in-person due to age, disability, or lack of transportation.

Three months ago Rev. Lynne Gardiner at Bethel Rideau Ferry never imagined that this is how she would be doing church. Her church board has adopted the following as a working assumption: no return to normal use of sanctuary until a vaccine is available; no choir for the foreseeable future. In her words, "We need to do church differently. There won't be a post-Covid, rather a new normal." †

In addition to the three churches mentioned in the text, the following United Churches were included in the survey: East End United in Toronto; Westdale United in Hamilton; and the Chalmers United-Sydenham Street United consortium in Kingston.



Merran Neville (on behalf of the FSA Tech Team)

Sunday, March 15th, 2020 was the last worship service held in the Sanctuary, following the closure of churches mandated by the Ontario Government and supported by the United Church of Canada, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the closure, Rev. Michelle Down bravely decided to prepare a video service for the following Sunday, March 22nd. With the vision of including music from archived recordings, it was apparent that to continue with such a plan for the long haul a tech team should be formed. The team came together in time to prepare a video service for March 29th. Tech team members are Rev. Michelle Down, Kathryn Skelly, Jen Sadler and Merran Neville, with additional support from Joyce Payne, Jim Silcox and Willis Buckingham. Jim and Willis provide photos from their large collection taken over many years.

Rev. Michelle prepares and records the service at home, using her regular cell phone. She selects an appropriate backdrop, sets up her cell phone to the right height which includes a plant stand, a banker's box, several puzzles, a hymn book, and then leans it all on her recipe box! Michelle writes the Call to Worship and Opening Prayer and then invites congregational members to record themselves in their homes. We are so grateful that folks have stepped up to participate and share their gifts in this way.

The music is being selected from archived recordings dating back to January 2016. This gives us the wonderful opportunity to hear once more the playing and conducting of Terry Head over the three years of

his music ministry with us at FSA, and Paul Merritt before him. Kathryn Skelly is building a spreadsheet using the Orders of Service, which she has from her office computer. She is including all the music from Junior and Senior choirs, FSA Strings, Laudamus Bells and Joyful Ringers. Each piece of music that is chosen has to meet copyright requirements and also recording quality. Some hymns are also being used from the Senior Choir's CD of *Favourite Hymns*. Merran Neville makes musical selections which seem appropriate for a given service and then these are put through this vetting process. Kathryn also prepares the image slides of texts for the music. It is fortunate to have photos from the archive that Jim and Willis have created.

Once all the recorded sections are complete and meet the requirements, Jen Sadler, our wonderful multimedia expert, assembles them in Adobe Premiere Pro to produce the smooth and seamless video which we watch on a Sunday morning. Jen is our guru giving her expert advice about what works best from a video perspective.

It is fair to say that as much effort goes into preparing each video as into preparing a regular service. Every week, 30, 40 or 50 hours are spent creating the recording of the service. It is finally a joy to hear the finished video, and then as a team, we move right on to preparing the next one! We pray that you are blessed with this form of worship, and trust that the Holy Spirit is reaching you in new and wonderful ways through this technology .†



Here is the Tech Team joyously at work! from upper left: Rev. Michelle Down, Jen Sadler, Merran Neville and Kathryn Skelly.



CREATING A VIRTUAL WORSHIP SERVICE AT FSA



Clockwise
adler, Merran

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Jean Wright

May 3, 2020. This marks the seventh Sunday that I haven't been able to "go to church." Now I reflect on it, sitting at the kitchen table on a Sunday morning, drinking my coffee, and watching the video of a service, (to date— four from First-St. Andrew's and two from Kingsway Lambton U.C. in Toronto where my friend Kerry Stover is a minister.)

How does this affect me? Appreciating that this is obeying the law re the pandemic, what are my feelings as I watch the service? First, of course, I am full of admiration for the technical work that church people have put into this. Just getting the service to come up on my iPad has pushed my technical expertise (or lack thereof) to the limit.

All right. YouTube. There it is with comforting organ music by Paul Merritt or Terry Head. And there is Michelle, but she is not in her ministerial robe, or at the front of the sanctuary. She is speaking from home. But as she speaks, her words, her warm familiar manner, settle me down. Bit by bit I am drawn in to concentrating on her message. There is a theme: legacy, volunteers, Easter. I'm drawn in.

Then there is a hymn. That is a disaster. After singing in the choir for over forty years, singing a hymn by myself, at the kitchen table, sounds awful. So I shut up, listen to the recording of the choir/congregation singing, and I concentrate on the words of the hymn.

Ah the liturgists. I know them, and I relax as in each service they do their presentation with sincerity and obvious preparation. I feel a little awkward bowing my head and saying the Lord's Prayer aloud, but that passes, and I feel calm, and dare I say, "filled with the Spirit."

The final hymn—drowned out by Susie playing one of her World Wrestling videos.

What I miss, of course, is sitting in the sanctuary surrounded by people I care about, and who, over the years have supported me and my family through good times and bad. So I finish the service with my own prayer of thanksgiving for the blessing First-St. Andrew's has been in my life, and a prayer for all the people affected by the pandemic.

Amen. +



TWO FR THE (HO





Marion Evans

How fortunate we at First-St. Andrew's are to be able to attend church services virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. For my husband Barrie and me, the services since April 5, 2020 have filled a gap left by cancelled choir practices and Sunday singing and are enabling us to remain connected with our church family and to receive welcome words of comfort and hope.

What else is there about virtual church that is so successful? Well, we have had the gift by Merran Neville, Kathryn Skelly, and Jen Sadler of their expertise to help Rev. Michelle in realizing this concept which fits in so well with this year's theme of 2020 Vision. Using YouTube, Zoom, and video clips recorded at home are definitely new ways to worship. The numbers of viewers documented on YouTube have been greater than at our normal services, some of them former FSA members whom I know. In the future, could our real-time services also appear on YouTube to appeal to others?

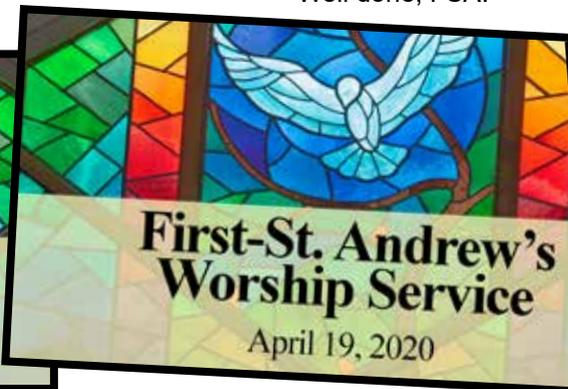
A part of the success of our new services is dependent on our important church archives, the work of volunteers. Previously recorded organ, handbell and choral music has enlivened and normalized the virtual services. I was especially pleased that in the May 2nd service, one of the recordings was of the Senior Choir, led by Dr. Victoria Meredith, singing "Lead Kindly Light" from Howard Goodall's *Eternal Light: A Requiem*, the Good Friday 2019 music chosen by Terry Head, first performed by us some years ago under the direction of Paul Merritt.

Of course, Michelle has done so much more to make our virtual church interesting, varied, and inspiring. As visual aids, she has used props, art works, her own palm and fingers on Palm Sunday. The discordant sound of nails being pounded into the cross created suspense and drama during the Good Friday service. She has also enabled the continuing participation of children, teens, adults, and seniors as liturgists, so important in our regular services. And it has been great fun to watch how she has colour-coordinated her clothes to the season and the sermons' themes!

Well done, FSA!

†

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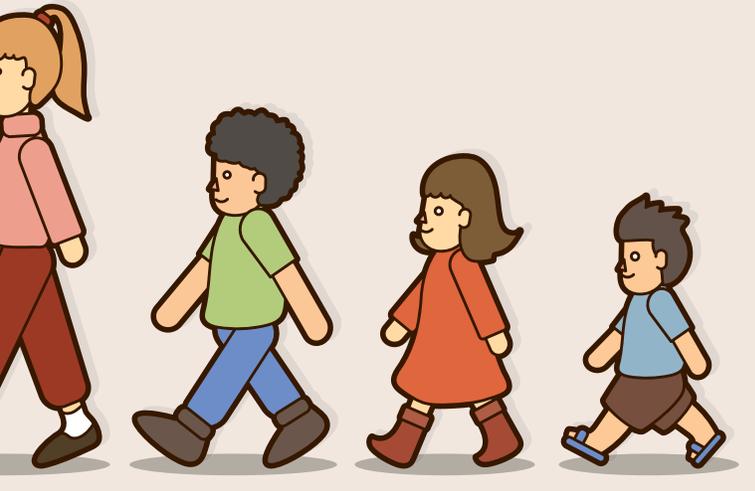
Our Attitude

It's very hard to believe that on Sunday, March 15th, we were talking together, laughing, doing crafts, discussing bible stories, and playing games at FSA Church School. By the next week, March 22nd, all churches and church schools in Ontario (and Canada) were shut down to prevent further spread of the COVID-19 virus. Within the week, under the guidance of the FSA Faith Development Committee Co-Chairs, Jo Ann Silcox and Katie Glaves, and the 2019-20 volunteer Church School team—Allyson Watson, Karol Boyd, Chris Lindsay, Kes Sebborn, Kathryn Skelly, Ann MacPhail and Linda Badke, we met by Zoom to discuss our options. Our main concerns were for our Church School youth and young families, and how to provide support and ensure the youth stay connected with their FSA church school friends.

We implemented different solutions for different age groups. The **JK-Grade 2** children have been receiving a weekly Church School lesson by e-mail from Ann MacPhail, which includes a link to a YouTube bible story video and a related craft (15 children, 11 families). A Mother's Day craft package and cookies were delivered to six of our young families.

The **Grades 3-5** children (typically 10) have been coming together using Zoom between 10:30-11:00am each Sunday. Approximately six **Grades 6-8** join by Zoom between 11:00-11:30 am. The children love seeing their church friends on the computer screen. Allyson Watson, assisted by Kes Sebborn, Jane Dockrill and invited guests, such as Rev. David and Susan McKane have





been presenting bible curriculum, engaging these children in thoughtful discussion, and developing on-line bible story games and activities. Each week, two to three members of the FSA congregation are selected to receive a card from these Grade 3-8 children. Through COVID-19 these children are certainly learning to *'treat your neighbours the way you would like to be treated.'* Matthew 7:12.

Although employed full time, Chris Lindsay has found time to organize a Zoom gathering for the **Youth Group (Grades 6–10)**. Time together is focused on having the youth connect with each other and socialize. Chris has become expert at hosting online games such as Charades, Taboo, Pictionary, Trivia and other games which are greatly enjoyed by this very companionable group of FSA youth. Next, they are venturing into the world of family-friendly online games!

Finally, we would like to welcome back our beloved FSA Youth & Young Families Coordinator, Jane Dockrill. Jane is thrilled to get in on the action at FSA once again. She feels the current youth leaders have made "Zoom" gatherings easy to take part in and it is so good for us all to see each other, leaders, children, and the moms and dads too! Jane looks forward to planning for future youth and young family activities during COVID-19 and for when we can be together again. Jane would like us to know that *"I am eternally grateful for the support I received while healing and recovering. Payback is coming! I owe you all—young and old, a tremendous heap of thanks! Hope to see you soon."* †



FSA COVID-19 Church School Team (left to right) Allyson Watson, Kes Sebborn, and Jane Dockrill, Ann MacPhail (pictured at top) and Chris Lindsay (not pictured)

FSA CHURCH SCHOOL AND YOUTH GROUP DURING COVID-19



David McKane

When we first emigrated to Canada in the late fifties, the way of keeping in touch with family in Ireland was those little blue Airmail letters. With great regularity those letters would drop through our mail slot. Like thirsty trekkers they were always the first opened, the family gulping down the news of family left behind. Something like that has happened to us during Covid-19. We are self-distancing, gathering places such as churches and malls are closed, parks and playgrounds are off limit as we are compelled to be creative in the ways we keep in touch.

Thank God we live in an age of phones and computers with calls, e-mails, tweets, Zoom, Skype and the internet to keep us informed and connected. The challenge for Pastoral Care is that many seniors do not have the ability to use such means of communication beyond the basic telephone. Our generation and the ones below us are tech savvy, but COVID-19 has accentuated this generational divide. Since I cannot visit in person, I am visiting seniors by phone. While not quite the same, no smiles, no hugs, no obvious sense of concern or anxiety, no ability to “read the person” unless they tell you, such phone calls have become the new “norm.” Of course that’s not all bad. While it took me a month to work my way through the list I can now cover the list in a few hours each week. This means that I am in more regular contact with our seniors and shut-ins. The ones I cannot contact are those in hospital or those suffering from various forms or stages of dementia. Where possible I can and do contact their families. Then there are the deaths, and there have been several connected to COVID-19. Since funerals are not possible some families have chosen to wait until the ban is lifted while some have opted for grave-side committals. Pastoral Care letters are another way of keeping in touch and Jo Ann and I have been sending out such letters by email on a monthly basis to those who have access to the internet. I have been impressed and encouraged by the many ways in which the church has kept in touch during these difficult days. While eager to get back to face-to-face visits before my contract ends in June, I can see that going forward, Pastoral Care, like church meetings, medical appointments, and visits with family and friends, can be greatly facilitated by technology such as Zoom.

Several questions remain. With all the technology at our disposal why are families not allowed/able to be “present” to those in hospital or care facilities, especially at time of death? And, after years of including Chaplains as part of the health care team and recognizing that spiritual and emotional health is as valid as physical and medical health, especially when physical health declines and the medical resources have run their course, it interests me that Chaplains were summarily excluded from hospitals during this pandemic. These are questions for another article at another time. †

PASTORAL CARE IN AN AGE OF COVID-19

The Robin's Nest



Florence Niven

The Robins are back. They've built a spectacularly messy nest on top of the light by our front door, obscuring the warm glow of our Shaker-style lantern with long tendrils of garden debris—once the protective layer around last year's perennials, now a tattered veil.

Our feathered friends are not happy with us. They flap their wings in alarm when we venture outside, scold us with loud staccato chirps, 'Step away! Step away!' Even on our own front step we're reminded of boundaries. Respecting the rules of social distancing, we choose an alternate exit. Finding, as we've had to during this pandemic, different ways of doing things.

It's interesting that this time of global isolation began during Lent, the season Christians traditionally find themselves contemplating a metaphorical wilderness. Waiting for the last exhausting exclamations of winter to subside. Watching for the many gifts of rebirth and renewal Spring has to offer. Except this year, the celebration has been delayed. The light obscured by a tattered veil. We must be patient. Mindful.

We stay home for the well-being of our communities, especially those most

vulnerable, and pray our politicians make wise decisions on our behalf. We stay home for the nurses and doctors so they can better manage the overwhelming task before them. We stay home for the essential workers making sure our cities, towns, and villages function during and after this crisis.

Adapting to our new normal, we reach out to one another through the wonders of technology—frequent 'phone calls, virtual chats. We hold office meetings from the safety of home quarantine. Seek online educational assistance for children—and parents trying to teach. Support food banks and Red Cross workers with paperless e-transfers and fervent prayers.

We stream yoga, art and music classes to move and be moved. We hold family game nights, inviting cross-country participation, to remind us how it feels to laugh, to be with one another.

In doing so we pick up the ties broken by the virus and weave them into new connections. Trusting, anticipating, knowing, the restrictive mandates will eventually be lifted. Through it all we stand firm in our belief that we are not alone. We live in God's world. We seek out signs of hope in the wakening gardens and morning birdcalls. The

unfurling of tender leaves, the burst of magnolia and cherry blossoms.

In time we will ease back into our communities and social groups. Cautiously, optimistically, reclaim the natural rhythms of our lives. We can never go back of course; our paths are forever changed. But we can move forward having learned from this experience, grown from this challenge. We will mourn our losses. Laud our heroes. Be stronger for having endured.

The Robins are back. There's hope. The light is partially obscured just now, but make no mistake. It's still there. †

Florence Niven and her husband, Don, attend Edith Rankin Memorial United Church in Kingston, Ontario. The editor became aware of this piece via Margaret Wardlaw who had received it from Florence in April 2020. This essay was originally published on the Edith Rankin website and is reproduced here with permission of the author.

MILESTONES

DEATHS

Thelma Stevenson, March 28, 2020

Jack Lewis, April 11, 2020

Douglas Bocking, May 9, 2020

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- A ACTIVATE YOUR FAITH
- N NOURISH YOUR SOUL
- T TALK WITH GOD
- I INTERCEDE FOR OTHERS
- N NESTLE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD
- E ELEVATE GOD IN WORSHIP

NOTEWORTHY

Viki Meredith

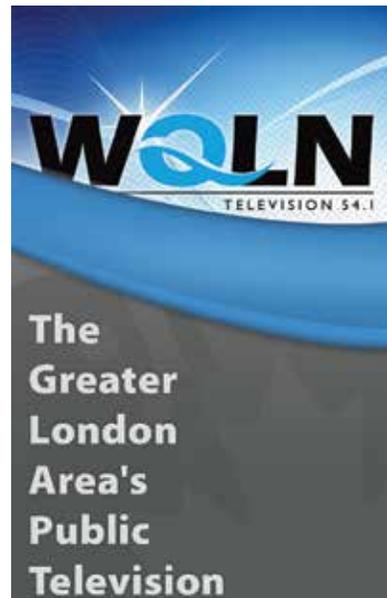
We extend our congratulations to Viki Meredith, our interim choir director, and choral conductor, professor emerita at Western University, on winning the **2020 National Choral Award for Distinguished Service**.

Established in 1988 to honour outstanding contributions to Canadian choral music, the National Choral Awards are presented every two years. Winners are selected by a panel of choral experts appointed by Choral Canada. The Choral Canada Distinguished Service Award is given in recognition of long-term service to choral music in Canada. Awards are based on the significance and extent of transformative service in building, nurturing or promoting the Canadian choral community through a primary career in Canada. The individual’s contributions may have been made through teaching, conducting, or leadership.

We certainly have been honoured to have Viki with us at FSA during the past few months. †

Cara Bulmer

FSA sends hearty congratulations to Cara Bulmer on her 50th birthday, June 8th.



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