

Red Door Chronicle



A newsletter of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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MINISTRY IN A TIME OF COVID



IN A TIME OF COVID, MANY churches have gone dark: and many are rumoured never to open again. Needless to say, the life of the church, it would seem—like so much else—teeters on the cusp of obliteration. “Is Jesus still Lord?” some ask. “Which is (now) Lord?” they also ask: God very God, or a coronavirus which can kill or cripple (or leave unscathed) at complete random?

By faith I believe I know the answer, but in an age in which fear is now the “new normal,” and with it a desperate search for God’s mercy, this remains (for many) an open question. “Five months into the year 2020 and it already feels like a new era,” wrote CNN analyst Nic Robertson in May: “now there is only BC and AC—before and after coronavirus.

And suddenly the dynamics of almost every single geopolitical dispute are being exacerbated by the pandemic, sharpened by the complexity and urgency of the situation.”

Sadly, for many life is no longer written in what novelist, poet, and Presbyterian minister Frederick Beuchner called the “alphabet of grace,” but in letters of despair, writ large; letters which increasingly spell out a new and frightening vocabulary:

Covid-19. A code-name for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, a.k.a. SARS-Co-V-2, first identified in Wuhan, China;

Social distancing, (a.k.a. **physical distancing**). Maintaining a certain physical distance between people, especially in public;

Sheltering in place. Staying indoors by

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governmental decree;

Flattening the curve. Slowing the spread of an epidemic—and/or pandemic—so as not to overwhelm the health care system;

Incubation period. The period between infection and the onset of symptoms;

Zoonotic. Any disease of animals communicable to humans;

Herd immunity. The theory that growing resistance to a pathogen that occurs when a very high percentage of individuals have developed immunity to the same either through vaccination, or developing antibodies on their own, i.e. through exposure to the same. And/or, the U.S. Administration's idea of an answer.

(See www.nature.com, uploaded 21 October 2020, "The false promise of herd immunity for COVID-19.");

New normal. What life will be like during—and after—Covid-19. Yet to be defined . . .

"New normal" . . . "Yet to be defined" . . . What could these mysterious phrases possibly mean?

Believe it or not, the disciples faced the same question. In spite of a grisly death by crucifixion, in an extraordinary, life-changing demonstration of God's power, Jesus had risen miraculously from the grave. Nevertheless, as the disciples cowered in fear of the authorities, doubts remained vis-à-vis the fate of the nascent church. Would Jesus' extraordinary tours of ministry resume? Would Jesus stick around, or skedaddle back to heaven? And the most important question of all: Were he to leave them, how would the

disciples then do ministry, without the ongoing presence of the Lord?

I suspect they gathered about Jesus anxiously. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore, the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). In other words, "What's coming down the road, dear Jesus? Now that you're leaving us, what's going to happen? What's going to be the 'new normal?'"

Sound familiar? Sound 2020-like? Ever been so overwhelmed by fear, i.e. of the future, or of change; or of suffering; or of the unknown; that you are not just sheltered-in-place, quite against your will, but actually "frozen-in-place"? You can't go back, of course—one can never go back—and yet you just can't quite move forward, either And so you're stuck, like the proverbial frog in a beaker—to mix metaphors—waiting for the water to come to a boil. Yes, this kind of experience is a very "Covid" thing. "You can't go out; you can't stay in. You can't lie down; you can't get up. You can't get going; you can't stay still."

But the reply of Jesus to this kind of paralysis is very clear. "My dear disciples, you who have been my dearest friends . . . It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **But don't despair: you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything

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I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you, always, to the very end of the age!!”

And with these words, Jesus ascends into heaven.

The alphabet of despair? The vocabulary of fear? The words of extinction? Not on your life.

Yes, it would seem Jesus had ascended into heaven *without quite telling them* what the “new normal” would be. (Don’t you just hate that, i.e. people who don’t provide the explanation you’re looking for, or the instructions you feel you so clearly need?!? Frustrating? That’s putting it mildly, 007!!) But as it turns out the disciples *had everything they needed*, and more!

“My friends,” says Jesus, in effect, “you have, and will have, everything you need to move forward; to be the church; to do ministry. And I want you to move out in ministry as never before! *So get going!!!*”

Indeed, I daresay the Lord Jesus left the church with three extraordinary gifts, to inaugurate a whole “new normal,” and they were these: **Number one**, the vision. (In other

words, hope with legs!) **Number two**, the power. And **number three**, the presence:—the ongoing presence of the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. “Lo I am with you always,” Jesus promised, “even to the end of the age.” (St. Andrew’s motto, by the way, emblazoned on our letterhead.)

Will Covid mark the end the church, and the end of the age? God being God, I believe they won’t! And so, dear reader, I invite you to press on through the first edition of our newly-minted *Red Door Chronicle* to discover what your church—even St. Andrew’s Presbyterian of Penticton BC—is doing in an age of Covid, undaunted by fear! After all, the gifts of God for the people of God still remain! Yes, we still live in the in-between time between the coming of the Kingdom of God and its glorious consummation; the *now-and-not-yet* time. And yet God being our helper, we bravely carry on . . . We have the vision; we have the power; and we have the presence—even the presence of the Spirit of God.

Blessings, as always,
in Jesus’ Name, Colin

CHRISTMAS PRAYER LABYRINTH



THE UNSTOPPABLE ST. Andrew’s! Your Clerk, Session, Sunday School teachers, Minister, and gifted and visionary people, have been praying, talking, dreaming, and think-

ing hard about how we can help meet people’s need to celebrate Christmas during the pandemic; teas and concerts and plays and Walks to Bethlehem (our trademark ministries) now being impossible. But tentative plans are taking shape. And one of these “shapes” has ‘stretched’ and ‘meandered’ into a Christmas Prayer Labyrinth!

WHAT IS A LABYRINTH, AND WHAT DOES IT mean to walk it? Walking a labyrinth is an age-old form of prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, and repentance. To the early Christians walking a labyrinth symbolized making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There are no rules to walking a labyrinth, other than keeping silent and focusing on prayer.

There will be at least seven stations, with music by pianist Dennis Nordlund and more Nativity scenes than you can count:— decorated windows; candles; and beautiful spiritually-based decorations everywhere. To give you a glimpse of what is coming, here is a write-up from one of the stations. Its theme? The beautiful splendor of God’s holiness:

UNCREATED LIGHT: From Glory into Glory

THE “UNCREATED LIGHT” WAS A STRONG theological theme in the first centuries of the church and it still is in Eastern Orthodox churches. The imagery of light or fire appears frequently in Biblical passages relates to encounters with God’s presence. Some examples are Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3); the radiant face of Moses returning from Mount Tabor (Exodus 34); the transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9); and the tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2). This light was the source of “burning” the disciples experienced in their hearts on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24).

Jesus said that, “When the eye is single (and sound) your body will be filled with light” (Matthew 6:22). Paul spoke of putting on “armor” of light (Romans 13:12). This

light is not just a metaphor. It is a description of a spiritual experience which is the transforming power of God at work within us. Most people who practice being aware of God’s Presence within and around themselves will experience ever more tangible awareness of this vision and life-transforming light. True Beauty indeed!

GUESTS PROCEEDING THROUGH THE LABYRINTH will be prompted to keep returning their attention to God’s presence within them. The ideal goal over time is to maintain this awareness as people walk through life. This is what Paul calls “walking in the Spirit” (Galatians 5). Another name Paul has for this moment by moment awareness is “continuous prayer” (1 Thes. 5).



Light Enters the World

watercolour by Bob Pushak

PLEASE NOTE: **SINCE THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES TO SURGE** we will postpone this event for another year (or prepare an Easter version, should Easter (4 April 2021) suddenly reappear from the wilds of pandemic). In other words, all that we have prepared will **not** be going to waste. After all, in God’s Kingdom, as C. S. Lewis pointed out in his Narnia stories, no good thing is ever lost, nor effort wasted. All that has to change is one’s perspective.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

“CHRISTMAS IS NOT ONLY A UNIQUE TIME IN the life of every child, it’s a unique time in the life of the church—and an unprecedented opportunity for daring and creative ministry,” wrote Colin in a December 2007 cover story for the *Presbyterian Record*. (No longer in publication.) “Call it madness, but the doors swing open, and hearts and minds of every description are suddenly willing to hear the Gospel. [And so,] **let the church preach**, to the greater glory of God.” But what happens during a time of Covid? What about the people who have filled our sanctuary every Christmas Eve? Where will they go, beside nowhere? Or do for Christmas Eve worship, beside nothing? For this reason, we are determined to provide Christmas Eve ministry, not only for the greater glory of God, but to bring hope and uplift during what may be one of the darkest Christmas holidays in memory. Our plan? To provide several services on December 24, both day and evening, each limited to 50 participants. Dennis and Colin are already planning the music, which may include a virtual choir. And what is a virtual

choir? It’s a filmed compendium of choristers, brought together by technology, each prerecording his or her own part, alone, on video. With some technical ‘finessing,’ the individual videos are then brought together on the same screen without any of the sing-



ers having rehearsed as an ensemble, resulting in a choir of voices, sounding together! Some virtual choirs have hundreds upon hundreds of voices, but most are more modest. In any case, please pray for this important outreach!

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADE



GOOD NEWS! The Church has received a \$5000.00 Technology Upgrade Grant from the Presbytery of Kamloops. With this we are develop-

ing a new website with the help of local con-

tractors; installing permanent cameras for recording and streaming services; and purchasing an LCD projector (and screen) for the Sanctuary, both of which can also be used downstairs for presentations and workshops. We are also replacing **all** the fluorescent/incandescent/halogen light bulbs in both Church and Annex with corresponding LED bulbs, which not only generate a fraction of

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the heat, but also consume a fraction of the power. (The ornamental sconces in the Sanctuary, for example, now draw 400 watts when lit. The replacement bulbs—all 16 of them, each at 3.6w—draw a mere 58 watts. That’s a dramatic 70% saving.) In addition, we are upgrading the fixtures in the chancel (i.e. choir loft) to accentuate both the 1964 stained-glass window and our hanging tapestries; and lighting the Faraday window (at the back the Sanctuary) on a timer, so that this

wonderfully-evocative blue window—and the Church itself—will be much more visible at night, perhaps piquing community interest in our work. (A project that was suggested years ago.) Government rebates and dramatically lower electricity costs will allow us to recoup our lighting investment in just a scant few years. Plus, we will be making a small contribution to the important effort to reduce the climate crisis.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

WE ARE PRESENTLY IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH Pathways Drug and Alcohol services who would like to use our Lower Hall. (Their current facility is too small for social distancing face to face appointments or for groups.) We are also in the process of moving Colin—who to spare the church further expense volunteered to go half-time from May to July, and is now working at 63% of a full-time position)—to a 75% Call.

We want to thank you! We are deeply appreciative of your donations. We really need them since we still need to pay salaries and bills during the pandemic. Donations can

be dropped off at the Annex (there’s a mail slot in the front door); or by signing up for PAR (i.e. Pre-Authorized Remittance; please call Michelle at the office for this); or by clicking on the Canada Helps tab directly from our website (godshouse.ca), which facilitates giving by credit card, either regularly, or on a one-time-only basis. Our mailing address, by the way, is 157 Wade Avenue West, Penticton BC, V2A 1T7, or you can phone us at (250) 492 8304; or email our bookkeeper Michelle at doorwarden.godshouse@gmail.com. Again, thank you for your generous support of God’s work, critical during this ongoing time of Covid.

SUNDAY SCHOOL



THROUGHOUT THE pandemic, Bob and Nadia have continued to be in touch with our Sunday School families, both present and past, on an almost weekly basis. Bob continues to use his mental health

knowledge on how to foster healthy development in children to guide his interactions with families. Most of the children are thriving, but there are two families who are struggling:—so we welcome your prayers.

Last year, the Sunday School children created a book called “Encounters with God’s Pres-

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ence,” inspired by the spirituality of the Bible. We made the book as beautiful as possible, so that it might become a keepsake. The book summarized Sunday school lessons and included the children’s artwork. Bob included notes for the parents—and for the children when they grow older—describing how our relationship with God (through prayer)

changes us at a fundamental level, even changing how our brains work. God being our helper, these changes enhance both healthy development in children and spiritual maturity in adults, making both children and adults into kinder and more compassionate people. God is good!

PRAYER REQUESTS

*BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION,
WITH THANKSGIVING, LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD. (PHILIPPIANS 4:6)*



THE ST. ANDREW’S PRAYER GROUP CONTINUES TO MEET WEDNESDAYS AT 7:00 P.M. PLEASE PASS prayer requests on to Colin at 250 462 1901. We will be delighted to pray for you, and bless you, in Jesus’ Name. Join us as we pray for:

- Inez Pringle, who is recovering at home from surgery;
- Frazer and Iza’s daughter-in-law Margaret, who is receiving chemotherapy (and responding well, thanks be to God);
- Tony Vant Geloof, who is unwell and is in a long process of diagnosis and treatment;
- Joan Vant Geloof, who is recovering from hip surgery, and gradually gaining back her mobility;
- All those in long term care, especially Bob Hayhurst;
- All those sheltering at home, and bereft of family and friends and loved ones;
- Alexa Knodel, a high school student and former Sunday school student who has returned to Penticton from Didsbury, Alberta, and is now staying with Bob and Nadia. She is looking for low-Covid-risk work, i.e. snow shovelling or yard work, and can be reached at 250 460 4607;
- Stephan, father to Michaela Belanger, who is approaching his 90th birthday;
- Yurdle Vant Geloof, as she studies for her Class 4 Driver’s License;
- Ashlin Vant Geloof, that together with youth everywhere she would find peace, purpose, reconciliation, and a profound sense of God’s love for her;
- Colin Cross, our Minister, who is working reduced hours, and at the behest of Session and Presbytery has been asked to limit his ministry in accordance with this;
- The church’s ongoing work of outreach during Covid-time, especially at Christmas;
- Debbie Norris, that she would sleep well, and blessedly, in the coming days and weeks.

THANKS



BLESSING

FINALLY, WE WISH TO SAY HOW deeply we appreciate the support and volunteer help of so many lovely people! Including: **(1) Kurtis Robinson.** Kurtis has generously and cheerfully stepped up to the plate to keep on top of church maintenance. (An important job at the best of times.) He not only cut the lawn this summer, but tested fire alarms, weeded the parking lot, raked leaves, blew out the irrigation system, and much, much more! Thank you, Kurtis!!! **(2) Nadia Pushak.** With the utmost care and attention, Nadia kept the Annex garden in tip-top shape; pruning, deadheading, weeding. (You name it she did it, including graciously interacting with passers-by, who love our little garden and its fountain!) Thank you, Nadia!!! **(3) Jan Higgins.** Like Kurtis, Jan graciously stepped up to the plate to do the work of Treasurer—a big job!—in the absence of a congregationally-elected volunteer. Thank you, Jan!!! **(4) Carol Hayhurst.** If you've been watching our services online, have you noticed the wonderful decorations on the Communion Table? They are the work of

Carol Hayhurst, with more to come! Thank you, Carol!!! **(5) Nolan Adam.** Nolan is not a member of our congregation, except in honorary terms! (Nolan and his wife Abigail operate Providence Funeral Home, on Main Street at Bennett Avenue.) *And well he deserves this honour!* At the beginning of the pandemic, Nolan immediately volunteered to help us livestream our services. Not only has Nolan been behind the camera most weeks—and training volunteers for this work when not—but he generously offered us Providence's Vimeo account, free of charge, in order to facilitate our broadcasts, something which would have been a significant expense. Thank you, Nolan!!! **(6) Bob Pushak.** The pandemic has not been an easy time. As our Clerk of Session, Bob has outdone himself keeping in touch with the congregation, and with Presbytery, and undertaking the work of ministry wherever ministry has been needed. Thank you, Bob; and thank you, Lord, for so many giving, good-hearted, kind, and generous people! God is so very good:—so too his people! Let us bless and thank Him!

