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## **A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION**

November 13, 2020

A year ago, I had surgery on my shoulder. It was fairly serious in the sense that it was very broken. When I woke up from the anaesthesia, I felt excruciating pain not in my shoulder: in my leg. Due to the extra hours I was in surgery (I have enough screws and plates in my right arm to start a hardware store) I have a compressed nerve in my back that has led to terrible nerve pain in my leg. I can't explain it well; however, as it was told to me, nerve pain is a long game when it comes to healing. The trauma of that day is long behind me mentally. Because I'm on a high dose of medication, I have been fighting fatigue and forgetfulness. I can no longer walk far distances thus ending my walking around Moncton that gave me exercise and a lot of pleasure as I studied the city's business and old homes from sidewalks and listened to podcasts.

Because things are coming to a head for me physically, it was suggested that I go see a Registered Massage Therapist. We did some exercises to help him understand the root of my pain and get an idea of the causes of it. One exercise involved holding out my arm and hand as he said, "Don't let me bend your fingers." Easy enough, I thought. He couldn't bend my fingers. I passed that test. Then he brushed his hand lightly past my surgical scar and we did the exercise again. This time, my fingers fell. We did the same test again in a few different ways. Each time he went back to my scar, I failed.

I can't stop thinking about it. Thanks to physiotherapy and an amazing surgeon my shoulder, aside from some stiffness, is healed. I get that our bodies are a collection of muscles and nerves, but I didn't understand the test or why my fingers did what they did. The massage therapist explained to me the complexity of the brain: it still thinks I'm injured. I was holding tension without even realizing it. I hold my shoulder differently. My muscle memory was still focused on the injury a year later.

During our Sunday gathering, I feel like we are holding some tension. We aren't sure what to do. Even if we are sure, it feels unnatural to us and goes against our instincts and therefore we reject it. Yes, people know how to seat themselves, and yes, we know how to come and go. And, yes, sometimes it is hard to breathe when the mask is over your nose. However, we are doing things like this for very good reasons.

Like many of you, I am very impressed with Dr. Lisa Barrett who appears on CTV news with Steve Murphy on a fairly regular basis. Last night, as they discussed the outbreak of COVID-19 cases in Clayton Park. Referring to asymptomatic spread, she said that what we do know are the things we can do to protect ourselves and each other: wear masks, social distance, and wash our hands.

We have been following these procedures at the church as we ask people to stay six feet apart when entering and leaving the building as our entrances and exits small and (as recommended by The

United Church of Canada) we will escort you to a seat as they are all clearly marked with the ends marked off, not unlike the Capital Theatre or the Avenir Centre. This virus is in our province. We are being diligent even if we are suffering from COVID fatigue and feel like we are going overboard despite our low numbers of infection at present. By doing all of these things, we are practicing an overabundance of care.

What we ask is for the congregation to understand that, for the time being, things will be different; however, as we have more and more services it won't feel so different and our responses will in fact be automatic. We are social creatures and even I find myself guilty of reaching out my hand or tempted to stay and chat awhile. I love that interaction. But, while we are in a building with no air circulation and small entrances and exits, the current way of doing things is the safest way of doing things.

I thank you for your understanding as we work through this together. It's new to all of us.

Our bodies and minds are holding the tension of trying to have gatherings during a global pandemic, whether it's a hockey game, gatherings with friends and family, or church services. Even if we aren't conscious of it, the tension we are feeling is there.

My hope is that we are able to be graceful towards each other even if we don't like the new ways of doing things, and that we can still be centered in our commitment to be the people of Jesus during uncertain times. As the old song goes, "I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together. All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together." It's not just us here at this church doing things differently (and each church are choosing to follow provincial/denominational rules in their own ways or not at all in some cases) but society itself is trying to figure out how to keep each other safe as COVID-19 cases rise throughout Canada. Clergy colleagues in Winnipeg and Ontario have shared with me that they are being forced back into online worship only (just as we were in Moncton during the outbreak here not so long ago) and in some cases they have cancelled Christmas services already.

Thank you for understanding, and if you need clarity or have questions, as always, please email or call the church office.

Peace to your heart this day as you read these words.

*Rev. Aaron Billard*



Our UCW Annual Bazaar cannot happen this year in the format we know. However, we did have our Jam, Jelly and Pickle Sale off-site and \$562.00 has been turned over to our Treasurer.

We are now planning a similar offsite sale, of **TRAYS OF SWEETS** for the holiday season, perfect for your family gathering or around the bridge table. You will receive 16 assorted squares for \$12.00. They must, however, be ordered in advance, by MONDAY, **NOVEMBER 23**, by calling Brenda McFarlane at 852-3550 or email at [brejea47@gmail.com](mailto:brejea47@gmail.com). Squares will be packaged and delivered to your home in the early days of December and you will be notified ahead of the delivery. Please have correct money in an envelope for the driver. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

*Brenda McFarlane, President*

## In-person Worship

Registration closes on Saturday at noon.

Here is the link to register to attend:

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/november-15th-sunday-service-tickets-127452047505>

(The link changes every week.)

*The Church extends its deepest sympathies and condolences to the family of **Ruth M. Fowler** (wife of the late Edward "Ned" Fowler) who died on November 8, 2020.*



### CHURCH MINISTRY PERSONNEL AND STAFF



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