

## **Update on Re-Opening at Grace United Church**

June 11, 2020

In light of recent announcements by the Ontario Government with respect to public gatherings and worship services, we would like to provide an update on what is currently happening and being considered at Grace United.

First of all, on behalf of the board, we would like to acknowledge and thank the incredible work that has been done over the last few months by Reverend Helen, supported by her wife Barb, and a growing number of volunteers within the congregation for developing our capability to deliver worship services virtually. Who would have thought four months ago that this is how we at Grace United would be getting together on a weekly basis.

And it's not just the Sunday morning worship. A growing segment of our congregation has embraced technology to participate in many of Grace's activities, including board meetings, book club, the seniors cooking program, Grace Notes. The success of these alternative ways of maintaining our church community speaks volumes about who we are as a congregation and who we can become in the future.

We know that some activities and some people are not able to migrate to this new way of doing things. The Friday Morning Food For Life program continues with the dedicated help of our volunteers, adapting the processes to ensure everyone's safety.

And we also know that there are some members of our congregation who are not able to participate in our new ways of meeting and celebrating our spiritual beliefs. For these people, we have many volunteers to thank who maintain contact with them, whether it be regular phone calls, or delivering meals, or simply reaching out to make sure we are all OK.

The important thing is that the community of Grace United continues to find ways to nurture our spirits.

The Ontario Government recently announced that worship services may commence with limits of 30% capacity in their sanctuaries. As with most things, this is a bit of a double-edged sword. There are some within our congregation who are already asking when can we open our doors. At the same time, there are many within our congregation who are saying – it's too soon.

A few weeks ago a sub committee was formed with representatives from Worship, Communications, Property, Outreach, your board chairs and Reverend Helen, for the purpose of investigating how we will eventually begin to re-open Grace United. This sub committee is reviewing all of the relevant information from the government and from the UCC, and will make recommendations to the board.

The first recommendation that will be made to the board is that while legally we can open our doors, the recommendation is that for the time being at least, we will not be holding in person services at Grace. Our primary concern continues to be the safety of our congregation, volunteers, staff and clergy, and we do not feel that we are ready to safely open our doors for in person worship.

We know that this is disappointing news for some people, but for others it is likely re-assuring. Under current restrictions, if we did re-open our in person services, they would look and feel very different from what we are used to. No coffee time, no passing the peace, no choir, no singing, everyone wearing masks, limited seating, spaced apart. This is not the Grace United that we are used to, and we don't know yet what things will look like in the future. We strongly encourage you to visit the Grace United Web site. On the landing page there is a link to many resources both from the Ontario Government and from the United Church of Canada, talking about what will need to happen in order to safely open our doors. Once you've reviewed those, we're sure you'll agree with that the future will look and feel very different from what we know, and that until we have more information it's better to go slower rather than faster.

The second recommendation that will be made to the board is that we are going to want to hear from our congregation. What are we doing well and what could we be doing better to help meet your spiritual and community needs. More information will be coming on this in the near future, so stay tuned.

For now, please know that all of you are in our thoughts and prayers. As a congregation we have been through a huge amount of change in last couple of years, and we truly believe that we continue to surprise ourselves with how resilient and adaptable we are. We believe that speaks volumes for who we are as a congregation and who we can become in the future.

Heather McGavin / Dale Martin  
Co-Chairs  
Grace United Church