

March 19, 2020

Dear People of Saint Laurence,

The good news is that we are taking the steps we need to in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect the most vulnerable among us. The challenge is that at the very moment when we would want to come together for comfort and encouragement we are being asked to stay apart.

The Archbishop has directed that we suspend all in-person related activities- including worship, classes, meetings and other gatherings – until May 3. *And that date may be extended even later, depending upon how this all plays out.*

I feel grief over not being able to meet. Our worship together is deeply meaningful for me. I am also finding it hard to wrap my mind around all that is happening. Watching the news can be overwhelming. We don't have any precedent or paradigm for this in our experience. There is much that is uncertain and unknown. In many ways we are powerless in the face of what's happening, and our daily rhythms and sources of support are disrupted. There have been and will continue to be real economic losses as a result. People are feeling vulnerable. They are panic shopping as one-way of maintaining control and safety in this moment. Anxiety is heightened, and there is a pull to fear. I feel it when going out in public. Even though keeping our distance is prudent, it does raise the question, "Do you have the virus? Am I safe with you?"

But we are also rising to the occasion; not giving into the fear. We are finding new ways to connect and new ways to express our care. Neighbors are looking out for each other. Young people are looking out for the old. The goodness of our humanity is showing through. People are providing economic support to each other. Italians are singing; Spaniards are applauding their health care workers. We are resilient, and we will ultimately be OK.

*In a moment like this, it is important we maintain our spiritual well-being. But how to do so? It requires some experimentation and creativity. **This Sunday at 10:30am, we will live-stream a morning-prayer service on***

the St. Laurence Facebook page. *I am told you can access it even if you don't have Facebook – just type in “St. Laurence Coquitlam Facebook” and it should get you there. Maggie and Dan will provide music for a couple of hymns. I will offer prayers. And this Sunday Jason Wood will preach (because two months ago we had agreed he would preach this Sunday, so that is what we are doing.) If you wish to follow along, a bulletin for the service is attached below.*

Going forward we will continue to have Parish Council and Finance Committee meetings via ZOOM. The Confirmation Classes will continue via ZOOM. Since not all of us are connected via social media, we are considering setting up an email chain or phone-tree for those who wish. We will continue to think about how we can still be church together and maintain the strength of our community. We are also open to your suggestions.

Finally, there is perhaps an opportunity here. A chance to rest and take a Sabbath. Below, I share with you a poem that was sent to me.

Peace to you all,

Rev. Eric Mason

Pandemic

*What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.*

*And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.*

*Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.*

—Lynn Ungar 3/11/20