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Dear Friends

These are uncertain, and for many disturbing, times. We are facing something we have not seen in a number of generations in the form of the virulence of the COVID-19 virus – but at the same time we have seen a rapid and unprecedented response on behalf of our governments, and the many organisations which make up the fabric of our society.

On a personal note, I have had to self-isolate following our shortened trip to India, but I am fortunate enough to be doing so with my lovely partner Sabina. We are well and have another week of separation from the wider world before we are able to know definitively if we are free of the Coronavirus. This hasn't prevented me from connecting with colleagues on-line and on the phone, and it feels like there is as much work as ever, if not more, to be done in this new 'remote' way of working. I am profoundly grateful for the way in which Canon Kevin Arndt and the leadership team of staff and volunteers have responded quickly, thoughtfully, and with care to this rapidly changing situation over the time I have been absent – and on all our behalves offer a profound thank you to them all!

As for the latest news, you may well know that Bishop Logan, at the request of the Provincial Health Officer and following national guidelines, has closed all churches in the Diocese of Islands and Inlets, effective immediately. This is in order to comply with the 'no gatherings' requirement, and to help prevent the inadvertent spread of the virus. I was recently in an online meeting with the Bishop where it was evident the heartbreak that this decision has caused to him, alongside the recognition how many of us will feel similarly about not being able to attend worship in these places which feel like home for us in a spiritual sense.

Ever since I was a young, enthusiastic, teen follower of Christ I have said "The Church is the people not the building," and that is at heart true, but we are used to having places of worship which feel safe, comfortable, where we come together in community and share our stories, where we make friends, and participate in the ancient rituals and practise of the Christian community. In these spaces we have explored our faith together, asked difficult questions of ourselves and the world around, and been inspired and uplifted by prayer, beautiful music, liturgy, and the simple yet profound act of sharing bread and wine in remembrance of Christ. So, I am sure, that like me, this sad but necessary move of closing the doors comes as a shock, and feels deeply jarring.

For many of us, the loss of our space for an indefinite amount of time, is creating a sense of loss, a grief – and it is important to acknowledge that. In the meanwhile, being unable to gather, your leadership team





is seeking ways in which we can continue to have a worshipping presence by making the best use of the Internet we can. We cannot broadcast a service live, but we are in discussion about how we can create some form of 'virtual' service with all of us contributing from our own homes. We will be posting details of this on Facebook, Twitter, and on our website. If you would like to be a part of the team that offers readings or prayers in these worship events (recorded on phone/computer/ipad etc. at home) then please could you email me incumbent@stjohnthedivine.bc.ca with what role you feel you could play, and one of the liturgy group will be in touch. This coming Sunday, March 29th, will be a simple service at 10am, links will be shared on our website and Facebook page.

We are also planning to create a prayer list for distribution to all of those on the parish email list, or maybe on the website, with individual members of the community being prayed for by first name and surname initial only (in the interests of maintaining privacy). Alongside this a group of staff and volunteers will be calling around the whole of the parish list in order to check-in and make sure we all remain connected. We are still community; we now have the task of imagining and realising how that community can look and be in these difficult times. If you do not want to be on the prayer list, or to be contacted by phone, please do email admin@stjohnthedivine.bc.ca to let us know and we will remove your name from the lists.

What can we do for ourselves at this time? Continue to take the opportunity for silence and prayer. If you wish to find prayer resources there are many on the web, including at www.stjohnthedivine.bc.ca and www.bc.anglican.ca, including the daily collect and readings being co-ordinated by our Cathedral and read, daily, by various Clergy of the Diocese.

Also, as I said in my interim note from India, please practice self-care; stay away from sensationalist news outlets, and ration time on and the form of social media you are on. Take exercise, as you are able, and let us use our time well, reading, listening to or playing music, watching favourite TV shows – whatever feeds heart and soul. Please also reach out to one another using online portals and the good old fashioned telephone. I am happy to receive calls on my cell, which is in the Parish Directory or I can send you my number via email if you connect with me on incumbent@stjohnthedivine.bc.ca – I will answer calls and mails as best I can, and will get back to you if you leave a message for me.

Please be assured of my prayers for us all, and that we continue to work together in order to maintain and build community in these uncertain times. Indeed, it is the uncertainty around all of this which causes many of us anxiety, but I encourage you to remember the certainty of the love of God, and the love in which you are held by our community as we seek to navigate these times together.

With my love to and prayers for your all, and with thanks for our partnership in the Gospel

Alastair

