The United Church of Canada
L'Eglise Unie du Canada

First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council

Regional Council 15

MEMO

TO: Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council, Regional Council 15 and First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council Communities of Faith, Ministry Personnel, Board/Council Chairs and Regional Members

FROM: Faith March-MacCuish, Executive Minister

DATE: March 17, 2020

SUBJECT: **COVID-19 Update and Closing of Our Church Buildings**

As acknowledged in all parts of health care systems both, federally and provincially, things are changing daily and sometimes hourly with COVID-19. Everyone at every level has the same objective to protect people and the church is no different.

Our objective is to protect the health and well-being of our Communities of Faith, its members, our volunteers, our ministry personnel, our staff and our wider communities. Another objective is to make sure that our Regions continue with its services and remain connected with one another.

I realize that as a United Church, we have a conciliar system and we allow the governing bodies of our local Communities of Faith to make their own decisions. Please know I continue to respect that. However, these are unprecedented times and I feel it calls for unprecedented actions. After hearing from our Prime Minister who asked us to "stay home" and in conversation with the Presidents of our three Regional Councils, I am advising that it is time to **close our churches for public worship and gatherings from today, March 17, 2020, to March 30, 2020.** The situation will be assessed and new communication will be circulated as we get closer to March 30.

I know there will be many questions and I assume one will be about funerals. I would ask that you speak with your local funeral home to find ways that will best serve the families at this time and at the same time protect each other.

General Council Office has advised their staff who work from the office and those deployed in the Regions to work from home. Therefore, as of March 18, 2020 all staff in our Regional Council Offices will be working from home. Please use the same email and phone numbers. For urgent matters, please do not hesitate to call Regional Executive Minister Rev. Faith March-MacCuish at 1-709-691-3524.

For our Ministry Personnel, I realize that for your Communities of Faith you are an essential worker, and you will continue to find ways for your ministry to happen. Where there are needs to provide pastoral care to very sick or dying members or neighbours in your communities, you will need to protect yourself and others by taking appropriate precautions. This will involve some difficult judgements but these are unusual times, and we are asking you to take precaution. Social distancing, as difficult as that will be, is necessary. Please refrain from shaking hands and hugging those who are sick and dying and their families, remember hand washing and use hand sanitizer.

I also know you will spend much time connecting with your members through telephone and other technology as well as finding new ways to worship. For some of us, it is perfecting old skills and for others, it is learning something new. Please know my thoughts and prayers are with you and you are not alone.

For our Ministry Personnel: Each of our Regions will be having a Zoom meeting for Ministry Personnel at least once a week so that as ministers you are able to check in with the President and Regional Minister and with each other. An email will be sent to you from the Regional Ministers with details of your *Regional Conversation*.

For our Divisions and Committees: We ask that you have your meetings through conference call, Zoom or Adobe Connect. For Adobe Connect and Zoom, please be in contact with Jennifer Taylor (jtaylor@united-church.ca). For conference call numbers, please be in touch with Leona Laundry (llaundry@united-church.ca).

For Communities of Faith: If you wish to make use of Zoom or conference call, please know we have made allowances for you to do that. We ask that you be in touch with Jennifer for Zoom and Leona for conference calls. This is to help you continue to have your Board meetings and any emergency meetings to assist you with decision-making.

Please note you will need to be patient. We have added three new Zoom accounts totaling six for our three regions to use. However, with the demand, we are asking that groups only use it for necessary work at this time. Please let Jennifer and Leona know how long your meeting will be and please keep to your allotted timeline as others may have meetings booked before and after you.

I know this is a difficult and uncertain time for everyone. As ministers are still working, they will remain on payroll. We are asking our Communities of Faith, Pastoral Charges and Congregations to continue to pay your lay employees where possible. It would be important for you to communicate with your members the different ways to continue to contribute financially. Two options are through Pre-Authorized Remittance or encourage members to continue their weekly givings through Canada Helps (https://www.canadahelps.org/en/). Each congregation is already pre-loaded into the site, so there is no set up needed. The United Church of Canada has also provided some guidance for congregations in regards to employment. Please go to www.united-church.ca/covid-19 for more information.

I have been reflecting on the Gospel reading from Matthew and Mark when Jesus was in the boat with the disciples and the storm came up suddenly. Remembering how scared the disciples were and how scary this Pandemic is for us and our world, I am reminded repeatedly that Jesus was in the boat! In the middle of the storm, he was with the disciples. Our faith reminds us that in the midst of this storm, Jesus is with us. We are not alone.

My prayer is that we not only remember that we are not alone but that we are able to help each other feel comforted and included as we are called into distancing and isolation. May the God of all peace give us calm minds and hearts as we are called to steer the boat. May those who are ill have healing mercies. May those who are on the front lines be protected. May those who have the heavy load of advising and making decisions be guided. May we all put kindness first and hold one another as precious children of God.

In Love,

Faith

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister