

President

Having thoroughly enjoyed the first Annual Meeting of our newly created First Dawn Eastern Edge Region and experiencing the ease with which we were surprisingly transitioning into our new structure, I chose “Behold I Make All Things New” (Revelations 21:5/Isaiah 43:18) as the scripture verse around which to build our theme for our 2020 Annual Meeting.

I chose this verse with the assumption that we would be continuing the remarkably successful transitioning that we had been witnessing, with overwhelming gratitude to the team that had facilitated the process. Little did I ever dream the extent to which these words would become prophetic.

Both Isaiah and John wrote these words, spoken by God as a promise to them, after enduring unprecedented times. These are words that we truly need to cling to at present, for COVID-19 hurled us into a situation for which we had no precedent, and little preparation.

I have no words to adequately convey our gratitude for the ingenuity of our Regional Staff in organizing the bi-weekly Zoom meetings for clergy and lay persons. It was a tremendous feat in enabling the flow of desperately needed information. These Zoom meetings literally became a life line to clergy and congregations.

Special recognition must be given to our Executive Minister, Rev. Faith March-MacCuish, who truly deserves a medal for her juggling. She was the conduit through which information came from multiple sources. With amazing delegation, she spearheaded the sharing of that crucial information through her skilled and cooperative staff; not just to our own Region, but to congregations in the other Regions of Atlantic Canada and Bermuda for whom she is responsible.

When our churches were forced to close, another amazing transition took place. Our worship service became virtual and God was indeed making something new, because in a time of crisis, our services brought hope, joy and meaningfulness to many unconnected people who regularly tuned in ... not just our own congregations.

In retrospect, the first few months of my term were very meaningful for me. There were times of joy as I celebrated congregational anniversaries and Covenanting Services and times of deep sadness and tears as we closed the doors of churches whose shrinking congregations and diminished resources compromised their ability to remain viable. Christmas services rejuvenated our collective spirits as we looked forward to 2020 with increased confidence in the anticipated effectiveness of our newly created organization. And then COVID-19 hit us and became a pandemic! Quickly our whole world changed!

Although we were in isolation from each other, we became closer through our Zoom meetings than we ever thought possible. We had a common fear and a desperate need to be there for each other.

Congregations in Newfoundland and Labrador are to be congratulated for the innovative ways in which they responded ... and are continuing to respond to the crisis. The successful ways in which clergy and congregations handled the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis bodes well for the future of our church.

Words from our "Song of Faith" (2006) seem very appropriate for these times:

*"We are called together by Christ
as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
loving what he loved,
living what he taught,
striving to be faithful servants of God in our time and space."*

My heart reaches out to you all as we look forward with hope to a time when we can gather safely together in Celebration as the Body of Christ. As I end my message to our Annual Meeting, I am very conscious of the fact that our sessions are taking place in our virtual world and I am grateful for the technology which gives us this privilege.

Looking forward with hope, and with our Moderator's permission, I will end by repeating these prophetic words from the Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott's Easter Message: *"God is doing things. Mysterious things. Miraculous things. Incredible things. Resurrection things. Whether we know about them or not. And we will celebrate those things with great joy and wonder-filled alleluias -- when the time is right."*

Rev. Peggy Johnson
President