



The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada



First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council
Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council
Regional Council 15

March 24, 2020

Greetings to You from Your Regional Council Offices;

As the sand continues to shift under our feet we, as citizens and church members, are facing unprecedented circumstances. As our health and government authorities place more restrictions on us to keep us safe, we are learning to adjust. As we listen to the news about our world, our country, our provinces and our community, individual and community anxiety is very real. The disruption of our daily routines and our inability to meet in person as faith communities will further exacerbate our isolation and worry.

It has been wonderful to see the spirit at work helping us to be creative in meeting community needs, pastoral care, support and worship. Technology and telephone has allowed the gospel message of the unfailing and universal love of God to be heard at a time when it is most important.

While we do not know how long these measures will need to be in place, what we do know is that there is a growing need for pastoral care and support in these anxious times. The call for community pastoral leadership is immense.

On March 20, 2020, Communities of Faith received communication from Rev. Alan Hall, Executive Officer, Ministry and Employment, General Council Office, which recognizes that with in-person worship and rental income being suspended, Communities of Faith may be experiencing financial difficulty. In that letter, Communities of Faith are to be in touch with their Regional Council Office if having trouble. ([Letter from Alan Hall](#))

We do know that at this time, there are many families who are feeling the financial strain from the many businesses that have been forced to close and there are those who have experienced layoffs. We also know that as United Church people, we have been most generous in difficult times. This is an important time to encourage people to continue stewardship support and to assist them in that endeavour given that they are unable to be physically present with you to place their gifts in our traditional offering plates. Please see the following suggestions from our Atlantic Stewardship & Gifts Officer, Rev. Roger Janes:

- Encourage members to sign up for Pre-Authorized Remittance (**see attached form**). We suggest that churches edit the PAR form to have your information on it, making the form as simple as possible for folks to use. To speed things up, scan your completed PAR forms and email to Judith Gomes at jgomes@united-church.ca
- Encourage members to continue their weekly givings through **Canada Helps** (www.canadahelps.org/en/). Every congregation already has a page on Canada Helps, and RIGHT NOW, people can go to the link and donate to the congregation. I encourage congregations to go on and edit their congregation's area to make it pretty, inviting and compelling. (**see attachment**)
- Encourage people to prepare post-dated monthly cheques and put them in the old fashioned mailbox.
- Here is a great article by Lori Guenther Reesor on online giving for churches: [Online Giving for Offline Churches](#)
- Encourage your congregation to use e-transfers. (Ask your treasurer to talk to the bank and make sure you are already doing electronic banking. If not, set it up so the treasurer accesses the account for statements and can make deposits through e-transfer. Persons can then log into their bank account, send the e-transfer

to the treasurer who logs into the church's account online or through their phone and deposits the money. The treasurer has a record of the email with the amount and the bank statement shows the deposit in the exact same amount, all is clear and audit compliant.)

Other options for these trying times: (Please be in contact with your Regional Minister and the Property Committee for necessary approvals in these options below)

- Obtain or increase your line of credit
- Secure a loan
- Make an application for a low interest loan (if made possible from General Council and/or Regional Council and if your Community of Faith meets the criteria)
- Access government funding support for any staff who continued on payroll ([see Alan Hall's letter](#))
- Consider using funds set aside for another purpose. It is possible for a Community of Faith, who has internally restricted funds, to use them; example: property or manse funds. If your congregation needs to use internally restricted funds, you will need to seek approval and structure it as an internal loan, with amount owing to the fund and a plan to pay it back when things return to normal.
- Make sure your Trustees understand the status of any possible investments that may be needed in the short term for emergent ministry.

There are many types of restricted funds. Some have internal restrictions and therefore as a Community of Faith, we can choose to use them differently as needs or opportunities arise as long as we follow the appropriate consultation and procedures.

Some funds are formally restricted and we need to be careful to understand the difference. If you have donor-designated bequests, these normally have explicit instruction and are not to be used. Cemetery funds cannot be redirected if governed under the Cemeteries Act of your province.

If all options are exhausted and you find that you have no other choice but to move into a temporary layoff for your employees, it is imperative that you are in consultation with your Regional Minister and Pastoral Relations Committee. The General Council is working through the process to follow if your Pastoral Charge finds itself in this unfortunate situation. As the Region and Communities of Faith are in a covenantal relationship, it is important that all Pastoral Charges are in touch with the Region to work through these difficult decisions, and, where necessary, acquire the appropriate approvals.

Funerals

There have been questions about funerals. You will soon be receiving a letter from the Moderator. In all cases, it is recommended that funerals be postponed so that the families can have the service they need and deserve when this pandemic has passed. In cases where there is a body to be buried, it is recommended that a graveside burial happen, with strict adherents to the numbers that the health and government authorities have dictated in your province or country (Bermuda).

We know there are challenges and we are here to work with you to do our very best to find solutions. We continue hold you, our faith communities and your pastoral leaders, in our prayers as we know you are offering your prayers for the entire country at this time.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish

Executive Minister

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