

Concern and community, a chat with Rev. Bist

Written By MARNI WALSH

As concerns mount over the growing threat of COVID-19, thoughts turn to the vulnerable – especially the elderly – the folks who built the services, organizations and institutions from which the community continues to benefit every day.

No one is at greater risk. For many elderly residents, the church is not only a spiritual sanctuary, but a social sanctuary. I asked Reverend Candice Bist how Trinity Primrose Charge is supporting its congregation during social isolation.

“Social distancing should more properly be called ‘physical distancing,’” says Reverend Bist, “because it is more important than ever to think of those other than ourselves. It may seem a contradiction in terms, but we are to focus firstly on keeping ourselves as healthy and as well as possible, in order that we keep others as safe and well as possible.”

She added, “It is never easy for us to live in uncertainty. Closing the churches in solidarity – and direction by the government – and unable to visit hospitals, retirement/nursing homes and one another, seems so counter intuitive. We want to offer comfort, but the usual ways we do that, are not available for us.”

In order to continue those practices in a safe way, Reverend Bist says, “People in our churches have been divided into small groups, little pods if you will, so that with one leader overlooking each little flock, everyone has a group they can keep an eye on. Regular phone calls, notes in the mail, items dropped off at houses, and shopping runs, are the many ways that the pastoral work is done.”

“Though this is organized within the church, people are doing this everywhere, calling around to check on people they might not normally think on, picking up groceries for neighbours etc.,” says the Reverend. “This is wonderful to observe.”

To benefit the larger community, Reverend Bist suggests “time spent in quiet reflection, gentle exercise, thoughtful reading, a re-ordering of one's own life, is an enormous help to the general population. “After that, communication can continue through technology, the post service, telephone calls,” she says.

Rev. Bist believes, “In some ways, we are being forced to think of others and how we can connect, now we don't have the usual excuses of work. Most of our elderly are on fixed incomes so they are accustomed to living in a careful way. It is actually the young families with children and perhaps unemployed parents that are a greater concern. And the small local businesses of course.”

She says, “The idea is to be quiet and allow certain people to come to mind and offer what comes to you intuitively. It is not at all helpful to run around in circles trying to ‘fix’ anything. The world and all those in it will right themselves soon enough. We want to know when it does, that we held steady and hopeful throughout.”

Trinity Primrose United Church Charge is now sending out two email correspondences each week. One on Thursdays containing resources for the week and one on Sundays containing a newly launched podcast – “a 45 minute reflection with music, readings, some practical spirituality – like a Sunday morning service, but less formal and more contemplative – as well as any other resources as accompaniment,” says Rev. Bist.

Reverend Bist and her husband, professional musician Bruce Ley record the services in their studio.

“It is available to anyone who wishes to listen to it,” says Reverend Bist, “We have had a lot of interest expressed in the original music within it, so we are in the process of making the various files available to other ministers – or anyone really – who wants to use it or listen to it.”

The Sunday podcast service will be offered every Sunday, on Good Friday and on Easter – until the churches open again.