Home Street leaders met this morning to discern direction for our congregation as the first cases of COVID-19 emerge in Manitoba. After prayerful discernment, review of guidelines from Manitoba Health, and consideration of responses from other congregations, **we have decided to cancel Sunday School and worship at Home Street tomorrow (March 15).**

We want to do our part in helping to limit the spread of the coronavirus, to protect the most vulnerable among us, and to give our front-line medical and service providers the best possible chance of responding to this public health crisis. We see this is an act of care and compassion for our faith family and for the wider community. Like the writer of Psalm 46, we affirm our faith in God’s presence in a time of trouble:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.*

*Therefore, we will not not fear…*

*God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;*

*God will help it when the morning dawns...*

As we limit larger gatherings of people, we will also be postponing congregational events for the coming week, including:

The Art Exhibit and Pi(e) Supper (today, March 14)

The Senior’s gathering at Bethel Place (March 19)

The Junior and Senior Youth Event (March 20)

Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner (March 22)

We will let you know when we are able to reschedule these events.

While we will ask rental groups who use our building to cancel their gatherings, we do want to continue to offer essential services and space to the most vulnerable in our neighbourhood.  With clear guidelines for hygiene and social distancing, Coffee & Conversation will host our neighbours tomorrow morning, and we will continue to offer space for the three 12-step programs and for Home Plate (food bank).  We are committing to some extra cleaning and disinfecting to provide safe space for them; please let us know if you could volunteer to do approximately one hour of such cleaning once a week.

As our community patterns change in this time, we have an opportunity to explore creative, new ways of being church together. Tomorrow (Sunday) morning, you will all receive an email with prayers, scripture, and a short meditation.  We encourage you to spend some intentional time tomorrow to read, reflect, and pray; may our worship rise together as a geographically scattered but spiritually united community of faith.

Stay tuned for other avenues of connecting as a community in this time.

You can be assured that Home Street leadership bodies will continue to meet to offer care and spiritual resources, to discern direction in this time, and to take care of church business. Church staff will continue office hours: Diane Hiebert is doing administrative work while Cindy is away, and your pastors, Phil and Judith, continue to be available at the office, via phone and email, and for pastoral care.

As we take precautions as a community, we encourage you as individuals to stay informed and to practice prevention. Updates from Manitoba Health are available at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/>  We are also attaching a summary sheet from The Public Health Agency of Canada.

In these times, may we be people of hope and faith.  As we practice social distancing, may our love, care, and prayers bridge the distance between us and extend to our neighbours and to those around the world who are struggling in these days.

Home Street Leadership