

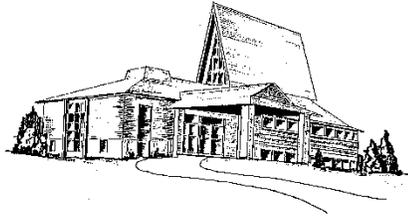
St Columba Presbyterian Church

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The Rev. Jennifer Cameron
Minister

Mrs. Jane Cox
Clerk of Session

March 21, 2020

To the Congregation of St. Columba Church,

Greetings, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I have just returned from a week with my Dad. My heart was with my church family while helping him prepare to stay home for a while, and I have been praying for your health and safety. It has also been a week of making difficult decisions about worship and church life. I am grateful to the Session for their wise leadership in this unusual time.

To use a now-common phrase, we are experiencing unprecedented times. We are all in a state of uncertainty as churches close our buildings during this pandemic. Especially as we come closer to our Easter celebrations, it feels strange not to be joining with one another to praise God and share the Word. I encourage you to explore ways to worship and engage with Scripture at home.

To keep our church family and community safe, all services at St. Columba are suspended until further notice. A number of churches across the denomination are providing online worship services. You will find several through the Renewal Fellowship website (renewal-fellowship.ca). Click on the article "Response to COVID-19 – Livestreaming Worship Services." I will be posting Scripture passages and devotional meditations on the St. Columba website on Sundays and each day throughout Easter Weekend (stcolumbabelleville.ca).

Pastoral Care remains a priority, especially in this time when people will be experiencing loneliness without being able to visit with family, friends and neighbours. The Session Elders will be making regular contact with the people in their districts through a variety of communication methods. I will be connecting with people in the congregation through phone calls, email and text. If you would like private prayer time, I will be glad to read Scripture and pray with you over the phone. It is not something with which all people are familiar, and it may seem strange at first, but I can assure you, from my own experience, it can be rather powerful to be prayed for even when we are not face to face. The phrase "I'm praying for you" takes on a much deeper meaning.

I remind and encourage you to practice intentional self-care and care for others as outlined by local and federal Health Officials.

We are all feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the constant media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Take a break. Spend time with Scripture and in prayer. Watch a favourite movie. Read a book. Play a game with your family members. Do a crossword puzzle. Call a friend or family member that may be feeling lonely. Send a funny email to brighten someone's day. There are many ways to calm ourselves in a very intense environment.

Above all, trust our loving God to fill us with hope, to protect us from harm, and to sustain us in a challenging situation. As the apostle wrote, *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).*

Please contact me if you would like to discuss different ways to worship, pray, and connect with the Word of God at home, if you have a pastoral need, or you would just like to talk.

You may also contact your Elder or the Clerk of Session, Jane Cox.

If you have need of groceries or other practical needs, please let the church know. The church office phone will be answered during regular office hours (613-962-8771). The church email is stcolumbabelleville@gmail.com.

Be assured of my prayers. We will continue to care for one another as the family of God, and we will get through this time as a community connected by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in and among us.

May God bless you with hope, strength, endurance and peace in these unprecedented days.
Rev. Jennifer