

### United Church Community of Faith directly impacted by COVID-19

In her daily update to Alberta, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Deena Hinshaw told the story of a faith community who has been directly impacted by the COVID19 virus.

With the blessing and encouragement of that faith community's leadership, people are learning that Dr. Hinshaw was referring to Living Spirit United Church, Calgary and that she prepared her talk by speaking with its minister Rev. Shannon Mang.

Similar to many congregations, Living Spirit United Church had its final worship service on Sunday, March 15, before closing down public activities. A small social function followed worship. All known safety protocols at the time were followed.

As Dr. Hinshaw outlined, "There were only 41 people present, and they were careful to observe 2 metre distancing and hand hygiene. Food and drink were served by a small number of servers wearing gloves. No one was ill at the time. They followed all the rules and did nothing wrong."

Within a week, one person had tested positive for COVID-19 and others soon followed. In total, 24 of the 41 people present tested positive, four people ended up in hospital and two people have died.

"It is not clear what the source of the virus was for the people at the gathering that day," says Dr. Hinshaw. "It could have been environmental contamination from others who had previously been in the building, it could have been that someone who attended had been exposed elsewhere and was unknowingly infected and able to pass the virus on to others before their symptoms started. We may never know exactly what happened, but the message is clear. Even with the precautions they took, more than half of those who attended that day got sick. Two lives were lost and those left behind are grieving their absence and the incomprehension of how what should have been a joyful event turned tragic."

*Grateful for their open and faithful spirit, we pray for the people of Living Spirit United Church. In the midst of loss, may they know comfort. In the midst of sorrow, may they find hope. In the midst of crisis, may they experience peace. In the name of the crucified and risen One. Amen*



The congregation and its leadership is to be commended. It quickly activated the emergency team that was named just one week earlier. The team has kept in contact with all church membership, ensuring everyone has support and needed supplies. An on-line wake has been held via Zoom for the first person who died, and a second on-line wake is in the planning stages. Both members who died were in their 80s.

Additionally, the Living Spirit congregation recently held drive-by candle light vigils where congregants and friends drove by the homes of the two households who had lost a family member. The cars stopped briefly to drop off a candle that was then placed in the yard. Most people taking part were moved to see the candlelight surrounding these bereaved families. They were grateful to have some concrete, safe way to express their grief and their care. One family member later said to Shannon, "I'm sure the light from the candles in our yard could be seen from space."

It is important to the church's leadership as well as the families who lost a family member to the COVID19 virus that communities of faith be told about their experience. As Emergency Team member Paul Davies wrote to that congregation earlier in the outbreak, "Our experience is a reminder of how invisible, contagious and difficult to track this virus can be and how it can affect anyone, regardless of age or health."

Tuesday marks **International Nurses Day** –a day people will want to observe, especially this year.

In a website for nurses, one article features two dozen prayers for most any occasion a nurse might encounter.

A well-known indigenous prayer which is an inspiration for any situation or activity was included. It was featured as...

### **A hand washing prayer**

Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind,  
Whose breath gives life to all the world,  
Hear me; I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever  
behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have  
made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand the  
things you have taught my people.

Help me to remain calm and strong in the face of  
all that comes towards me.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in  
every leaf and rock.

Help me seek pure thoughts and act with the  
intention of helping others.

Help me find compassion without empathy  
overwhelming me.

I seek strength, not to be greater than my  
brother, but to fight my greatest enemy MYSELF.

Make me always ready to come to you with clean  
hands and straight eyes.

So when life fades, as the fading sunset, my  
spirit may come to you without shame.



### **Night-time Prayer**

*This night, to those who are anxious bring calm,  
and enliven those impaired by apathy.*

*To the sick in body, mind and spirit bring healing,  
and to their carers bring skill and sensitivity.*

*To the abused bring safe affection,  
and send an angel to forestall their abusers.*

*To the war-torn, bring the dawn of a different day,  
and to those who wield power  
give the wisdom to use it wisely.*

*And now I put into your hands,  
which cradled creation,  
my soul, my body, my hopes, my fears,  
my past and my future;*

*For you alone are God from whom all goodness  
comes and through whom all life is made new.*

***Iona, adapted***