

What Your Congregation Can Do to Prepare for COVID-19

A Message from the Uncollared Cooperative (Anglican Diocese of Calgary)

March 13, 2020

Hi there friends, my name is Rev. Clara King and I'm the Rural Missioner for the Anglican Diocese of Calgary. This is a message to all rural parishes we serve through the Uncollared Cooperative and the Lay Preachers' Bulletin.

I know we've all been taken aback in these last few days about the spread of the Covid-19 virus, and the steps that are being taken to control it. The virus will hit all of our communities. Of course, in the Church we are not immune. It is entirely possible in the coming days that the Alberta Government will suspend gatherings... even Church services.

These social distancing measures have been deemed necessary elsewhere in the world to protect our elders and most vulnerable populations.

We've made this video because there are things your congregation can do **right now** to prepare for this likely eventuality.

If Church services are cancelled, your congregation can use technology to remain connected. Technology can give you a place where your congregation "meets". This means even people who are self-isolating or even sick can stay part of community life.

The essential thing to do now, while we can still meet and discuss face-to-face, is to create an online gathering place to help your congregation remain connected.

This Sunday, ask each another: what online tools do we use?

There are many technological tools to keep connected and informed. At the end of this document, you'll find a list of great tools you could use, and the basic pros and cons of each.

What is more important than which tool you choose, is how you as a parish can use technology to create an online gathering place. It can become the place where you can pray together, share information about who is sick and who is vulnerable, and where you can coordinate your caring actions for the community.

This Sunday, discuss this question in your congregation, and make a plan for what tool you will use. Identify the person who will take the lead – this needs to be someone with some basic technological skills.

If services are cancelled, agree that you'll meet during your service time. You may also want to identify one other time to meet each week as well.

Using video conferencing, you could say Morning Prayer together from the BCP or BAS. My husband and I are making plans to lead a Eucharist service from home... It will be awkward to start, but it will help you hold together as a congregation.

Or you could go around your "circle", creating an online prayer meeting.

In your online gathering place, you also want to share information: who is currently infected in your families, your congregation, your community? Keep a list. Who needs help, with food, or rides to the store or to the hospital? Who can help?

Most importantly, you can identify who has recovered. With many illnesses, once a person has recovered, they are immune. It's important to note that researchers don't yet know if this is true of Covid-19. But those who have recovered might well become the best ministers to care others. If we start sharing this information now, we will be better equipped as the crisis unfolds.

If you want help organizing a system like this in your congregation, email the Rural Ministry Team: ruralministry@calgary.anglican.ca.

For some, all these precautions may seem like an outsized reaction to something that will make many people only mildly ill.

However, we've all noticed the aging population of the Church. This virus disproportionately affects our elders and those with compromised immune systems. What for some people might be a mild cold, will for too many others become a life-and-death situation, and fast.

The steps that are being taken now cannot contain the virus. All we can do is slow it down, to "flatten the curve" so that the number of people seriously ill doesn't overwhelm our health care facilities.

As Christians, we are called to be disciplined, compassionate and resolved as we face this challenge together.

Think of how precious our elders are; think of the vulnerable people in your community. Think of your local hospital or emergency centre – think of how busy they are already, and how hard our health care professionals already work.

The actions we take now can help those crucial services save lives as the virus spreads.

Most importantly, we encourage you to follow all the advice given by the authorities:

Wash your hands thoroughly and often (singing "Happy Birthday" twice or better still "The Doxology" once, helps you continue for the full 20 seconds); avoid touching your face; cover your cough; watch for symptoms; and stay away from Church if you are sick in any way, letting one another know how you are doing.

You can find current guidance for Albertans on the Alberta Health website:

<https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#p22780s6>

We continue to pray that once all is said and done, it will seem that all these measures were overly cautious. But friends, we have to persevere nonetheless.

These are the ways, right now, we are called to take Christ's command seriously: to love our neighbour and ourselves.

Let us pray for our health care professionals, and for our elders who are at risk, and for those who are suffering and grieving.

May God bless you, your family, and your congregation at this time. Amen.

This is a message for all our rural parishes served by the Uncollared Cooperative of the Anglican Diocese of Calgary.

TOOLS:

Ask, "who in our congregation uses the following tools?" If everyone is on FaceBook, great! Some people only use FaceTime, yet folks using PCs or Android phones can't use that tool. Figure out who uses what, and what tool will work best for your congregation.

Social Media Groups:

Your parish can set up a free WhatsApp group to keep connected. WhatsApp is free to download and can be used on all systems.

Use or create a private FaceBook group. Also consider using FaceBook's free live streaming capabilities. Best if most people in your congregation are already on FaceBook.

YouTube also offers live streaming.

Video Conferencing:

Skype and Facetime offer free group video conference calls. Facetime is an Apple product, and works easily on iPhones and iPads, but is not available for PCs. Skype can be used (for free) on any device.

In my own congregation, we will use Zoom, another video conference system. I bought a subscription for \$200 which allows me to host a video call with up to 100 participants. For our congregation, this is money well-spent. It works on Apple or PC computers as well as on any android, IOS, or Windows cell phones or tablets – so it is accessible to anyone connected to the internet.

Texting:

Another way to stay connected is through mobile phone texting services. The Diocese of Calgary recommends a free church texting service called Flock Note that allows you as a parish to keep up to 40 subscribers informed. Here is a video describing their service:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxpxQ3Qirhl&feature=youtu.be>

And here is their website: flocknote.com/