



First Presbyterian Church

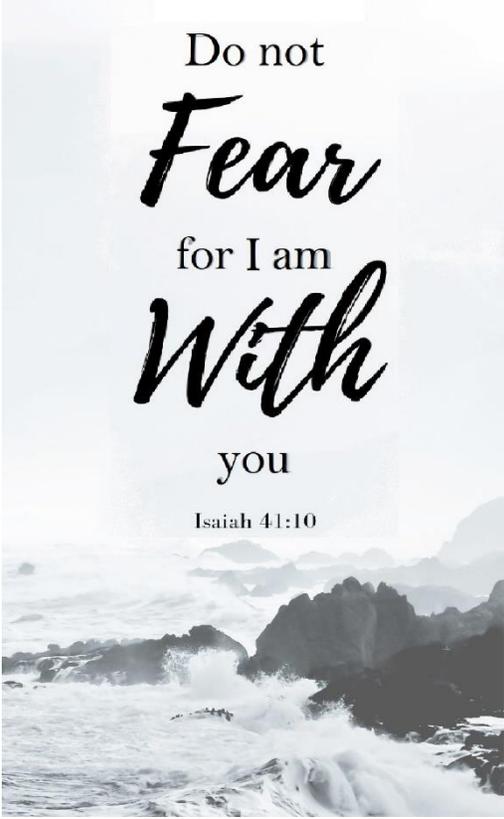
Dear Friends,

We are in the midst of a social upheaval like few of us in my generation have ever seen. The COVID-19 virus exploded into the world with hardly a warning. Subsequent events have allowed it to spread across the globe, and by the time you receive this letter we will be in full swing of restrictions set up by our national and provincial governments as well as by the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I am writing to encourage you, and to remind you that God is in the midst of everything that happens in the world. As the Bible teaches us, “...do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) Surely our Lord will bring the city of Chatham through this ordeal.

That being said, our life is going to look different for the time being. By now First Presbyterian Church has suspended worship services, mid-week groups and our Saturday Breakfast. We have planned to shut down through the month of March and into April including Palm Sunday and Easter. We simply do not know how long it will take for authorities both in government and in the Presbyterian Church in Canada to give us the green light to reopen. And yet, although the COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed many of our activities, both in the community and at church, it has not stopped our life altogether, nor has it diminished our love for one another.

I want you to remember that we are still a church – we are sisters and brothers in Christ. Although we cannot meet face to face for a while, we are still able to care for one another. I strongly encourage everyone who attends FPC to reach out to one other, and especially to those who will be sitting alone at home or in nursing homes. Don't wait to be told that someone in our church family is in need of a friendly conversation, a ride, or someone to run an errand. Pick up the phone and call the people who normally sit around you in church to ask them how they are doing. Be friend and family to them!



Do not
Fear
for I am
With
you

Isaiah 41:10

Please don't hesitate to contact me, should you know of someone needing pastoral care. You can leave me a message at church (519-352-2313 ext. 2), and I will receive it quickly. The letter of James instructs us: **“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”** Although we are asked to stop all non-essential visits and activities over the next few weeks, I will be reaching out by phone to many of the people on my pastoral care list. I want you to know that neither I or First Church have forgotten you.

Please note that visits have been severely restricted at Chatham-Kent Health Alliance during this pandemic. It will be difficult to arrange for me to visit anyone in hospital, and it will be impossible to do so for anyone in ICU. This is a very challenging time, but we understand the need for CKHA to make these difficult, but life-saving decisions. All the same, please let me know if anyone is in hospital so that the Pastoral Care Team, Prayer Chain and I can be in prayer for you or your family member.

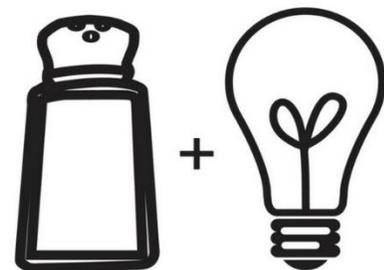
I invite you to stay connected to church life by visiting FPC's Facebook page. An easy way to find that page is to visit our church website at www.firstchatham.org You will find a link to our Facebook page on the top left and at the bottom of the home screen. Our Facebook page will feature articles, updates and my videos of my Sunday messages which I will be uploading while our worship services are cancelled.

We have closed the church office following the newest provincial restrictions on non-essential businesses in Ontario. You can still reach us by email, which is checked on a regular basis. As well, messages can be left 24 hours a day. Non-essential messages can be left for Linda Weeks on ext. 1.

Finally, remember that we are all ambassadors of Christ in our community. Take care of your church family, but be a light to your neighbours as well. Do not add to the confusion and panic we see on the news everyday. Use common sense, limit your attendance at events, and don't hoard food and household items. Look in on your neighbours, and find ways to be of help to those around you. Be patient and polite as much as you are able. And, please do not politicize this pandemic, nor find scapegoats to blame. We are in this together, and together Christ will bring us through to greener pastures and peaceful waters.

God bless and keep you,

Mike



Be these
MATTHEW 5:13-16