

Aurora United Church  
Congregational Update  
September 27, 2021

Greetings to you all. Another summer has come to an end and with the arrival of fall, we look forward to the seasonal colours and the crisp, clear air. I hope that you had an enjoyable and relaxing summer and were able to indulge in some of your favourite activities, be they at the cottage, around the backyard pool or in the great outdoors.

In pre-pandemic times, which feel so distant now, September marked our return to the church building for Sunday worship and a busy schedule of meetings and activities through the week. But as we all painfully know, we have been prevented from gathering in person for the last nineteen months by this insidious coronavirus which continues to plague us. It has indeed been a long sojourn but through our willingness to adapt to the circumstances and embrace new technologies we have continued to worship together and carry on the business of the church from the security of our homes.

Now entering the fall of 2021, we find ourselves in the midst of a fourth wave of the virus and continued public health restrictions in place for various types of activities. We are nevertheless encouraged by the reports that 80% of Ontarians 12 and over are fully vaccinated with the number inching upwards to the targets set by health officials. But in the meantime, we are called upon by the various levels of government and our church to do our part as citizens and people of the church by observing the public health measures and getting vaccinated in the hope that a return to a semblance of normalcy is not far off.

It is against this backdrop that Church Council held its first meeting on September 20 following a summer pause. High on the agenda for discussion was how we are going to worship and gather for meetings and activities through the fall months and into the winter. In approaching the discussion, Council's twin concerns were the health and safety of the congregation and the meaningfulness of worship within the limits of the current pandemic restrictions.

The Province of Ontario is currently in Step 3 of its Reopening Ontario Plan and has indicated that it will remain so while the Delta variant continues to spread. Within Step 3, indoor worship services are permitted with attendance capped at a capacity which maintains a 2 metre separation amongst attendees. All other indoor gatherings are subject to similar space capacity limits.

Trinity Anglican is required, of course, to comply with these measures as well as a more detailed set issued by the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. In-person worship has resumed at Trinity Anglican with the following measures applicable to all attendees:

- Masks must be worn at all times in the building
- Hands must be sanitized upon entering the building
- Socializing is not permitted in the Narthex (entrance way) either before or after services
- Attendance at worship services must be pre-booked to ensure capacity limits are not exceeded
- Attendees must sign in upon entry into the building to facilitate contact tracing
- To ensure 2 metre distancing is maintained amongst attendees, signage and directional markings are displayed in the building and every other pew is roped off with designated seating spots in each pew
- Offerings must be deposited at the entrance to the sanctuary
- Choir and congregational singing are not permitted
- Worship may incorporate instrumentalists provided the players remain 2 metres apart

- A soloist is permitted but must be 4 metres distanced from the congregation and must wear a mask when singing
- Communion may be served but with physical distancing, masking and hand sanitizing applied
- Children under 10 must remain with their families
- Youth programmes for those 10 years and up may resume but with physical distancing and masking in place
- Other than the communion elements, food and beverages must not be served either before or after services or at any other meeting or gathering.
- Meetings may be held in the building but subject to individual room capacities, physical distancing and the wearing of masks.

Effective October 1, Trinity Anglican also implemented a COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination Policy for clergy, staff and volunteers on the direction of the Diocese. The Policy mandates that all clergy, employees and volunteers must be fully vaccinated before being allowed entry to the church premises. Only those in possession of a valid exemption either on medical grounds or under the Ontario Human Rights Codes are excepted from the mandatory vaccination requirement. Further, it has been announced by the Diocese that people will not be required to show proof of vaccination in order to attend worship.

As a tenant of Trinity Anglican, Aurora United is required to comply with the vaccination policy for clergy, staff and volunteers and the restrictions applicable to worship services, meetings and gatherings at the church. The United Church of Canada, through Shining Waters Regional Council, has provided general advice on mandatory vaccinations for staff and proof of vaccination to attend worship but is leaving the establishment of policies on both subjects to the individual congregations. With these factors in mind, the members of Council had a detailed and very open discussion about the direction for worship, meetings and gatherings in the time ahead. Council recognized that we all wish we could be back together again at the church to join in worship, to enjoy the gifts of music by the choir, the handbell groups and others and to engage in conversation over a coffee following the service. Council also considered how meaningful and fulfilling in-person worship would be with all of the restrictions and prohibitions described above in effect. Having thoroughly discussed all these factors, and in particular the health and safety of the congregation, Council unanimously decided that AUC will remain online for worship, meetings and gatherings for the foreseeable future. Discussion of an AUC vaccination policy was deferred to a future meeting in light of the decision. Council will continue to monitor the state of the pandemic and the status of public health restrictions through the fall to determine when a review of this decision might be in order.

Having made the decision to remain online, Council then discussed the temporary layoffs of Margaret Heney and Cathy Hiltz and the status of Lisa Kyriakides' contract. The Province of Ontario recently announced that the period of job-protected infectious disease emergency leave for those employees whose hours have been reduced or eliminated due to COVID-19 has been extended to January 1, 2022. Since there will not be sufficient work to warrant their recall while we remain online, Council decided to further extend Margaret and Cathy's layoffs from September 25, 2021 to January 1, 2022 and not to renew Lisa's contract for the time being. AUC will continue to pay both the employer and employee portions of Margaret and Cathy's health benefits during the extension. In deciding to extend the temporary layoffs, Council reiterated its concern for the well-being of the staff members and reaffirmed the commitment to their recall when conditions permit. We continue to value their contributions to our church life and to hold them in our thoughts.

Separate from Council's extension of the temporary layoffs, Cathy Hiltz had announced her intention to retire from her position of Church Secretary as of September 30. In her nine years of service, Cathy experienced the loss of our historic church, the makeshift office accommodations in one of the rental houses and the move to our interim home at Trinity Anglican. Through these moves and transitions, she maintained office operations and responded to the needs of congregants and visitors

with a friendly greeting and offer of assistance. In a special motion, Council expressed its appreciation to Cathy for her years of service to AUC and extended best wishes to her in retirement. Council also decided that the position of Church Secretary will not be filled for the time being.

I am sure that this update has provided you with a lot to digest. Some of you may be left to wonder when or if we are going to get back to in-person worship and meetings. Rest assured that we will but when it feels safe and comfortable for the members of the congregation to come together. In the meantime, Council continues to appreciate your understanding, your support and, of course, your feedback. We are still the church and will continue to carry on its good works even though we are not in the building.

Feel free to get in touch with me by phone or email should you have any questions or comments.

Best regards.

Bill Newman  
Chair, AUC Council