



Moderator: God Is with Us

Posted in **Faith Communities and COVID-19**

We are with each other even when we aren't
able to be together. We are not alone.



The Right Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, 43rd Moderator of The United Church of Canada

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Grace and peace to you, in the love of the Creator, the peace of Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. I am writing to you on the evening following the announcement by the World Health Organization that the novel coronavirus COVID-19 has reached a pandemic state. Here in Canada, while the number of presumptive and confirmed cases remains low, Canadians are being asked to prepare for an increase in the number of people affected by the virus.

There are many more people who are far better equipped than I am to talk about how the virus can affect our health. I have been deeply thankful for the calm and clear explanations and directives by Canada's public health

services, local, provincial, and federal. I hope that individuals will turn to these medical leaders, who are well prepared to lead us through this time.

The General Council Office is sharing resources with communities of faith and regions to help them in their planning about how to respond to this health situation. (You will be able to find links to them, as they are posted, on the [Faith Communities and COVID-19](#) page.) As measures are put in place to help people remain as healthy as possible, it is my hope that our communities of faith will continue to help people to love God with all they are, to love their neighbour, and to love themselves by helping each other, and the wider community, to the best of our abilities.

I recognize that there is a great deal that is being learned about COVID-19. I have also noticed, both on social media and on traditional media, a great deal of misinformation and “hyping” of fears. While that is understandable in the face of the unknown, it isn’t particularly helpful. A level of caution is important. It can help us to be careful and caring about our actions. When fear overwhelms us, we can act in ways that do harm not only to ourselves but also to those around us.

Scripture talks a lot about fear—often in the form of “Don’t be afraid!” I know that can be hard to do, but I think there is an important call to us as people of God and followers of Jesus. In those moments when fear gets huge, we have the opportunity to love even more and, in that love, to help one another.

As we build in “social distance,” where people aren’t able to spend time in each other’s presence in the ways we’re used to, it becomes even more important to reach out in creative ways—by telephone and video-chat, for example. For those who are staying home from church because of health concerns, or as we face the possibility that communities of faith may need to suspend regular gathering for worship at some point, there is the possibility of joining a worshipping community through livestream on the

computer, or downloading audio or text versions (if that's possible in your area) until we are able to return to our more traditional practices. And if you are offering services online, let people in the wider community know via social media. At times like this, people turn to the church for comfort, and we can still offer strong and reassuring pastoral care online and through telephone and text.

God is with us in this, and we are with each other—even when we aren't able to be together. We are not alone.

Christ's peace is with you.

The Right Rev. Richard Bott
Moderator, The United Church of Canada

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