



# St. Albert United Church

an Affirming Ministry within the United Church of Canada

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## Statement re: COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19 throughout many parts of the world has begun to dominate our daily news cycles as well as our discussions as a community. Much remains to be learned about this rapidly-spreading, unpredictable virus, but most indications suggest that it has the potential to be very harmful to certain members of the global population. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that, “older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.” The WHO has also suggested that we have an opportunity to proactively stem or at least slow the chain of transmission by taking decisive action.

The St Albert United Church Council has been closely monitoring the situation in our region because we recognize that many members of our church family would be at a greater risk of developing a serious illness if they were exposed to this virus. As a community of faith, we also recognize that we are called to mirror the compassion and understanding that is at the heart of our Christian beliefs.

In an effort to extend the hand of compassion and to continue holding our Sunday services while seeking to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Council has developed an action plan to help safeguard our members and all those who come through our door. The following items are the initiatives we have agreed to implement going forward:

- Continuing to promote frequent hand washing and providing additional hand sanitizer stations
- Discontinuing the practice of passing the offering plate for the time being and providing stations where people can place their offerings before or after the service
- Asking our greeters to refrain from shaking hands or making any physical contact as they welcome people into the building
- Ensuring that the volunteers who are printing, folding and distributing bulletins on Sunday morning, as well as those who count the offering, regularly wash their hands and have access to gloves
- Eliminating personal contact from way we prepare and serve coffee and tea following our Sunday service
- Sanitizing the church with greater frequency and paying special attention to cleaning the chairs in the sanctuary before every gathering
- Eliminating personal contact from the way in which we serve communion

The following public events are also impacted:

- Death Café event (originally scheduled for March 11) is postponed
- PIE Day and Panel (originally scheduled for March 15) is postponed
- St Patrick's Day dinner (also scheduled for March 15) has been cancelled; ticket purchasers are welcome to a refund in the meantime)

No dates have been decided upon for the postponed events, and there is the possibility of the dinner being rescheduled as well.

In addition to these actions, we also request that

**all who are exhibiting symptoms of illness refrain from attending church,**  
and that

**any church members or staff who have recently returned from outside of  
Canada observe a period of self-isolation for 14 days,** to ensure they remain  
symptom-free.

The discussions that led to the development and implementation of this action plan have been lengthy. We have tried to consider all of the stakeholders that this plan will impact. We also recognize that further action may need to be taken as this situation develops, including the possibility of temporarily suspending public worship services.

During our deliberations, council, church ministry and staff and other stakeholders considered many different points of view and do not want to appear alarmist in our approach. Currently, the threat level reported by AHS for our region remains low and the odds of contracting the virus are also low, but the stakes of risking an outbreak in our community are extremely high. As church council, we would much rather err on the side of caution than risk the well-being of any of our church family.

We thank you for your understanding and cooperation, and we welcome any questions or feedback.

Troy Sartison, Chair  
St. Albert United Church Council