# Knox

# Presbyterian Church

March 14, 2020

Greetings Knox Church community,

Yesterday an email was sent regarding cancellation of this Sunday morning’s worship service at Knox in light of the COVID19 health pandemic.   In this note today, I want to offer just a few comments regarding how and why this decision was made and also offer some guidance for next steps at Knox during the present health concerns.

Clearly, not all churches are cancelling worship services tomorrow, and perhaps some are wondering why this decision has been made for Knox.   First and foremost, we are doing so because we are a downtown congregation with many interactions among vulnerable populations, including those who are disadvantaged, elderly persons, as well as international travelers seeking a place of worship while at a nearby hotel.  In other words, the decision to cancel our worship service is not only to prevent risk among our membership, but also our extended Centretown Community.   While it is true we are being told the risk in Ottawa right now is low with limited confirmed cases of COVID19, nobody really knows how many people are undiagnosed carriers at the moment.   The decision to cancel worship at Knox is made to do our small part in preventing any potential spread of the virus, whether through our regular members and attenders, disadvantaged persons who join us, or international travelers.

Conversely, you might be surprised to hear Knox is going forward with our Saturday evening Out of the Cold (Centre 120) program.   We are doing so primarily because this is an essential service to disadvantaged persons in our community.   That said, with thanks to leadership of Helen Beck, OOTC Coordinator, strict precautions are being implemented for risk prevention, both in terms of food preparation, service, and clean-up so that both our guests and volunteers experience as safe an environment as possible.   In addition, guests will be seated at tables in much less closer proximity than usual and  ‘take-out’ options will be provided.    Following this weekend’s program, decisions by Knox regarding future weeks of OOTC will be made in tandem with any advice given by local health authorities.   At present, mission outreaches similar to our OOTC program have not been requested to close.   In addition, as mentioned above, this ministry is primary to our mission where God has placed us in the heart of our city.

It’s good for everyone at Knox to also know that on Monday of this past week, the Elders of Session had already approved the formation of a COVID19 Contingency Committee (CCC) which includes a small number of Elders, Temporal Board Members and myself.   While the health situation is very dynamic, it might be of some assurance to everyone that this committee has been reviewing a wide range of concerns and potential implications related to COVID19 as well as ministry opportunities arising from the current health concerns.    Through communication to you by our Elders, emails such as this, plus our website (knoxottawa.ca), our Facebook page (Knox Presbyterian Church Ottawa), and even our Church Signs, we hope to communicate as clearly and often as needed.   Regarding the email distribution list through which you’re receiving this note, I’m aware not nearly everyone at Knox is included so if you know someone who is not receiving these messages and would like to be included, please have them email me at pastor.jim.pot@rogers.com.     If for some reason you do wish to be removed from this list, email me with that request as well.   If you know of someone in need of pastoral support, please also inform an Elder of Knox or myself.

Finally, I also want everyone who is part of the Knox Church community to know we are working on plans to find a way to begin some form of communication to replace Sunday worship via video on our Church website.   When this is ready to go, you will be informed.

In addition to the above information which I trust will be helpful and hopeful for you, I have a few requests for you to consider:

**First of all, pray.**    Be in prayer especially for health workers, particularly those in our city.   Give thanks for them, for their expertise and the advanced medical technology and procedures we’re able to have in place.    Pray for their physical and emotional well-being.   We need them to be their best right now.     Pray for our politicians, including city councillors and our Mayor to offer clear guidance alongside health officials and make wise decisions.  Pray for good cooperation among them and their counterparts in the provincial and federal government.   And of course, be especially in prayer for our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his wife Sophie, both in terms of leadership and personal health concerns.    You will know of other ways to be in prayer for yourselves, your loved ones and neighbours.   Pray especially for calm in the middle of an anxious time.

**Secondly, be a good neighbour.**   In relation to the measure of calm we should pray for, do what you can in whatever context you live to be a calming and helpful presence to others.    For example, this is an especially important time to show what it means to be a good neighbour.   Who in your circle of influence, either next door or a phone call or email away, could use an encouraging word or supportive gesture.    And of course, if you yourself are someone getting anxious or in need of the same, please do reach out.   Contact someone you trust, including the possibility of contacting someone from Knox, either an Elder or a trusted friend.   Please know I’m also available to be reached either by phone (mobile 613-266-7712; office 613-238-4774), email (pastor.jim.pot@rogers.com), or in person as needed.

**Third, be patient**.    Communication from Knox has been limited so far.  I know that since yesterday when we first communicated the cancellation of Sunday Worship, I had promised to provide updates on the website, which so far has been quite limited.   With the COVID19 Contingency Committee in place, our ability to communicate clear and timely decisions will increase.   In addition to the information above and these three requests to you, there’s no doubt you might have other questions about ministries and programs at Knox, and perhaps even how you can contribute in some way to helping our church continue to be the presence of Christ in Centretown Ottawa.   As the situation evolves and as the CCC makes decisions and recommendations, you will be kept informed.   With that in mind, please also keep updated about COVID19 announcements from our City (ottawa.ca) and our local health board (ottawapublichealth.ca) via television, radio, newsprint or social media.   We will be making decisions very much in alignment with both our civic and health authorities.

I know this is a lengthy communication.   Please be mindful of all the above consideration, and in the middle of this time of uncertainty, have faith that God is with us.    In concluding this letter, I want to encourage you with four Bible verses: two for your own spiritual and emotional health and a couple of reminders for how this present situation offers opportunities to live out our faith:

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;*

*Do not fear, for I am with you;* ***Isaiah 43:1-2, 9***

*Cast all your anxiety upon Christ, because he cares for you.* ***1 Peter 5:7***

*Love your neighbour as yourself.* ***Leviticus 19:18***

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.* ***Hebrews 13:12***

*Peace, in Christ,*

*Pastor Jim*

*Minister, Knox Ottawa*

*613-238-4774 (office) 613-266-7712 (mobile)*

*pastor.jim.pot@rogers.com*