Dear London Presbyters:

It has been our practice during the COVID-19 pandemic for the moderator(s) of presbytery to provide some guidance to sessions as, together, we seek to be faithful and responsible churches in an unprecedented time.   This week, the province of Ontario issued a stay-at-home order, with exceptions only for essential services, due to the rising cases of COVID-19 in the province and the significant impact these numbers will have on hospitals.

The national church has advised that the form of public worship is a session matter. Therefore, we offer the following guidelines for sessions to consider during the stay-at-home order:

* Ensure all staff are working from home, if at all possible.  If this is not possible, have only minimal staff (1) in the building or stagger start times/end times.  Continue to exercise hand washing/cleaning strategies.
* If at all possible, record worship services from homes rather than church buildings.
* If you are unable to record worship services from home, limit those in attendance at the recording to a minimum number of people/households. (example:  1 preacher/1 musician.)  Please note, that the visual of 5 people in a church building while most in the province are not permitted to socialize inside with others is not, perhaps, a helpful one.
* Do not have soloists or wind instruments.
* Many of us will have already prepared and even filmed our online services for this Sunday. Consider making these changes for the following Sunday.
* Consider drafting a letter for those who must go to the church, outlining their work. (example:  a supply preacher who is being recorded for a Sunday service).     While the public has been assured that there will not be random road stops, this letter may help supply preachers and other dedicated support volunteers & staff feel more comfortable, if they are asked why they are on the road and headed to or from the church.
* If your building is empty, ensure that you have a member of the church assigned to regularly check the building for insurance purposes. Ask them to flush toilets, check taps, and also fridges and freezers when they check on the building.  A reminder that while we are not using our parking lots, we would be wise to ensure that they not community hazards for those who may use them as a walk through. There may be insurance ramifications.
* Pastoral visiting should occur only by phone, email or video conferencing.  In person pastoral care should be reserved for:  end of life or those in extreme mental anguish.
* Funerals and weddings are limited to 10 people, including the officiant, inside and outside.

We continue to hold you up in prayer, as you seek to provide hope and joy in the midst of difficult days.   We hope these points for discussion are helpful to your sessions.

Blessings,

Rev. Michelle Butterfield-Kocis

Rev. Mavis Currie