

September 2021

Dear friends of the Presbytery of London,

It is with much fear and trembling that I come to the role of Moderator of the Presbytery of London for 2021-2022. Not only because this role is new to me, but also because these are very uncertain times with many churches struggling to survive and the church is not alone. The pandemic has touched all spheres of our world.

I am sure that many of us will remember where we were when we had to make the difficult decision to suspend in-person worship for the first time. I happened to be at a church dinner. Little did we know at the time that that would be our 'last supper' together for a very long time.

Now, a year and a half into this pandemic, there are still so many unanswered questions and we are all weary. As Presbyterians, we believe that our intellect is a God given gift, and that advances in science are one way God is at work in our world. Therefore, we encourage all members of our denomination to get vaccinated.

Currently, the province of Ontario requires its citizens to be fully vaccinated to attend restaurants, bars, nightclubs, event spaces, sports, fitness spaces and concerns. Churches, and businesses deemed essential are exempt. This raises many concerns and questions for sessions, as they determine a safe, inclusive and faithful path forward.

The order and time of public worship is the responsibility of sessions. Some churches in our presbytery are continuing with online worship at this time. Others are moving to in-person worship, following all of the public health protocols. Some churches will be taking a cautious approach and require vaccinations for public services, while others will decide to welcome whoever registers, so long as they continue to follow proper Covid protocols. Churches are advised to continue to use caution in any re-opening plans and to abide by the regulations of your public health jurisdictions. Please, whatever decision you choose, do so as Christ's followers showing grace and mercy to your community.

I also want to take this opportunity to speak about another possibly unnoticed implication of the pandemic. While we have read about the negative impact that these uncertain times have had on front-line and healthcare workers, we are also beginning to learn that the clergy have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. I have talked to many clergy who are struggling with the strain of this prolonged season of uncertainty.

Many are working long hours, learning new skills and taking their work back to their homes in the form of various online meetings. The financial strain of churches coupled with congregational divisions over online vs in-person worship etc., have increased the stress on pastors. All this to say, please, remember to care for your minister. Recognize the strain on them and their families. Here are some practical ways to care for your minister: Make sure your minister is taking their holiday time and study leave, encourage them to connect with other clergy or talk to someone if they are having a difficult time, gift them an extra Sunday off and be willing to offer encouragement when needed.

Lastly, know that you are not alone. We continue to stand together as the body of Christ knowing that "he who has promised will be faithful (Heb 10:23)." Remember to take care of yourselves. Give yourself the permission to relax and let go of your burdens to the God who cares for you.

My prayer is that you would remain in Christ's love. When all around speaks of trouble, despair and heartache, may you be filled with faith, hope and peace that only God can give.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Andrew" being more prominent than the last name "Thompson".

Rev. Andrew Thompson
Moderator of the Presbytery of London