



## Fall Pastoral Letter: Babysteps to Recovery

Dear friends,

**Like many people, I put on a bit of COVID pudge in the past few years.** My chiropractor attributes my recent lower back pain to a weakened core and hamstring muscles, which is his gentle way of telling me I am out of shape! He encouraged me, as we discussed remedies, **to start with baby steps** – treat the flare-up of pain, then start on a program of gradual strengthening exercise. “It’s okay,” he reassured me. “Many of us saw declines during COVID.” But as I lay cricked up in pain on his treatment bench, it became clear that it was time for healthier habits for me!

**In many ways, the same is true for us, spiritually.** During the lockdowns, it wasn’t healthy to meet together as a community. Important ministries of care, teaching, communal worship and prayer were suspended. COVID left many of us feeling like “a spiritual puddle of goo” (as a friend described it). These were big feelings to deal with: health concerns, financial worries, stressors at home taking care of family, loneliness, anxiety, fear, depression... it’s been a lot, and our spiritual disciplines have slipped. People got out of the habit of gathering weekly in person. Personal devotional practices have suffered.

**Let me reassure you - you are not alone.** Across denominations, there is a spiritual weariness and one of the areas where we are seeing this fatigue is in Sunday morning worship. People - especially working adults, and families - have not yet resumed attending weekly in-person worship. And yet I have heard from many of you a desire to renew good spiritual habits this fall.

**Let’s start with baby steps.** Let’s face it – we have been missing each other. And we can do something about that. If you haven’t returned to in-person services, why not start with scheduling Sunday worship into your calendar for once or twice a month? And perhaps pick up a copy of a devotional like Daily Bread from the church office. You can spend 5 or 10 minutes with Jesus at breakfast, lunch, on the GO train, or before you go to bed. Sunday school has started up again – why not bring the kids? Why not invite a friend? Start with baby steps and build from there.

**The world has changed post-pandemic,** and so has the Church landscape in North America. I am grateful to our wardens, staff members and so many lay ministers who have been labouring with me this past year to rebuild our spiritual walls. It’s been exciting even when it’s hard work. We are beginning to see the fruit of our labours. We are building our faith journeys, our community, and our concept of what God’s church is and needs to be going forward. We are learning together as we go and as we grow. We need each other and that means we need you. **What hasn’t changed post-pandemic is the hope to which we are called.** And we can hold on to Paul’s wisdom - he speaks of how we are to live as we move into an unknown future:



*Now we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love.*

**Here are some of the ways I am inviting you to join St. Paul's as we strive to lean into the Faith, Hope and Love that we find in Christ Jesus.**

### **Growing in faith**

*God calls us all to find our place and part in the healing and redemption of all of God's Creation.*

**Small Group Bible Studies:** Our lay leaders are resuming both in-person and on-line groups. Check out our parish website to find a group you can join.

**Preaching Series:** To prepare us for our fall preaching series on Gideon, guest speaker Dr. Lissa Wray Beal will be joining us online this October for an adult education event, introducing us to the book of Judges.

**Youth Alpha program:** Matthew Waterman is leading this engaging program with all interested youth, both for those interested in confirmation and for those wanting to learn more about their faith. Please reach out to Matthew to find out more, at [mattheww@stpaulsonthehill.com](mailto:mattheww@stpaulsonthehill.com).

**Renewed Devotional Practices During the Week:** For those wanting a great way to spend time with God during the week, Hasangi has ordered more copies of ***Our Daily Bread***, which will be available soon for pickup.

**Sunday School:** We are introducing a fun and powerful children's church experience with our new curriculum called Kids' Own Worship as our kids learn to experience God through a weekly Bible Point, fun activities, and engaging worship.

**Reconciliation With Our Indigenous Peoples:** We are creating opportunities for those of you who want to take up the invitation of First Nations peoples here in Canada to listen to their stories. We begin in October with an in-person workshop with a Metis elder, who will be offering Metis 101 class after Sunday service. Later in October and early November, I will be offering two classes: "How we got here", looking at our historic relations with our First Nations people, as part of a commitment I made last June at our first National Indigenous Day of Prayer service.

### **Persevering in Hope:**

*Isolation can rob us of hope. God calls us to Christian fellowship so we can encourage each other to persevere in our walk with Jesus.*



**We are a Hybrid Church:** We now have a regular online worshiping community as well as our traditional in-person worshippers. Let's commit, as we are able, to Sunday mornings becoming once again a time to connect with fellow Christians, to welcome new members, and to encourage one another in faith. Baby steps!

**Lay "Friendly Visitors" Ministry to Those Who Cannot Attend in Person:** Some of our members cannot come to church for health or mobility reasons, but in-person Christian Fellowship is needed for everyone's spiritual well-being. We are hoping to start up a lay "Friendly Visitors" ministry to our shut-ins. If you are a shut-in and wanting a visitor, or if you are willing to **Adopt a Shut-in**, please reach out to Hasangi in the church office.

**Investment in Ministry:** We are continuing our livestream services for those who cannot attend in person due to health, travel, or work. To this end, we need to sustain and improve our website and livestreaming - specifically, a website redesign, better lighting for the livestream, and purchasing equipment to replace what was generously loaned to us by Bill Bradbury.

### **Serving in love**

*God calls us to be His hands and feet as we express His love and care in our homes, our church community, and the world.*

**Lay ministry:** This fall, we are celebrating and thanking our volunteers on September 18. I prefer the term lay minister to volunteer, because that better captures the dignity and kingdom importance of the priesthood of all believers.

**New Ministry:** If you are thinking about pursuing new things, please consider ministry at St Paul's. Maybe you could commit to ushering once a month or joining our new choir that will sing for a few special services this fall and winter. Perhaps you could help out with Sunday school once a month or join a phone calling or card-writing ministry. Are you a bit of a techie? Consider getting involved with our AV team. Do you love hospitality? Why not help out at coffee hour? We have lots of opportunities and we want to hear from you. If you want to explore where you might join in ministry, please reach out to Hasangi in the church office to start the conversation.

That's a lot of information. Check the website or check the bulletin for details for these upcoming events.

Yours in Christ,

Canon Stephanie