

## An Open Letter to the people of Windsor/Essex from your faith leaders.

Windsor, ON  
December 2020

To our beloved neighbours, from your local Windsor/Essex Priests, Pastors, and Faith Leaders,

We love you. It's true: we do. Please forgive us for the times when this has been unclear in the past.

We write you today in the spirit of this love: we humbly encourage you to follow the recommended public health guidelines, and we also write to let you know we will be doing the same. The signatories below, who represent local churches, will be following these same guidelines as best as we know how, to limit the spread of COVID-19. As a tangible expression of our love, we will suspend our large onsite, in-person gatherings for alternative methods of worship that follow appropriate health guidelines. Don't get us wrong: we love to gather and worship together on Sunday mornings, but our faith is so much more than one day a week, and we consider it an honour to lay down our privileges for the sake of our neighbours and larger community.

In this pre-Christmas Advent season, we are accustomed to gathering for worship, study, prayer, and confession as we wait in joyful hope for the advent of God. But because we love you, some of the ways the church goes about being the Church will be different in the midst of the current season of escalating public health alert.

We are church communities who have limited onsite worship to prevent our buildings from becoming epicentres for the spread of the current pandemic. This is for a short period of time, and not indefinite. We have done this before, of course ... most recently in March of this year, but also in 1918. Other church communities are limiting the numbers and movements of people within their buildings in strict adherence to the physical distancing and masking imperatives. Communities have moved to online forms of worship that allow us to gather and maintain connections to the people, the prayers and the practices that will strengthen us to meet the challenges ahead. We have also dusted off our phone call-out lists and bought stamps again to maintain some semblance of the connections we love.

The scriptures we lean on for example, and to discern the way through life's trials and triumphs, call on us to love God with everything we've got and to love our neighbour.

Our communities remain at work here on earth and we are devoted to upholding Windsor/Essex in prayer and support with outreach ministries to uplift the most vulnerable – food security ministries supplied and 12-step programmes hosted, among many others. We are mindful of groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic restrictions such as small businesses, domestic abuse survivors, teachers, front line workers experiencing fatigue, those with mental health needs, and people with addictions etc. Please contact us if there are ways we can support you.

We believe that all good gifts come from God and are best used to the glory of God. We trust that the intellects and skills of doctors, nurses, sanitation workers, scientists, laundry workers, teachers, and so many others who are currently devoted to the current emergency are just such a gift from God. We also believe that their best work is yet to come.

It is because we believe the best days are yet to be experienced that we feel able to meet the current challenges – it is the very message of the current Advent season.

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We know there are some church communities that have chosen a different path and will continue to gather throughout the coming weeks – while we disagree with their approach, we will, as always, uphold them in prayer.

An unexpected benefit of the current restrictions is that people can explore church communities across the city, and indeed around the world, which would have been otherwise inaccessible. We invite you to explore the social media streams and websites of these and other communities. We pray you discover the hope, joy, love, and peace that your heart has needed.

May you be a blessing this Advent and Christmas.

~ 30 ~

Contact the letter's authors:

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Signatories:

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The Rev'd Alicia Good, Pastor – North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington

The Rev'd Charleen Jongejan Harder, Pastor – North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington

The Rev'd Kendall Jongejan Harder, Pastor – North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington

Ben Kivell, Windsor

The Rev'd Sharla Malliff, Rector – St. James' Anglican Church (Roseland), Windsor

The Rev'd Kimberly Myer, Rector – The Parish of St. Stephen's and Church of the Redeemer, Oldcastle.

The Rev'd Paul Poolton, Rector – St. Augustine of Canterbury Anglican Church (Wyandotte East), Windsor

The Rev'd Shalini Rajack-Sankarlal, Pastor – University Community Church, Presbyterian (University), Windsor

The Rev'd Maurice Restivo, CSB, pastor – Windsor Heritage Catholic Family of Parishes (various), Windsor

The Rev'd Drew Riach, Pastor – Exchange Church, Windsor

(Exchange will not meet in 'grey' and stand with these fellow churches)

Chad Rollo – Living Out Leadership, Windsor

The Rev'd Kevin Saunders, Lead Pastor - Lifeline Church (downtown), Windsor

PS Signatories have been included here with their permission. We are modelling physical distancing by not all gathering in one place to sign this letter.