



## Pastor appreciation – We need to say thank you

By Bishop Greg  
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Among the many important observances during the month of October, “Pastor Appreciation Month” is another one that you should consider. In this year of dislocation and change, there have been added strains and pressures on our church leaders. We need to say thank you. We need to show our appreciation.

I have been so impressed by the incredible work undertaken by our church leaders. I occasionally hear the comment, “We weren’t trained for this.” That is so true. None of us were. There have been significant technical issues to navigate. Traditional ways of gathering have gone by the wayside. We are trying to figure out how to maintain a sense of community and belonging, while at the same time ensuring physical distancing and proper health protocols. There has been a steep learning curve for clergy and for congregations.

Zoom and other technological methods are all fine and good, but many people in our society are craving physical presence. We might understand in our heads the need for restrictions, but our hearts are longing for the familiar, the closeness, and the “being together.”

This is compounded by one of the characteristics of our so-called modern society, in that we want things now. Everything must be delivered now and acted upon now. There is to be no delay. Things are to be in our hands tomorrow; decisions need to be made now. We want instant access to news, purchased goods, and answers. With respect to COVID-19, we want a vaccine now, we want to return to our church buildings now, and we want church to be the way it was.

But we are going to be in this for the long haul. Things will not be back to “normal” for quite some time. Some limited, in-person worship might be possible this fall and in 2021, depending on your congregation’s context. However, things will not be the same. Being a community of faith in this COVID-era means refraining from some of the things we highly value about being a community.

We can do this. We can continue to be the people of God. We will still worship, have Bible studies, and visit with each other (albeit by phone, zoom or across the yard). We will still care for each other and serve our communities. We will still make our financial gifts to our congregations.

Depending on your context and your congregational decisions, you may or may not meet face-to-face for worship for some time to come. But we will get through this. We are still the church.

I was reading an article recently that reminded us of the times in church history when Christians needed to gather together in secret. When they gathered, they needed to be quiet, because singing could give them away. To care for each other, they refrained from singing.

In our context, we need to refrain from singing for a different reason. Singing increases the production of droplets and aerosols, which increase the risk of transmission of the virus. This is even made worse in enclosed spaces that lack significant ventilation — something that is a problem for many of our churches. If refraining from singing means that we reduce the risk of transmission, then so be it. Is that too hard of a thing to ask? If our ancestors in the faith could refrain from singing in order to avoid detection and imprisonment, surely, we can refrain from singing in order to reduce the risk of viral transmission.

If we do gather for in-person worship, we must shorten our worship services, ventilate the space as much as we can, refrain from singing, and keep our gatherings small. We do this out of love for the neighbour.

In the midst of all of this, your pastors are working hard trying to maintain a sense of community and relationship. They are trying to navigate the changes that are needed in order to care for you during this COVID-era. They are working hard to discern how best to lead funeral services and weddings, how to provide hospital and hospice visitation, and how to conduct baptisms and confirmations.

“We were not trained for this.” In some ways that is true. But in other ways, I wonder. Is it true? Maybe we were trained for this! Maybe our training prepared us for the ability to respond to new and unforeseen circumstances. Maybe our training helped us to remember that in whatever changes and challenges life throws at us, God continues to live and move and have being among us. Maybe our training has shown us that there are many different ways by which worship, and community, can take place.

Even so, make sure that you express your appreciation this October or November. Don't just give thanks to God for the work and ministry of your pastor, give thanks directly to them. Thank them for their ministry. Remind them that you pray for them regularly. Tell them how they have made a difference in your life. Be gracious. Be real. Be thankful.