



# An Unconventional Advent – Waiting, Watching and Longing

By Bishop Greg

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A blessed Advent to you all! Yes, I mean it. I know we are no longer in December, but we are very much immersed in Advent life during these first months of 2021. Who knows how long this Unconventional Advent season will last?

Advent is a time of waiting, watching and longing. Those three words pretty much summarize our lives throughout most of 2020 and well into 2021. As you may have surmised, this Unconventional Advent time of watching, waiting and longing does not pertain to the coming of Christ but instead to the coming of a vaccine and immunization. However, the way of thinking, and the posture required, at this time has so much in common with our yearly church season of Advent.

When we immerse ourselves in the church season of Advent, we speak of patience, waiting in hope, and watching for something to come among us. As we watch and wait, we live a life of prayer, kindness, and service to others. It is no surprise that these Advent rhythms of life result in strong support for food banks, toy drives, Christmas hampers and shelters.

Can we learn something about our current pandemic life by reflecting on our Advent practices? What are we learning and experiencing about ourselves, our faith, our neighbourhoods and our communities?

We see some heartwarming and special things taking place: people caring for each other, being creative in helping out, doing fundraisers, sending cards, phoning people living alone, saying thank you more frequently and, as BC's Provincial Health Officer Dr. Henry states, being kind to one another.

Yet we also see the brokenness of our relationships. We hear of staff in stores and transit drivers being treated cruelly. We become concerned about situations where an individual refuses to acknowledge that we live in community and that there are times when the common good takes precedence over any individual right.

It was nearly one year ago that the bishops wrote several letters to the church regarding the onset of the pandemic. We discussed what a faithful response might be at this dis-located time in which we found ourselves. Central to that response was the understanding that the suspension of worship, the stopping of congregational singing, and the refraining from handshakes and hugs, were actions taken out of love for the neighbour.

As we think about our church Advent season, we know that the coming of Christ into our midst is not something that is just for us. Rather, we are propelled out into our communities to be of service, to care for others, to be agents of peace love, care, and compassion. These actions are also the actions required of us during this 2021 Unconventional Advent season.

We do all of this for the love of the world. We live out this "neighbour-love" because the one who came among us — the one who came to be God incarnate among us — calls us to be agents of love, compassion and justice.