

Greetings Innerkip United,

It's good to be home!!! Recently, I was named your new Pastoral Charge Supervisor – a 'coming home' of sorts, for me. As many of you will know, I grew up at Innerkip United and I was even a candidate for ministry from your congregation. I live just outside of the village and my roots are deep in this community. I always joked that the only volunteer position I never held at Innerkip was that of Trustee, and now this appointment has allowed me to scratch that, as well as the role of Minister at Innerkip, off my bucket list! Above all, though, it's just good to be home and to offer what service I can through your time of transition.

I know it has been a challenging few months for you – the leave of your minister (who has our prayers,) the recent closure of your sister community of faith (whose members are still grieving,) the resignation of other key staff to follow other pursuits (with our well-wishes) – and now a far-reaching pandemic that has brought society to a near stand still and has shuttered the day-to-day operations of many businesses and services, not least of all your church. You could feel like Job, wondering what you did to deserve all this tragedy. You could even ask, as Jesus did from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I wouldn't blame you. Even the psalmist wasn't afraid to lament, putting all the worries and concerns of the world on God's shoulders – God is big enough to handle it, and so you can lament, too. Just also know that God is there – not causing these problems, but grieving with us through the, crying with us, walking with us, and comforting us. As our new creed in the United Church of Canada says:

God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Although I would argue the church is more 'essential' than ever, I understand that we must do our part to flatten the curve and now maintain that success even after the peak. Thank you for taking the advice of our government and health officials by doing your part to keep physical distance and stop the spread. Thanks also for checking in on the more-vulnerable, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions to ensure they have what they need. Thank you for your prayers, your faith, and your hope. Thanks for bringing needs forward to us so we can respond with help and hope. Thank you for continuing to be the church! The church is not closed – it is deployed!

A piece from the Morning & Evening Prayers of our Lutheran brothers and sisters seems quite appropriate at this time:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Our doors may be shut, but our hearts are open. Thank you for opening your doors and hearts to me, as well . . . again. By God's grace, we will hopefully have a vaccine sooner than later so we can all come home to our churches again – the days of trial will be past and what a day of celebration that will be!

Stay home, stay safe, stay calm & stay connected,
Rev. Mark Marshall
Pastoral Charge Supervisor