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Steve Shaver

September 28, 2020

Dear Christ First Friends

Despite the inconveniences and hardships imposed upon us as a result of COVID-19, I am hoping that in some form or another you were all able to take advantage of the best that this strange summer had to offer - and indeed it was strange. Whether it was enjoying the tranquility of a cottage, long walks in your neighbourhood, being curled up on the porch reading a new book or simply enjoying an early evening cup of tea as the sun sets, something was missing. It was being with our church friends.

Thanks to COVID-19, we are temporarily cut off from the many activities that bring us pleasure and help us feel the warmth of our church family when we spend time together. We are missing the bridge games, Good Neighbours bus trips, Bible study with Ted Lutz, quilting sessions and choir practices to name a few examples. We are missing the laughter and the buzz of conversation that is the daily life of a busy church. For now, we can keep those memories close and keep our friends close too with calls to say "how are you"? It's not quite the same, but it will do until the day comes when we can be back together.

While we haven't been able to sit beside our friends in church, fortunately we can continue to enjoy worship online. Each Sunday you can tune in to amazing online worship services created by a very talented group comprised of our administration, music team and the Worship Committee. I encourage you to "attend church" each week online and enjoy the wonderful music and Morar's inspiring sermons.

While the online services help fill the void, we are all looking forward to the time we can share the special fellowship that in-person services offer. In planning the return to in-person services the objective and the safety of our congregants is always top of mind. The Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC) set about to create a COVID-19 Stage 3 Health and Safety Manual.

The purpose of this manual is to outline the steps and establish guidelines that the Christ First leadership team should take in planning and holding services, running events and working in tandem with community partners who share our space during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members, adherents and visitors to Christ First (CF) should be assured that every effort is being made to create a healthy and safe environment within the buildings and functions with which CF is involved. The EPC believes that the manual accomplished all of its initial objectives concerning safety and health. It is now up to all of us to follow these guidelines and protocols. We will also be sharing this manual with St. Stephen's on-the-Hill and other congregations to assist them with their return to church preparations.

I would encourage everyone to take a few minutes and review the manual. It can be easily accessed by clicking on the following link.

[Health & Safety Manual](#)

A lot of you will be aware that many religious institutions of all denominations have started back attending in-person church services. Your EPC did not feel comfortable recommending the reopening of the church for Sunday services even before COVID-19 cases were beginning to spike in Peel Region. Now, more than ever, we do not consider it is yet safe to return.

A questionnaire was developed and distributed to all CF members and adherents in order to determine if the majority of the congregants were supportive of this decision. The results of the survey confirmed that many shared the EPC's thinking that it was too early to return to church for in-person services. To see how the congregation responded to the questionnaire, click on the following link.

[Return to Services
Questionnaire Response](#)

It is the EPC's considered view that we will not be in a position to make a determination as to when we will be able to re-open for Sunday services until caseloads lessen dramatically and we are able to assess the impact of students returning to school on the overall caseloads.

When a decision is made as to when we can safely reopen, it is our plan to provide all congregants with a link to a video outlining what procedures and guidelines will be in effect. We want everyone to be comfortable with the new measures in effect and the safeguards that will be in place. In order to make the re-opening as comfortable and inviting as possible it is our current thinking that a rehearsal service will be held to assure the environment is as healthy as possible.

I would be remiss if I did not sincerely thank the healthcare experts on our EPC. Heather McGillis, Kay Cranston and Nancy Hori skillfully navigated their way around a myriad of thorny issues. Without them sharing their expertise with us we would not have a truly impressive Health and Safety Manual. Thank you ladies.

Financial Update

When I reported to you in early July, I stressed that Council was being very careful in its spending. Because we continue to be negatively impacted by suppressed rental revenue, Council remains reluctant to incur large discretionary expenses including the purchase of new capital assets until we get a better indication as to when our rental revenues will return to pre COVID-19 levels, assuming that will eventually occur. The Cash Flow Statement (Appendix 2 attached) gives us some hope that rentals may in the future rise to previous levels. Currently we are experiencing a steady increase in rentals as about 55% of pre COVID-19 tenants have renewed their contracts with us. While we have reason to be cautiously optimistic, we must remain vigilant as we cannot presently determine how the recent spike in COVID-19 cases will impact our revenue streams. It merits pointing out that we continue to honour our community outreach commitments as they remain a high priority.

The Income Statement (Appendix 1) for the eight (8) month period ending August 31, 2020 shows an operating income of \$31,279 which is a highly pleasing result, given the difficult economic environment we are operating in. Upon examination, you will observe that the majority of this impressive result stemmed from hefty Property and Sundry expense savings of more than \$50,000, and in excess of \$69,000 in federal government wage rebates, being received. These two sources of bottom line income more than made up for the decreases of tenant revenue. The other source of income we were counting on to offset a shortage of fundraising revenues was "Identified Givings" from the congregation. We currently have a \$22,000 shortfall which we are hoping will be reduced over the next few months as people meet their givings commitments for 2020.

If you examine the Cash Flow Statement (Appendix 2) you will notice that we expect to end our fiscal year with a cash balance of \$225,000 which is approximately \$92,000 more than budgeted for when I last reported in July. Coincidentally the increase in cash is equal to the amount we will receive under the Wage Rebate Program. We have just been advised that the rebate program which was to end in mid November has been extended to July 2021. We are uncertain as to whether we will qualify for any rebates during the extension period so we have chosen to be conservative and not accrue any rebates past November.

Call Coordinating Committee (CCC)

It is with great pleasure that I inform you that the Horseshoe Falls Covenant Commission approved our Community of Faith Profile and Living Faith Story for the

purpose of declaring a vacancy for a full-time minister. The package received a very favourable review by the commission who said they were inspired by our ministry. In addition, the minister's position description has now been approved by the Human Resources Commission for posting on ChurchHub. This means that the work of the Call Coordinating Committee is now complete and the search process can begin. Thanks go to Mary Dowding-Paré, Nancy Hori and Aimee Gavin for their leadership in putting the package together. They were assisted by Sue Gittings and Heather McGillis who contributed their expertise in designing the position description and by many others who provided key information and thoughtful input. It was a truly collaborative effort.

Search Committee

The Search Committee has elected Mary Dowding-Paré as its chair and will be moving ahead with the search process in October after they receive training from Regional Council. The Committee will give the congregation regular updates as the search progresses.

Stewardship

In reading my financial report above, you will see that Christ First is weathering the financial turbulence caused by COVID better than expected but it's clear we may not be able to count on outside sources of revenue. More than ever, consistent financial support from our congregation is important to keep our operations and outreach programs going. Your contributions help to continue our online worship services, support the urgent needs of the Compass and other local outreach partners and the work of our Mission and Service Fund beyond our community. Our annual stewardship program will be starting shortly so please consider how you can help our church stay strong in the difficult months ahead.

In closing I want to say how proud I am that nothing, even COVID-19, has stopped the members of Christ First from continuing to show their dedication and commitment to each other and our church. Important work is being done both within our church and the community. We are moving ahead and we will get through this. We are not alone.

Sincerely,



Steve Shaver, Chair of Council