

***“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.” Acts 2:42-44***

Dear Via Church Lethbridge,

There are few passages in Holy Scripture that capture the heart of our Church more than these verses from the book of Acts. The Church at that time was in unprecedented territory: three thousand people baptized into Christ Jesus, for the forgiveness of their sins in a single day. Undoubtedly there would be a sense of pandemonium. Ministry systems had not yet been established, large buildings were not available for them to gather together in, and they did not have experienced and trained laity to assist the apostolic company in their ministry. Nevertheless, they truly understood the nature of the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and everything they did, was towards that end. As it is for us in Via Apostolica.

Friends, we are devoted to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the doctrine of the apostles, we are wholeheartedly invested in apostolic fellowship, which Saint John Chrysostom reminds us is not merely "prayers, nor in doctrine alone, but also in social relations."<sup>1</sup> We are also deeply devoted to participating in biblical remembrance during the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and are committed to apostolic prayer and worship. Jaroslav Pelikan recognizes this passage as being theologically *prescriptive*, "as an itemized list of the criteria by which the church in any age would both preserve and manifest its continuity with the apostles."<sup>2</sup> We wholeheartedly agree! Nonetheless, our ability to gather is being impacted by government regulations and our sincere desire to "love your neighbor as yourself" as Christ commanded us (Mark 12:31).

Accordingly, Via Lethbridge is excited to enter unfamiliar territory and adjust to the needs of the congregation and the city, while endeavoring to maintain the defining marks of the Church. Working in conjunction with Bishop Todd Atkinson, as of March 22, 2020, we will be postponing our Sunday morning gatherings held at our church building, to comply with the March 17, 2020 provincial ban on gatherings over fifty people. We encourage all of our congregants to participate in our live stream service, which will be available on YouTube, Facebook, and our website. Only essential personnel will be *asked* to be onsite. Thankfully, virtual sacraments are not a thing, and if they are, they should *not* be, and please do not tell me about them. Indeed, ignorance is bliss!

A dear friend of Via, The Rev. Dr. Dean Pinter, in his commentary on Acts, wrote this, "For centuries, Christians have gathered in groups both small and large to remember our Lord's suffering death on the cross for our redemption, sharing in a common loaf and a common cup together. We do so as a prayerful and joyful response of thanksgiving to Jesus's

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<sup>1</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, 2013, 59.

<sup>2</sup> Pelikan, *Acts*, 58.

command to remember his sacrifice for us until he comes again.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, we are excited to continue in our devotion to the Eucharist in a way that seeks to protect each of you, but also act as a missional testimony to the hope and peace of Christ.

"Well, how are you going to do that?" you might be asking. Great question. Thanks for asking! Our live stream service will begin at our regular time of 10 AM. We will have a time of sung worship, preaching, and our communion liturgy, which we hope you would all participate in at home, especially our time of confession and absolution, which are essential aspects of the Eucharistic service. When the service concludes, our clergy and leaders will bring the consecrated bread and wine to four designated homes in the city (north, south, west, and Coaldale). Between the hours of 12 PM-2 PM, we would encourage everyone in our Church (who is able), to come to the nearest home to receive the Eucharist. The addresses will be posted each Sunday on our church Facebook page.

Here's how this will work:

Your clergy will be standing outside of the home and there will be a chalked line on the sidewalk to ensure that the majority of our time together will be kept at a safe distance (2m). After saying the Lord's Prayer together, the clergyman will approach you and place a piece of bread that he has intincted into the wine into your hand. He will then immediately step back and would love to pray a blessing over you and your family during this time. Any clergy who feels even slightly sick, will not be involved in this process. Additionally, between each family, they will be washing and sanitizing their hands. We also ask that you not leave your vehicle until you see that there is no one at the house to receive the sacrament or a blessing. We hope that this would be a missional sign and opportunity in our city, where we could also pray for anyone walking by!

A Quick Refresh:

1. One family at a time come to the house.
2. Stop at the chalk line.
3. Say the Lord's Prayer with the clergy.
4. Receive the bread.
5. Receive prayer.

One last thing. You may notice that I said the priest would be intincting the bread for you, and some of you are probably wondering about that, because just last week, Father Rob said that drinking from the chalice is proven to be more sanitary! You're right, and we did say that! The reason that intinction is less sanitary is that our hands carry more germs than our mouths, and often when people intinct they rest their hands on the chalice, and far too often, their fingers dip into the wine. Our clergy are highly trained intincters, and we are confident that if there were a national competition for this, we'd easily place in the top seven. Furthermore, our hands will be washed and sanitized between each family. Nevertheless, if you would prefer only to receive the bread, or only to receive a blessing,

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<sup>3</sup> Dean Pinter, Tremper Longman, and Scot McKnight, *Acts, The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019), 90.

please make that clear to us, and we will proceed accordingly.

For our elderly and vulnerable parishioners, we recognize that this may not be a viable option for you, and we would love to support you in any way that we can, whether that be bringing the Eucharist to you or calling to pray for you. Lastly, if you are feeling unwell, we ask that you remain at home, and let us know so that we can be praying for you!

Via Church, this is a new time for us. Still, we are confident that God does not want to decrease his engagement with us, and we feel like this is a step for our Church that is in keeping with our convictions about what makes Church, Church, and we look forward to worshipping with you all through this global pandemic.

In his Grace and Grip,

The Very Rev. Stephen P. Barbour  
Dean and Rector of Via Church Lethbridge