

## Message from the Moderator – AMC 2021

In last year's report, I suggest that 2021 would be similar to 2020, at least in terms of the disruption Covid-19 would have on what we used to consider as "normal life". The vaccine became widely available, as anticipated, and served to dampen the effects of the virus on many but did not prevent the emergence of "Oma Krahn", as Dan likes to say. As of the time of writing, we are again unable to meet in person and have delayed the AGM a month in the hopes that an in-person meeting will be possible. That hope and longing continue to serve as prominent influences on our lives.

Last year, I suggested that the church is good at waiting and something we practice every year during Advent and Lent. There is value in patience, taking a pause, living in the moment. Covid-19 has given us an opportunity to pause and reflect and take stock of the things that really matter in our lives. Or at least that was what 2020 was for.

If 2020 was a generational moment for pause, 2021 has felt particularly marked by impatience and frustration. Impatience and frustration with those who continue to flaunt and disregard public health orders. Impatience and frustration with those who refuse to be vaccinated and the perceived effect of prolonging the pandemic. Impatience and frustration with governments who value economic productivity over health and protection of the vulnerable. We have all of the data, medication, testing kits, and other tools necessary to respond to this challenge and yet it feels like we lack the collective resolve to do so such that the diligent efforts of many have been largely ineffective at containing the spread of the virus.

I wonder if this impatience and frustration is similar to the feelings of the early church leaders, buoyed by the experience of the resurrection and Pentecost, sought to rapidly spread the message of Christ to as many as possible, suspecting that the "universal restoration" was just around the immanent. Those early apostles felt confident in their message, many having first hand experience spending time with Jesus. They diligently spread their message to multiple communities and vestiges of power. In many respects, they found quick success and the urgency of their message led to the formation of many new Christian groups. But their impatience and frustration with the lack of wider uptake is also evident, in particular with those who they expected would hear the message first. How frustrated and impatient they must have felt, perhaps even blaming those who rejected their message as the reason for the delay in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

I think this presents a useful analogy for our current circumstance. Even in spite of our best efforts and diligent work, we are not alone able to usher in a post-covid reality. There are simply too many variables outside of our control, including those who deliberately reject the message but also the emergence of variants able to evade our diligent preparations, to honestly believe we are in control enough to determine the outcome. Recognizing that truth can be met with cynicism and fatalism that none of our efforts were worthwhile because we are all going to get Covid anyway. But they can also be met with a more sobering recognition of our role in history, that in spite of our inability to dictate the flow of history, we remain valuable people, worthy of dignity in the midst of struggle, made in the image of God, and called in our unique moment of history to live rightly with our neighbours wherever they may be found.

2000 years after those early church leaders felt frustrated, we have, perhaps of necessity, developed a more nuanced view of the already-but not-yet character of the Kingdom of God and the "universal

restoration.” The church continued and continues to exist during this time in between and, while there are many who continue to focus principally on their preparation for the after-life, our tradition is more focused on facilitating and supporting faithful living in the present. And perhaps that is what God wanted for them and for us.

In spite of our disappointment and frustration with the arc of history and the temptation to point a blaming finger at anti-vaxers and conflicted governments, the purpose of the church remains the same - learn about and support right living with our neighbours. From that perspective, the work of the church goes on, perpetually shaped by the unique space in history that it occupies. For AMC, that space presently includes the persistent reality of Covid-19. We cannot, by will alone, usher in a post-Covid. Nor can we simply set things down and wait for the restoration of our perception of normal life. We must continue to pursue faith living in these moments too.

One of the main tasks before us is the transition in leadership set in motion by Pastor Dan Kehler’s announcement on October 31, 2021 that he would be resigning effective April 30, 2022. A search committee has been struck and steps have been taken to arrange for an Interim Pastor for a period of approximately one year. While congregational approval of that arrangement is not yet in place as of the date of the preparation of this report, we are hopeful to have a concrete proposal for consideration on or before the AGM. An interim pastor can serve the deliberate function of exploring the needs of the congregation and how best to achieve them. I encourage everyone to actively engage in this deliberate time to imagine how the AMC of today, and not only a pre or post-pandemic AMC, can serve to support the right living with our neighbour.

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