

1) *How has the challenging situation your church family experienced during these last months created an opportunity for your congregation to intentionally connect with and meet the needs of your neighbourhood or wider community?*

GRACE: Initially it was decided that all our summer programs would be canceled, and we would not be able to connect with the community – but then prayers were answered, and Grace was able to hire two summer students. The students work involved connecting to the community by supporting Open Arms Mission, Elisha House and Rose City Kids for 3-4 days a week during the months of July and August. Not only was the community supported but the students were given the opportunity to see what the community needs were and how they could be involved in those types of ministries. It was a blessing to the community, the students and the church.

SMITHVILLE: While Covid-19 has definitely produced some new struggles and heightened some pre-existing tensions for our church family, we have also been blessed to see God at work through it. First of all, we found it challenging to have our tried-and-true ministries and fellowship options shut down. It forced us to think outside the box and do things like host pre-service Zoom coffee chats and create mini-groups focused on connecting. A few weeks ago, someone who has been involved in our church came to our Ministry Coordinator with an idea. His neighbour's framed barn had collapsed in some intense weather. They'd put a lot of time and resources into it and were devastated. We started to make some plans, while God laid it on a nearby contractor's heart too. Over the course of two days, volunteers showed up to provide labour, food, and support. A good old-fashioned barn raising gave us the opportunity to step out and demonstrate God's love to our neighbours and opened up the door to relational connections. The story was celebrated in our worship, with the prayer that we may continue to look for more places to be His presence.

Secondly, leading up to March of 2020, our church livestreamed our services on a private YouTube channel that was circulated to approximately 7 of our members who could not attend services in person. Then Covid locked the building down. The technology as in place, thanks to our gifted volunteers, and so we opened our livestream to public viewing. We have had to become more flexible and creative in service planning, including many components through pre-recorded video, but the response has been amazing. We have viewers in different provinces and countries. Our church family have sent the link on to family, friends, and neighbours—some of whom have had little relationship with God before. We have been blessed to receive email correspondence from several viewers thanking us for the livestream, and expressing how much Pastor Peter's messages have meant to them. One new viewer has indicated her desire to join a small group in a few weeks, after being introduced to our livestream by a co-worker. Expanding the livestream has allowed us to carry the Gospel into our neighbourhood in a way we haven't done before, and likely in a way we might not have attempted if not prompted by Covid.

One of our new viewers is a couple from India. They've connected with our livestream through the friendship of their son who is studying in Canada and one of our members. While watching the livestream and receiving our weekly newsletters, they've been praying for us. This past week, we included a video share of their faith story as part of our service. They note that they are praying for us

and ask that we pray for them. How cool is that? We talk about the difficulties Covid has caused, but look at the way God turns them to good!

COVENANT: Community Care Food Drives, Member's personal initiatives in their neighbourhoods, online worship services, Car Rally, Church sign messages of hope, tying blue ribbons in our trees to thank front line workers, signs on the windows of our café building thanking all those who have worked through this pandemic

BETHANY: Care packages were shared with community families.

2) *Have these months provided an opportunity for new initiatives or an awareness of underlying issues that came to the fore that should be addressed?*

GRACE: Instead of a VBS Grace was able to support community programs as noted above with the students providing much needed assistance. Also, providing increased awareness of the Live Streaming of the Sunday Morning service. Grace also provided two mornings a week of curbside service where members were able to drop off donations/offerings, pickup mail and touch base with the Pastor.

COVENANT: Live streaming online services and also providing them to Sunset Homes (for our Elderly). Some underlying issues we have found is members do not know how to initiate fellowship with each other even when they miss each other.

BETHANY: Home worship packages for those isolated at home

3) *What has your congregation put in place to maintain the bonds of community in your congregation when people are/were unable to worship together?*

GRACE: Making sure that for those people who have underlying health issues and those that do not yet feel comfortable in larger group settings are still a very welcome part of the church community through the Live stream and are not looked at differently than those that do feel comfortable attending worship in person. These are vastly different times, and everyone must come to grips with how they manage through it their own way. Elders are encouraged to make phone connections with members in their districts and the Pastor has made a point of visiting (at a distance) those who do not yet attend worship.

COVENANT: Many pastoral care connections (Our Pastoral Care Ministry has been very busy), live streaming online services. Including the congregation by asking them to record things at home and participate in the online services. @ PAR video blog and weekday worship sessions. All Paper items being provided via a box at our front door, where they can still come and pick them up (Today booklets, Banner etc). Someone always at the church during office hours so that they can call and have any questions answered.

BETHANY: Connecting with members by phone and other means. Sending Sunday School resources home.

BETHEL: From the time that Bethel was unable to worship together, we put in place the following measures in place to maintain the bonds of community:

- Regular correspondence to keep our congregation updated. This was done via weekly bulletin updates, emails and phone calls.
- To due the difficulty in meeting physically, ZOOM meetings were arranged quickly.

- Worship services were quickly changed to an online format. People were encouraged to join online. If they had technical challenges, help was offered.
- Following the online worship services, fellowship was also available online via ZOOM.
- Sacraments of Baptism and Communion have continued.
- Office bearers have been diligent in maintaining contact with their district needs.
- Diaconal visits and care has continued with phone calls and contact.
- Hospitality initiatives have continued.
- Music ministry has been challenging, but many people are now involved.

JUBILEE:

- Keep a strong connection to church services
 - Provide a meaningful online experience.
 - Blessed with a tech savvy staff services quickly moved into a professional format
 - Worship teams solo video are integrated into coherent and engaging display that makes it feel like singing at church a bit more.
 - Service are streamed so that everyone starts at 10am, keeping that feeling that we are in this together.
 - Enhance services with deliveries of communion supplies, kid's Sunday school supplies, and thanksgiving apple pies that continue our former special events and remind us that church is still happening - just not together.
 - With staff fully engaged in a beautiful online experience we can't do that and hold distanced services like some others are doing and are interested in hearing about the current and predicted success of offering services that way over time.
- Share community pictures each week.
 - Each week includes a hundred pictures from the congregation making their way through COVID with walks, renovations, bread making and summer breaking.
 - These pictures have been a highlight for many and helps us see and feel greater connection than a simple service broadcast.
- keep groups meeting
 - All groups from youth groups, small groups, coffee break, council, committees and staff have been outfitted with conferencing solution ZOOM to continue to engage those who choose to do so. ZOOM phone access allows the non-tech savvy access as well. Training and encouragement was provided to all groups, leaders and individuals
 - The Church is now able to host groups inside the church to provide continuity for groups who were taking advantage of outdoor meetings and to create additional small group opportunities for those not engaged in existing groups.
- encourage elders to reach out
 - While over half the congregation in engaged in small groups, ministries or committees, there are many who are not in regular activities.
 - Elders are stepping up to make regular contacts with those non engaged to make sure they feel connected and monitor for needs (which have been low to date).
 - All visits are tracked and we are anticipating using that data for answering the question "who hasn't been contacted"
- Other
 - Prayer team meets daily to pray for the congregation and their faith and comfort.

4) *Has the time of physical distancing created some surprises in how your community has responded?*

GRACE: Not really – people generally care for their fellow human beings and wish to protect them as much as possible and adhere to the initiatives put in place to help reduce the spread of Covid 19. Although at times people do forget since this is the first in their lifetime, they have had to be mindful of distance to others.

COVENANT: In the beginning, so many stories of people bringing others flowers, or having a social distance visit etc. Now that several months have passed, we find that members are getting anxious and almost angry. They miss each other and being together socially.

BETHANY: Pleasantly surprised that financial support has continue.

BETHEL: The time of physical distancing has created some surprises (some positive and negative) in how our community has responded:

- Many new people have stepped up and participated in music ministry
- Church staff has been very flexible in adjusting to an abnormal situation
- After many weeks of NOT being able to worship in our sanctuary, we were VERY excited to be able to gather again (even with some restrictions)
- Giving continues - our offerings are being received and we continue to be able to support our Classis and Denomination.

5) *If your church is struggling during this time, are there ways other churches in classis can support and help you?*

Grace CRC in Welland seems to be managing quite well putting appropriate measures in place to protect members and the community with the support of the membership. No additional support is required at this time.