

Some churches, notably Fairview Baptist and Cambridge Street United, already had long-established livestream capabilities, and so the switch to “virtual” services was fairly seamless. Other churches had been recording sermons and shifted to recording entire services with only the absolute minimum number of participants in attendance.

Still others jettisoned the trappings of a traditional sanctuary, save for perhaps the minister prerecording their homily in a pulpit. Readings are conducted by laypeople on back decks, in gardens, and by the lakeside. At St. Andrew’s, these are submitted to the church and integrated into a full service complete with pre-recorded choral music and inspiring drone footage of Kawartha Lakes.

So far, so good. However, as people of faith will attest, corporate worship involves more than just reading, preaching, and singing. Many of the most important rituals practised in these spaces include a great deal of physical interaction. For example, the logistics of Holy Communion – the meal at which many Christians believe they are nourished by Jesus himself – had to be worked out. Anglicans temporarily suspended the celebration, making the case that the meal reaches its fullest meaning only when the whole community is gathered in person.

Presbyterians took a different approach, relying on guidelines from their General Assembly which in 2012 allowed churches to celebrate Holy Communion virtually when meeting in person is impractical. Parishioners gathered around their own tables provide their own bread and wine or

grape juice, and the celebrant consecrates them from afar.

For the leader of one mainline denomination, definitions of community, place, and space are being radically widened or redefined because of COVID-19.

“I think that the pandemic quickly reminded us that ‘church’ must be more than the buildings in which we gather to worship, serve, and share fellowship,” observes the Rev. Amanda Currie, moderator of the 145<sup>th</sup> general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

“When we do return to our usual worship spaces, I hope that we will hold a little less tightly to the buildings, knowing that they are there to equip us for the work of ministry, but they are not equivalent with ministry itself.”

(With this year’s general assembly cancelled, Currie is making history in becoming the first Moderator to serve in the role for two years rather than the customary one.)

### **Serving One Another During A Pandemic**

For communities of faith, devotional life extends well beyond the sanctuary. With public health restrictions preventing gatherings en masse, and with the same restrictions deeply affecting personal finances, religious organizations have had to find ways to facilitate ongoing fellowship among their members and maintain their ministry of serving the less fortunate.

Since about mid-April, parishioners from St. Andrew’s have enjoyed a virtual

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