

## When Should I Come to Church?

*Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths." Isaiah 2:3*

When to come to the house of the Lord?—this is the question on our minds. Saskatchewan's three-phase re-opening plan is guiding our Council; even so, answering this question is a very personal decision.

Isaiah saw a time of spiritual renewal after a period of desolation. His congregation was the people of Judah and especially the royal court in Jerusalem: they had deserted God's house not because of pandemic, but by trying to appease a powerful enemy by adopting their religion. How terribly this strategy had gone wrong was becoming clear in Isaiah's preaching and prophesying: the prosperity resulting from the policy of appeasement was empty and shallow and soon to be swept away in civil strife and enemy occupation. But Isaiah also saw beyond these terrible signs of judgment, to a time of peace between nations, reconciliation between peoples, and the changeover from the war-economy to sustainability and justice. It all started when people began encouraging one another to "go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob."

Scholars who study the history of pandemics have noted a pattern of spiritual resurgence when a pandemic is ending. They think this is likely to happen here too. I believe this means we can feel free to discuss our question with our families and friends. What do they think about going back to public worship? How would they decide when it was safe? Honest, open discussions about real questions are sometimes easier and more welcome than evangelistic invitations! Feel free to include me with a text, email or phone call if you think I can be helpful. The pandemic has changed us all; the "rebound effect" is more than jobs and concerts, it has a spiritual dimension too. Having the kinds of conversations that Isaiah prophesied about will strengthen the spiritual resurgence as the pandemic changes and diminishes.

*O God, help us to invite our neighbours, friends, and families into caring conversations about coming back to church services. Give us opportunities to discuss going into the house of the Lord with one another too. In all things, help us to seek your ways and trust your will, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen*