

# Grace United Church tries out a new virtual style of ministry

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Church services performed by Reverend Takouhi Demirdjian-Petro of Grace United Church are now available to be seen on Cogeco TV. supplied by Gafry Petro PHOTO BY GAFRY PETRO /Supplied photo

Grace United Church in Gananoque is reaching out to parishioners by using a different media to get around the pandemic.

Instead of gathering by using Zoom or posting on Youtube, they are extending their outreach by having weekly services broadcast on Cogeco TV.

"With the few individuals that I have spoken this week by phone, those who do not have any internet connection have expressed deep joy," Reverend Takouhi Demirdjian-Petro of the church said. "Therefore, I believe this is a great gift that has come to Grace United Church in the middle of this pandemic and isolated congregants and non-congregants do not feel left out, alone, or lonely."

With the need for social distancing, churches have had to become more creative in order to reach their members. While computers and the internet have been a blessing for some, for others this is not possible.

“Zoom services have not been done because in rural areas internet can be a slippery slope,” said Demirdjian-Petro. “Grace United has done Facebook Live broadcasts when we were able to be in the church building. At this time, while we are staying out of the church building, we prepare the entire worship celebration on Saturday and post it on Facebook and Youtube for a 10:30 a.m. live stream on Sunday. Everyone does their part at their residence and sends everything to my husband Gary and together we put the worship celebration together. In the same afternoon, the morning worship celebration would be edited and posted on the Grace United Church’s YouTube Channel at [youtube.com/channel/UCNVYi-3mmlG7LnX1jKJnEg](https://youtube.com/channel/UCNVYi-3mmlG7LnX1jKJnEg).”

Television is different from meeting in person or on-line. Unlike these other venues, it is necessary to keep the timing under control and get everything done to fit into Cogeco’s available time slot.

“Grace United identified the need in our immediate community to reach out to those who are not connected on the web,” she said. “We need to keep the worship celebration to a 57-minute maximum. This helps Cogeco to have a smooth order of events on its schedule. But how wonderful it is for us to be able to make a difference in someone’s life even in those 57 minutes – the Spirit of God works beyond our time restrictions. With our music director, Mr. Paul Harding, and the many other gifted individuals who participate in these worships, we are so blessed and we are grateful to God and to the participants.”

No one truly knows how churches will be affected in the long run. Some people are desperate to return to the buildings, to get together in person to socialize and share their faith. Others are quite content with the idea of tuning in on their computers or televisions, able to watch the proceedings from a distance and yet still feel that they are participating.

“Throughout history, the church experiences change, like everything in life – it is a fact,” said Demirdjian-Petro. “To paraphrase the late Phyllis Tickle, ‘the

church cleans out its attic and has a giant rummage sale', and this pandemic has forced the church to rethink things outside the box. How we can continue to minister and make this world a better place, by 'cleaning up our attics' and see what works now, and what needs to be let go of.

"In my opinion, yes, we need to change our ways, and the internet has made this change a reality, but we cannot forget those who are unable to connect through that platform, hence the TV becomes an important tool.

"No one can predict exactly the future of the church, but whatever it is, God will still be at work in and through the faithful, because at the end of the day, the church is the people and not the buildings."

Grace United Church's Worship Celebrations will be televised on Cogeco, channels 13 and 700(HD) at 10:30 a.m. starting February 7. The broadcasts will be of the previous Sunday's service.