



Office of the Archbishop
1340 Cathedral Lane, Halifax, NS B3H 2Z1
902 420 0717 - bishopsoffice@nspeidiocese.ca

To: The Clergy and Parishes of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Date: March 16th, 2020

COVID 19 Update

Dear friends,

The situation is changing rapidly and updates from public health officials are now occurring on an almost daily basis. The following directions are based on the best information that we have as of this morning. Some may perceive them as being excessive, others as falling short; however I believe that they are consistent with what the wider community is being asked to do to limit the spread of COVID 19 and the mission entrusted to us. These measures are being taken out of abundance of caution and in the interests of the common good, particularly for those whose age or health makes them more vulnerable during this pandemic. Provisions in my earlier pastoral letter about health concerns continue to apply.

Worship: Effective today and until April 3rd, 2020, all public liturgical celebrations in the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are suspended. This includes regular Sunday services, any midweek liturgies, children's and adult faith formation programs. Church buildings may be opened for individuals to offer private prayer. The earlier notice about increased building cleaning needs to be observed. A decision will be made on or before April 3 regarding Holy Week and Easter worship.

Funerals: If funerals or celebrations of life cannot be deferred to a later date, families should be encouraged to restrict attendance to family members only. Graveside liturgies are an option. There should be no "receptions" following the funerals which do take place. Funeral Homes may have their own protocols.

Weddings: Couples should be encouraged to delay weddings until after this community health risk has passed. If existing plans cannot be changed, the liturgy may take place as a small family gathering with proper social distancing and hygiene. There should be no wedding receptions in parish buildings.

The Synod Office will remain open. Today we are creating a dedicated section of the Diocesan Website for COVID-19 related information and announcements. We will endeavour to update this information on a daily basis. In the next few days we will provide resources and suggestions for how to stay in touch with parishioners, simple ways to livestream worship, outside worship with safe social distancing and pastoral responses.

Meetings: There will be no in-person meetings of diocesan teams or task groups during this period. Team leaders and task group chairs should contact the Synod Office to arrange for electronic meetings. MORE Mission Schools for March 21 (Eastern Shore) and 28 (Cape Breton) are being

postponed. The Clergy Quiet Day, Blessing of Oils and Renewal of Vows is cancelled. We will explore the possibility of a similar gathering at a later date.

There should be no meetings or gatherings in parishes unless absolutely necessary. Clergy and lay leaders may explore electronic options to gather for Study programs or EFM groups.

I would encourage parish officers to find ways for outside groups using church facilities like parish halls to temporarily make other arrangements.

Pastoral Care: Nursing Homes are closed to all visitors including family members and clergy. Hospitals have restricted visitation. Visitation to individual homes of parishioners may continue if permission is given, the individuals are not under quarantine and proper hand washing protocols are followed. I am asking that such home visitations be limited to clergy. Use the telephone and update your email lists to maintain contact with parishioners.

Parishes might consider ways to support people who are quarantined by running errands

Food distribution programs. Parishes which receive food for distribution from Feed Nova Scotia will have received a communication from that organization. People need to be fed. Parish Food Bank and “Community Cupboard” programs should continue as much as possible. Once again volunteers should take special care to observe hand washing protocols. If you are feeling ill – stay home.

Electoral Synod: We are still making plans to proceed with the Synod, scheduled for May 30th. Information on the “General Qualifications and Requirements for the Bishop of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island” has been posted on the Diocesan Website, along with the process to be followed in submitting names for consideration as nominees. This preparation work does not involve any face to face meetings. We have had preliminary conversations about what would have to happen if we cannot gather on May 30th. It is far too early to make any decision about a possible ‘Plan B’

I appreciate your leadership in this time of significant upheaval in our regular routines. Please be especially mindful of any members of our communities, especially elderly ones, who may feel isolated and vulnerable during this time.

Finally, I ask your prayers for those who are afflicted by this disease, for caregivers, medical professionals, public health officials and those searching for a cure for COVID-19. Pray also for those whose livelihoods are threatened by the economic impact of this pandemic. May all that we say and do during this uncertain time be grounded in faith, the hope of God’s providence, and be a reflection of Christ’s compassion and love.



The Most Reverend Ron Cutler
Archbishop of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island