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To: To Clergy and People of the Diocese

Date: April 22th, 2020

A Web of Connections

Today is Earth Day (it is also the commemoration of St. George). It is the 50th anniversary of a public engagement event to draw attention to the pressures being placed on the environment of the planet. It is international in scope. No one country owns the planet's environment. What happens in one place affects the air and water that every human being requires for life. This year the observance of Earth day will be quite different. There will be no large public gatherings, no protests or rallies (unless they are virtual). There will be an opportunity to reflect on how 6 weeks of restrictions on movement is impacting our planet. There are many photographs taken in recent weeks of how the reduction in industrial activity and removal of cars from the roads has dramatically improved air quality. There has also been increased concern in how the global nature of our food supply is being tested in these times. People are re-discovering local producers. Of course, these changes have come as the result of a world-wide pandemic. The economic disruption in the lives of millions of people is incalculable. There is a growing desire, even a demand in some places for a "return to normal". I don't know when we might return to our previous pattern of life. I do know that that pattern is really not normal, at least as far as the sustainability of the environment is concerned. The creation story in scripture tells us that God is outside of creation but at the same time, is intimately connected with it and sees creation as "good". "Matter, matters" to God. No one would willingly choose the disruptions we are now living through but given that we are here - what are we learning? In what way can we change our structures, post-pandemic, to sustain creation? There are limits to what can be done today but perhaps you can plant a seed, read an article about our changing environment, go for a walk (in your neighbourhood) or just marvel at the sky.

One of the things that these times is reinforcing is that we are all interconnected. Pollution travels the world's oceans, pandemics are spread around the planet in days or hours - grief travels even faster.

As I write this, Nova Scotians are still reeling from the tragic killings which took place across our province this past weekend. The web of connection in Nova Scotia means that the deaths of so many people are felt far beyond the communities where they occurred. We are all grieving, sad and angry by turns. We are searching for answers to questions which may never be answered. We are looking for meaning in a situation where there is no meaning. On top of all these emotions, there are few if any ways for us to gather to support those most immediately and intimately affected. No hugs, no shared tears or cups of tea or casseroles. With the restrictions placed on public gatherings we have turned to online expressions of sympathy, countless phone calls, candlelight vigils with proper physical distancing and spontaneous memorials. We are using what we have, but virtual means are no real substitute for the physical presence and contact that instinctively we look for in this time.

Thank-you to all those who are offering support. In a time when we were already feeling anxiety, the sorrow can sometimes feel too much to bear. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please reach out to talk with someone. Many parishes have set up telephone support systems to connect with parishioners amidst the Covid 19 restrictions. The Mobile Mental Health phone line is: 902-429-8167 or 888-429-8167. The Kids help line is 1-800-668-6868 or you can text 686868. Other resources are available at www.mentalhealthns.ca. Even as

we share in the grief, we share a desire to support and care. Sometimes we give encouragement and listen to the pain, sometimes we need the support ourselves.

The other web of connection that I want to share with you is the one we share in through our broader church family. In the past few days I have received many, many emails, texts, Facebook posts, phone calls and letters of support for the people of our diocese and more broadly for the people of Nova Scotia. Our brothers and sisters in the faith, are sharing in the pain. These messages are not confined to church leaders and congregations across the country; people around the world are sending encouraging messages as we begin to move beyond the shock to figuring out how to cope. We are not alone!

Many parishes and clergy have already offered special times of prayer or online vigils. Several communities across the province will be holding online or candlelight vigils this coming Friday (April 24), starting at 7 pm and you may choose to join with others at that time. Congregations which have buildings with church bells may also want to ring or toll the bells at that time. The Nova Scotia government has set up a web page for condolences to be placed. It can be found at condolences@novascotia.ca

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:9-15)

Lastly, with all the things we might ‘be’ in this moment, let us be kind to one another.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Cutler".

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