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To: To Clergy and People of the Diocese

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What has changed, what will change?

In the past week, I have been part of several meetings where the topic of conversation has been: What do the restrictions used to fight the Covid-19 pandemic mean for the church in the long term? In the past six weeks, many things have changed and the change has been rapid and dramatic! Even as provincial education officials and teachers have had to resort to technology for children in the public school system, so too, we have started to use the same technologies for worship and for adult and children's Christian formation programs. The changes have affected some of the practices at the core of our identity: the inability to gather physically, the inability to shake hands or give/receive a hug, the inability to receive Eucharist, the inability to share meals, the inability to meet physically for planning/decision making and the much greater challenge; to support those in our communities who live on very thin margins in the best of times and who are desperate for food, decent shelter and human contact.

I have gone from the excitement of figuring out how to use "Zoom" in the first week of shut-down to the place where I am thinking about the way in which the increased use of such technologies change our processes. Technology to share worship both opens up opportunities to connect with those who have not been a part of worshipping communities and provides an opportunity for those who previously dismissed worship to cautiously and anonymously check out worship. Some kinds of worship risks turning the congregation into spectators rather than participants in what is meant to be "the work of the people". At the same time, parts of our diocese are excluded from this possibility because they don't have access to the technology and/or don't know how to use it. A great concern has been the challenge of funding ministry at every point: congregations, parishes, dioceses and the General Synod are all wondering how the massive increase in unemployment, the curtailing of regular sources of funds and decrease in investments are impacting us now and will continue to do so. Comparatively speaking, we are still living in a time of abundance but it doesn't feel that way. Our Synod Office staff has had to figure out how to provide supports to the parishes and leaders of the diocese while working from home. This time of dislocation has meant the rediscovery of "dated technology" like the telephone and regular postal delivery!

In the first few weeks of this evolving situation, we were simply reacting, trying to figure out how to do our thing under new circumstances. No one knew how long we would have to do this. We were making decisions on a daily basis using the best available information in that day. We were not thinking of long term consequences and we were not planning. Now the excitement of the first Zoom meeting has worn off and we are figuring out new ways we can begin to reflect on what has changed and what will change. Which of our temporary ways of doing things will last and which will disappear as soon as we are allowed to go back to the way things used to be?

These are questions that our whole western culture needs to be asking and there are particular questions that we need to be asking as a part of the Church. In both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, there is no definite time line for a lifting of restrictions. It does seem likely that there will be a prolonged period of adjustment and that some elements of usual social interaction are not going to return for a very long time. In the meantime:

What have we learned?

What has worked? What has not?

What can we keep? What do we need to let go?

Who has been left out? Who has been invited in?

How has our vision of God's kingdom been impacted?

What will we not go back to doing?

How will even the familiar and comforting rituals and routines be different in the "after Covid time".

In January the Anglican Journal published a story which told about a statistical analysis indicating that the Anglican Church of Canada would die by 2040. There was lots of reaction to the speculation of what kinds of changes would need to happen in the next 20 years for this prophecy not to be fulfilled. In the two months following the story, we have had to deal with 20 years' worth of challenges. I know of some people who have found that the edict to stay home has provided them with time for self-improvement and reflection. They have actually learned new things or discovered old and neglected passions. For many, however, it has meant a huge increase in the work of holding a family, a home and a career together. For others, this has been an experience in simply trying to survive. All of these experiences have also been true for congregations. Even as we long for a return to normal, we need to realize that there is no way we can go back, without carrying the changes we have experienced in the time of Covid 19 with us. Is it possible for us to use these experiences in a positive way to equip us better for God's mission? There are many places in the bible where the people are reminded of the faithfulness of God in the past, in order to give encouragement that God walks with them into the new challenge or opportunity. It is a teaching well worth remembering in these times.

Blessings,



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