

April 1st, 2020 - Archbishop Cutler

Dear Friends;

After a while it is difficult to find the appropriate adjectives to describe the period of time we are living in. "Extraordinary" and "Unprecedented" probably top the list but many more apply. It is a time when social cohesion is needed in order to contain the spread of the Coronavirus in our communities. We are being entreated to STAY HOME, WASH YOUR HANDS, and DON'T GATHER. These are not optional behaviours, they are truly matters of life and death, if not for ourselves, than for others close to us. Health care providers and support staff, and basic service providers are valued as never before. It's sort of a kingdom moment when the influencers in our society have been sidelined - the last first and the first become last!

In other aspects of our parish life, we are discovering a whole range of new options. Some will be more effective in certain communities/congregations than in others. It is a time for all leaders, both clergy and lay, to step up in consultation with one another about the resources available to worship, connect, teach and support. Our buildings are closed however the call to participate in God's mission has not been deferred. Rather than a time of idleness, this has meant increased activity in many parishes as we figure out how to fulfill our traditional purposes in new ways.

In both provinces, there are continued restrictions on any gathering of more than 5 people. On March 15th, I wrote that public worship services would be cancelled at least until April 3rd, 2020. In compliance with the Public Health state of emergency in both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and until directed otherwise by provincial authorities, public worship continues to be cancelled. I recommend that plans be made for this to continue until the end of May.

On Friday March 27rd, the Diocesan Council voted to waive parish allotments for April and May (in addition to the previously announced waiver for March). The diocese will also pay all payroll costs for stipendiary clergy for April and May. A small task group has been given authority to respond to other requests for financial support not covered by these first two resolutions. This is a commitment of \$1.3 million to support ongoing parish ministries in this extraordinary time. It represents all of our accessible working capital. It is not intended to be a complete income replacement for parishes. We continue to explore (along with other dioceses) if we may be eligible for the payroll subsidies offered by the Federal government. Glen Greencorn, our controller, has developed a FAQ list related to the council decisions.

Where our buildings are not being used on a regular basis, there may be insurance implications. We will send out a separate information sheet for parish officers about procedures to be followed.

We are still in the midst of the planning and preparation for an Electoral Synod to take place on May 30. At its regularly scheduled meeting on April 17-18, the Diocesan Council will decide on a provisional alternate date for the Synod to take place. We have already cancelled or postponed all diocesan events up to the middle of June, so this seems to be a logical precaution. Having started the process to elect a new bishop, there is really no way to stop it. Therefore, the deadlines previously announced remain effective. This means that

names of those to be proposed to the search committee for consideration as nominees must be submitted by midnight Saturday April 4 to the secretary of the search committee. If we are unable to gather on May 30 we will use the provision in Canon 1 section 12.2 to postpone to a date selected by Diocesan Council.

It is wonderful to see that over 50 of our parishes are now offering some form of online worship and that 12 more parishes (in areas of low or no internet service) have distributed special printed worship material to families. The majority of these worship services have been services of the Word rather than celebrations of the Eucharist. In the

past week, there has been a lot of online debate about the wisdom or appropriateness of streaming the Eucharist online. Some bishops have declared a "Eucharistic fast" for this time. I am not going to do so. There is a great variety in the ways that we as Anglicans approach the Eucharist. That variety is expressed in the Eucharistic piety of the parishes in our diocese. I will not order priests to stop presiding at Eucharist. Instead, I am leaving it up to the consciences of clergy and the discernment of parish leaders to determine the most appropriate ways to worship while we are prevented from physically gathering the Body of Christ.

There have been different calls to join in prayer across the country at different times. There have also been some suggestions regarding ringing all our church bells at the same time on Easter Day. I'm not sure that it is important to coordinate a specific time to ring the bells as much as to ring them! Don't wait until Easter - do it this Sunday as a reminder that we are still here and as a call to prayer - not in a building but throughout our communities.

Blessings;

The Most Reverend Ron Cutler

Archbishop of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island