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To: The Saint Francis Regional Ministry

Holy Week 2020

Dear Friends,

Like most of the rest of the world, the last few weeks have brought an extraordinary upheaval to the communal and operational life of our parishes and the diocese. The senior staff have worked diligently to try and deal with the rapidly shifting reality of our situation here in Quebec. We were the first diocese in Canada to enact a complete shutdown of normal operations and have found, like some of you, that we are busier than we have ever been.

First off, some practical issues. We have issued guidelines regarding the cancellations of all public services, the use of church buildings, pastoral care, and the restrictions on funerals. We have also addressed the serious personnel and financial implications of the shut down and a temporary protocol was communicated with the wider diocese on Thursday. You may read that letter for more specific details. In short, no staff will be laid off, parishes will benefit from the federal subsidy that pays 75% of employee's gross income, the first quarter Pooled Funds distributions will still be made on time, and Fair Share may be delayed if there is a significant lack of funds. Most of our parishes now have no source of income as people are not able to bring their offerings to church and all rental income has stopped.

I hope that all of you have been in receipt of the numerous diocesan communications about life under COVID-19. Everyone on the regional ministry e-mail list receives all deanery and diocesan communications. If you are not on this list and wish to be added please email the administrative assistant, Spencer Nadeau, nadeauspencer1811@gmail.com. You will also find communiques and news on the deanery website, www.deaneryofstfrancis.com, or on the deanery Facebook page, *The Deanery of St Francis*, or on the diocesan website, www.quebec.anglican.ca, or diocesan Facebook page, *Anglican Diocese of Quebec*.

Two weeks ago, the Deanery Ministry Committee began a pastoral response protocol. Since then our Corporations have been busy updating parish lists to ensure that we have contact information for everyone. Some parishes had up-to-date lists, and some have had to revise theirs. The DMC and the Wardens helped identify initial pastoral callers to make sure everyone was being contacted as soon as possible and to check that everyone was alright and being taken care of. All of you should have received a call from your local church community in the last two weeks. We have been extremely lucky that, thus far, everyone seems to have a support system in place and does not need immediate practical assistance. We have also asked the local community to try and discern if there are others in our community, outside our churches, that may have become isolated and forgotten so that we may reach out to them as well.

However, this may be a long haul for some of us, so we have identified individuals in each parish who are willing and able to offer practical help. If you need assistance please contact the administrative assistant, one of your Wardens, or one of the clergy to organise what you need. Father Giuseppe and I are also calling everyone in the Regional Ministry and some of you may have already received calls from us. If not, you will; it is a long list and takes time to get through. The diocese has also set up a COVID-19 Care Line for anyone in the geographical area of our diocese who might need pastoral care, someone to talk to, someone to pray with, or who wants

to make a prayer request. This will be staffed by clergy and trained lay leaders. Information may be found on the diocesan website.

One of the more difficult things about our current situation is not being able to gather for public worship or attend the Eucharist. I hope most of you are joining with our bishop on Sunday mornings at 10:30am for worship on Facebook Live. The link to this online worship may be found on the diocesan or deanery Facebook page or on the deanery or diocesan webpage. A Facebook account is not necessary to view these services. Those without a computer or internet who wish to phone into these services may call 647-736-0099 and enter the PIN 343 395 677# when prompted.

The bishop will hold online services during Holy Week on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. On Easter Sunday, he will lead us in the only diocesan eucharist during this lock down and invite us all to make a spiritual communion. He will teach us about this practice during the Maundy Thursday service. If you are unable to join the bishop online on Easter Sunday, you will find enclosed a short Easter day service I have prepared for you to use at home if you wish. You will also find a blessed palm frond, lovingly folded into a cross for you by the Rural Dean, Ruth Sheeran. It is traditional to place the cross near or behind a photograph of a departed loved one to remind us of the Easter hope of the triumph of the Cross over eternal death.

Our society is experiencing a mini “apocalypse”—in the scriptural sense of that word, a “revealing”. This is a time when many things are being exposed—in our leaders, our structures, the depth of our daily life and patterns, and in ourselves. Some will take solace that they have built well upon the rocks while others will begin to discern that they have put their faith in houses built upon sand. Revelations are deeply unsettling. This in turn produces a lot of babbling voices, which drown out the still small voices. I remind you that in times of crisis it is wise to find moments for silence, to listen intently with the heart, to try and discern those with compassionate and resolute voices that can guide us through the darkness to the other side.

For many people, Easter will feel muted this year. This has been the case many times in history, whether because of war, famine, plague, or natural disaster. This is also the case when Easter coincides with personal tragedy, grief, loss, or death. Strangely, the nature of Easter is perhaps more starkly revealed at these times, partially because we have a need to hear the truth that it proclaims and the comfort that it brings. We do not proclaim Easter because we are already in the right state of mind to receive it. Instead, proclaiming Easter opens us up to God’s grace and allows us to be changed by it. It is a powerful thing to read the Gospel of the Resurrection at the deathbed of a Christian and witness it bring faith, hope, and the courage to leave this world behind.

Father Giuseppe and I wish for you this Easter a deepening of your faith and a resurgence of the perfect love that casts out all fear. We wish you and all your friends and relations safety and health and bid you to pray for all the suffering of the world at this time.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Yours in Christ,
Edward OGS