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To: The St Francis Deanery

Christmas, 2021

Dear Friends and Faithful Members of the Deanery,

We hope this finds you well as we look forward to the Christmas season. While this past autumn looked more hopeful in terms of the pandemic, we find ourselves writing you amid the rising fear of new variants. With this uncertainty, we pray that our collective efforts and precautions will help to stem the tide of these trends. May we all remain vigilant both in keeping each other safe and in our prayers.

At least in this moment, a good proportion of churches in the Deanery have resumed or continued offering Sunday services. Services in care homes have also returned to pre-pandemic rhythms, though with ample safety protocols. This is definitely something to celebrate, and we hope it will continue, as we can all remember that Christmas services were in question only twelve months ago. The current list of in-person and online Christmas services throughout the Deanery can be found at the end of this letter. Given the recent rise in coronavirus cases, we encourage you to keep an eye on our website (www.deaneryofstfrancis.com/calendar) in case services are changed or cancelled.

While we are grateful for these developments, the pandemic has also brought with it some difficult decisions for some of our churches. A number of parishes are discerning that it is time to consider closing. Although many of these communities have seen this as a probability, the pandemic has quickened the process. One of the primary goals of the Regional Ministry was to provide stability in terms of both finances and worship. We promised we would never pressure a parish to close, but would provide space and time for local communities to discern their future. We are pleased that the parishes currently considering closure are able to do so without these pressures.

If a number of parishes do close then it will mean a number of changes for the Regional Ministry, some of which remain to be seen. The most obvious is that, with the stewardship of the closed parishes' resources, we will be able to move out of the "sustainability" phase of the Regional Ministry and begin phase two, the process of using resources for growth in ministry and mission. This seems to be occurring five years ahead of what the Deanery Ministry Committee predicted. The process of closures, continued pastoral ministry to these communities, and reallocation of resources will most likely take a couple of years and will involve a great deal of work by the DMC and diocesan staff. We are deeply saddened by the prospect of losing these parishes and are filled with admiration for the honesty, faithfulness, and peace that has characterized these conversations thus far. We also look forward with hope to the ability to start new ministries and act on plans that we have long waited to begin.

As always, we are grateful for all of you who have continued to support your local parish financially. While some churches have seen regular giving throughout the pandemic, others have experienced declines in giving and financial difficulties. Christmas offerings and other donations may be given online to particular parishes through Canada Helps (www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/church-society-of-the-diocese-of-quebec/), or you may contact your local wardens and treasurers for more information on how to give.

It is an oft-repeated but true statement that Advent is a time of waiting before the joy of Christmas. In Advent, we await the coming of the Christ-child in Bethlehem as well as Jesus' second appearance at the end of time. Only at Christmas do we declare that Christ has indeed arrived as the long-awaited Emmanuel, "God with us".

Advent in the midst of a pandemic adds a new dimension to our sense of waiting. We are eager for good news—for a lift in case numbers, for a return to what we had considered "normal," for a resumption of life with family and friends. With the current transition of our Deanery and its parishes, we also await what God has in store for our community. Perhaps Christmas amid a pandemic also brings an added layer, but one of hope: a reminder that Christ is indeed with us, that darkness will be pierced by light, and that God intervenes in the world out of his love for us.

This Christmas, may we witness that light of God's grace, even in the smallest of ways, as we celebrate the arrival of Emmanuel. We wish you all a happy Christmas.

Yours in Christ,

The Deanery Ministry Committee:

Fr Edward, Fr Giuseppe, Ruth Sheeran, and Jane Bishop

Christmas Services in the Deanery of St Francis 2021

December 18th

3:00 pm St George, **Drummondville** Holy Eucharist

Christmas Eve - December 24th

11:00 am Church of the Advent, **Sherbrooke** Holy Eucharist
2:00 pm St Paul, **Bury** Holy Eucharist
2:30 pm St Matthias, **Fitch Bay** Holy Eucharist
4:00 pm St George, **Georgeville** Holy Eucharist
4:00 pm St Barnabas, **North Hatley** Holy Eucharist (also via Zoom: contact stbarnabastechs@gmail.com)
5:00 pm **Diocesan Service** with Bp Bruce Myers Via Facebook (www.facebook.com/AnglicanQuebec)
7:00 pm St Mark's Chapel, **Bishop's University** Holy Eucharist
7:00 pm St Augustine, **Danville** Holy Eucharist
7:00 pm Christ Church, **Stanstead** Holy Eucharist
7:00 pm St John, **Waterville** Holy Eucharist
9:00 pm St Anne, **Richmond** Holy Eucharist

Christmas Day - December 25th

10:00 am St George, **Lennoxville** Sung Eucharist

First Sunday after Christmas - December 26th

11:00 am St George, **Lennoxville** Deanery Eucharist

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go forward with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A prayer by Fr Eric Milner-White OGS

Ô Dieu, tu as appelé tes serviteurs dans des périples dont nous ne voyons pas la fin, par des sentiers encore inexplorés, aux périls inconnus. Donne-nous la foi d'y aller vaillamment, sans savoir où nous allons, mais sachant que ta main nous guide et que ton amour nous soutient, par Jésus Christ notre Seigneur. Amen.

Une prière par Père Eric Milner-White OGS