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To: The St Francis Deanery

Christmas, 2022

Dear Friends and Faithful Members of the Deanery,

We bring you greetings as a late winter descends on the Townships. This Christmas, we have much to celebrate as most parishes are having their first in-person Christmas services since the pandemic began (see the schedule below). This is something for which we can be particularly grateful, especially as we gather with friends and family.

Thankfully, since April, we have not had any cancellations to our worship or events due to the pandemic. With renewed activities of special services and parish dinners, it looks like the Deanery's activity has made a comeback. One highlight of the last couple months was the Bicentennial service for St George, Lennoxville. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bishop Bruce presided over this celebration of one of our oldest parishes and we sang together the new hymn "As witnesses before us," written by Fr Giuseppe for the occasion. With both gratitude and sadness, both jubilee and memorial services for Her Late Majesty took place in Georgeville and North Hatley. Along with the resumption of these special events, we also continue to offer online formation, such as the recent course from Montreal Dio on Christianity and popular culture (stay tuned for more opportunities). Ministry to care homes and hospitals has continued without impediments, and we encourage you to let the clergy know if a parishioner is in hospital.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, parishioners from all over the Deanery were delighted to join Bishop Bruce at St George, Lennoxville for the ordination of the Rev'd Sam Borsman to the Sacred Diaconate. As Deacon Sam shared at the reception, he was filled with prayers of gratitude ("Thank you!"), awe ("Wow!"), and supplication ("Help me!"). We are confident that the faithful members of the Deanery join Deacon Sam in these prayers and will support him as he grows in this new vocation of service.

It was in our last Christmas letter that we shared with the Deanery that a number of parishes in the St Francis Regional Ministry were considering closure in the wake of the pandemic. This process has continued as seven parish vestries voted to close. With a special grant of \$48,000 from the Diocese of Quebec, the specialty consultancy firm Écobâtiment was engaged to help guide us through this process. The first stage of producing individual congregational reports has been significantly hampered by the difficulty in hiring surveyors and their own challenges in securing enough personnel. Although the surveyors were hired in June—also thanks to a generous grant from the Diocese of \$35,000—they have only just completed their work. A further delay has come from a new provincial law that requires all surveys of patrimonial sites to pass through the local MRCs. We have been assured that this final step should only take a few more weeks. When this work is complete we can finally move into Phase II and consult with the local congregations and municipalities before moving to Phase III, which will roll out the publicity about the closures. The final phase will decide the future of the church buildings. The process thus far has been wearying as we have had to wait patiently as the post-pandemic climate has made it difficult to make the progress we hoped for. However, we continue to be inspired by the grace and patience that parishioners have shown in the midst of these losses, and we live in hope for how the resources accrued by these closures can support the rest of the Regional Ministry.

Our society is coping with the repercussions of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, civil discontent, the effects of climate change, and general fatigue. In this condition, the hope of the Christmas message might seem very far for some, especially for a festival that is so often wrapped up in joy. Yet, it is in darkness that light shines most brightly—that a single candle flame makes all the difference. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, did not come into the world as an abstract idea, an economic policy, a scientific formula, or a political movement. Instead, “the Word was made flesh, and lived among us” (John 1:14). God became a human being to be intimately close to us, to share in our sufferings, and to bring life abundant.

As we celebrate a Christmas where we can once again be closer to loved ones, may we also be thankful for God’s closeness to us in Christ. As we eat together, let us remember Jesus’ coming to us in the Feast of bread and wine. And as we share these gifts with others, may we remember God’s greatest gift of himself to us: a light that “shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (1:5).

May you all have a wonderful Christmas and happy new year.

Yours in Christ,

The Deanery Ministry Committee:

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

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## CHRISTMAS SERVICES IN THE DEANERY OF ST FRANCIS, 2022

### **Christmas Eve - December 24<sup>th</sup>**

|          |  |                    |
|----------|--|--------------------|
| 11:00 am | Church of the Advent, <b>Sherbrooke</b>      | Holy Eucharist     |
| 2:00 pm  | St George, <b>Ayer’s Cliff</b>               | Reserved Sacrament |
| 2:30 pm  | St Matthias, <b>Fitch Bay</b>                | Holy Eucharist     |
| 3:00 pm  | St George, <b>Drummondville</b>              | United Church Rite |
| 4:00 pm  | St George, <b>Georgeville</b>                | Holy Eucharist     |
| 4:00 pm  | St Barnabas, <b>North Hatley</b>             | Holy Eucharist     |
| 6:00 pm  | All Saints, <b>Hereford</b>                  | Holy Eucharist     |
| 7:00 pm  | St Mark’s Chapel, <b>Bishop’s University</b> | Holy Eucharist     |
| 7:00 pm  | St Augustine, <b>Danville</b>                | Holy Eucharist     |
| 7:00 pm  | St George, <b>Lennoxville</b>                | Holy Eucharist     |
| 7:00 pm  | Christ Church, <b>Stanstead</b>              | Holy Eucharist     |
| 7:00 pm  | St John, <b>Waterville</b>                   | Holy Eucharist     |
| 9:00 pm  | St Anne, <b>Richmond</b>                     | Holy Eucharist     |

### **Christmas Day - December 25<sup>th</sup>**

|          |                               |                |
|----------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 11:00 am | St George, <b>Lennoxville</b> | Sung Eucharist |
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*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