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To: The St Francis Regional Ministry

Eastertide, 2023

Dear Friends and Faithful Members of the St Francis Regional Ministry,

We hope this finds you all well and enjoying this Easter season. As the sights and sounds of spring remind us of renewal, we remember the hope given to us in Christ's resurrection. With the recent coronation of King Charles III, we are blessed to witness an event that most living Canadians have not experienced—another sign of renewal and continuity. We hope you find some time to celebrate.

Over the last couple months, we have travelled around the Regional Ministry to chair the annual vestry meetings for the year 2022. We were grateful at how smoothly these meetings went, thanks to the care of lay leadership—wardens, treasurers, lay readers, and others—that sustains the parishes. While the repercussions of the pandemic are still felt throughout, it was telling that we were able to gather without immediate fears of the virus. We have come a long way since three years ago.

We are pleased to announce that, as of April 1st, Deacon Sam Borsman has been hired as a member of our ministry team on a quarter-time basis with benefits. His main mandate is to provide pastoral care for parishioners in care homes and shut-ins (of which there are around fifty people) and, in time, to re-establish student ministry. We are grateful that Dn Sam will not only be able to conduct services in care homes, but to spend quality time with each parishioner. Do keep him in your prayers as he undertakes this important work.

As the Deanery Ministry Committee shared in its Christmas letter, we have faced some delays in the process of closing and selling seven Regional Ministry churches. While we hired surveyors in May, they were not able to begin their work until September, and only finished in December. New Quebec legislation also required that all surveys of patrimonial sites pass through the local MRCs. This process was completed in January, and since then, the consultancy firm Écobâtiment has worked hard to create reports on each of the closing parishes. Each report is upwards of seventy pages, contains architectural drawings and assessments for possible uses of each church, and have been shared along with their English summaries at the vestry meetings of closing churches. Now, we are ready to move onto Phase III of this process, when we hire a small communications firm to draft press releases to advertise the sale of churches, to manage communications with local MRCs, and to submit these reports to interested parties. With the Écobâtiment reports, we plan to not simply sell buildings, but ideas of how they can be best utilized for communities and potential buyers. Phase IV of this process will hopefully begin mid-summer, which will concern the actual sale of the churches. As always, we are ever grateful for the faithful parishioners who, amid their own grief, are providing on-the-ground assistance in this complex process.

The last couple months have brought some fiscal changes in the Regional Ministry's operations. First, the diocesan stipend scale has been raised, as it had not been adjusted since 2008. In the fall, the Diocesan Executive Committee voted to raise the base stipend by \$4,000 to coincide with inflation and to help recruit and retain promising clergy in our diocese. (Even since raising the stipend scale, the diocese was able to recruit a young and talented priest for the Gaspé.) Second, hiring Deacon Sam has caused a potential rise in the stipends paid by each of our parishes. Rather than place a burden on struggling parishes or declining to bring Dn Sam onto the team, the Deanery Ministry Committee came to a solution after several extended meetings. The corporation of St Paul, Bury (one of our closing churches) agreed to loan the Regional Ministry \$70,000 out of its investments this year and next (or however much is necessary under that amount). In this way, we are borrowing against ourselves to keep stipend payments stable. We will be able to pay back this loan once the seven parishes close.

Spencer Nadeau, our administrative assistant, has recently taken on additional duties. Since the departure of the previous administrative assistant at the Diocesan office, Spencer is triaging diocesan communications through the office in Lennoxville. As you may have also noticed, he has resumed the weekly deanery newsletter by e-mail. This is a positive sign that activities have become more regular since the pandemic. If you have any event to announce, please send a note to Spencer (snadeau@quebec.anglican.ca; 819 347 8529).

In our pastoral work, it is clear that the residual effects of the pandemic and current economic fears continue to affect everyone. Weariness itself has become a kind of illness, affecting the rich and poor and young and old alike. We encourage us all to practice patience with others, and to seek out those moments where we may be like Christ to one another. As always, we are here for you if you have any pastoral concerns (Fr Giuseppe: 819 570 3433, ggagliano@quebec.anglican.ca; Fr Edward: 819 679 9957, esimonton@quebec.anglican.ca).

Enclosed with this letter is Bishop Bruce's pastoral letter for Easter. In his reflection, he considers the imagery of Christ's tomb being nestled in the midst of a garden, and what implications this may have for us today. As we go through significant shifts in the St Francis Regional Ministry, we take heart in our bishop's encouragement to tend our little part of the Body of Christ in the Eastern Townships. Every Christian, lay or ordained, is called by Christ to do our part to water, weed, and bring harvest in the communities in which God has placed us. May the Holy Spirit continue to give us all courage in these times, and the eyes to see glimpses of the resurrection around us.

Yours in Christ,

Fr Edward and Fr Giuseppe
Priests of the St Francis Regional Ministry

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