



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

The Anglican Church of Canada

The Right Reverend Dr. Geoff Peddle, M.Div., Ph.D.
Bishop of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

ANGLICAN DIOCESAN CENTRE
19 King's Bridge Road
St. John's, NL A1C 3K4
Telephone: (709) 576-6697
Fax: (709) 576-7122
Email: geoffpeddle48@gmail.com

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Bishop's Fifth Pastoral Letter regarding COVID-19 *Many Members, One Body (Romans 12:4-5)*

Dear Friends,

It is now just over three months since a global pandemic was declared because of COVID-19 and it seems that very little from our old way of life has remained untouched. Our personal lives have been affected in how we get together with family members, how we encounter our neighbors, how we work, and how we visit the grocery store. And I don't have to tell you how much the life of our church community has been transformed in that time because I am quite certain everyone who reads this letter knows all about that. This is my fifth such Pastoral Letter since March and it will address a way forward for our faith community as we enter Alert Level 2 of the COVID-19 Alert Level System for Newfoundland and Labrador. Although we have grown used to a new way of living and worshipping, it is my expectation that there will be a return to more traditional and familiar patterns by this fall, albeit with significant guidelines from the Province and the Diocese.

Although I had intended to release this letter last week, along with a diocesan plan for the reopening of our churches, I waited until my online meeting with the Provincial Medical Officer, Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, on Tuesday, June 23, in case there was new information that needed to be included. The attached document – ***“Many Members, One Body (Romans 12:4-5)”*** – is current as of this date and incorporates the Provincial Government's document, *“Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations.”* I consider our diocesan plan a “living document” that will continue to evolve as time passes.

“Many Members, One Body” has been prepared for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador through the incredible efforts of the Reverend Christopher Fowler in an effort to establish “best practice” for our churches. I thank Reverend Christopher for the work he has done on our behalf. The plan has also been reviewed by the *Ad Hoc* Diocesan Executive Committee and shared with the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. As you will appreciate when you read the document, our plan will necessitate a great deal of work on the part of our churches in order to implement it and I believe we should take the remainder of June as well as the months of July and August to work together on doing that. I believe it is best for us to keep our churches closed to shared worship in person until after Labour Day in September. I ask that we all continue with our livestreaming and online presence.

We will continue our “Eucharistic Fast” for now, including Home Communion in private residences. I am acutely aware that many of the people who share in Holy Communion are in a “higher risk” group due to age and other health concerns. We need to also take into account that the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador contains a more urbanized and densely populated region (the north-east Avalon Peninsula) than much of our province with its smaller and more isolated communities.

It is my expectation that by September we will be in position to return to gathered worship in our sacred spaces, but much work remains to be done in order for that to be safe. That work includes the education of our parish leaders and the acquisition of an array of cleaning supplies and skills. The guidelines we have developed also address other kinds of social gatherings and in the future will address fundraising events by our churches. Some of our church communities and buildings may be better able to implement the plan than others and in the post-September future it may be necessary for us to think about coming together more often in designated spaces for worship and social events. And if any parish should arrive at September and still feel they are not ready to re-open that is also OK. Our priority must be everyone's health and safety. I believe our work together as a church at this time will also provide a model for society to follow in how best to come together safely and responsibly.

Over the past months I have listened to the thoughts and concerns of a great many members of our church, and recently I met online with the rectors of our parishes. One of my reasons for talking with them was to explore a range of possibilities for us as this pandemic evolves. It is very clear to me that many of us are tired. A form of "pandemic fatigue" has set in and we are feeling exhausted from all of the changes since March. At the same time, we are denied many of our usual sources of renewal and energy from our families and friends and colleagues.

As we move into the warmer and more relaxed months of our all-too-short summers in Newfoundland and Labrador I ask everyone to step back from some of the responsibilities and stress of this unusual time and make every plan to relax and enjoy the next few months. Please take your holiday time and perhaps even travel about our province to see friends and relatives appropriately. For our clergy, please arrange to share services in your areas so that everyone may be able to share in worship online even if the clergy are on vacation. The fall will come all too soon and with it will be a return to a new normal for life and work and worship. It is my hope and prayer that we can all arrive at September refreshed and renewed and properly equipped for the reopening of our churches. I end with this prayer for summer that has come to me from multiple sources, most recently from Jim Manney of IgnatianSpirituality.com:

A Prayer for Summer

Father, Creator of all, thank you for summer. Thank you for the warmth of the sun and the increased daylight. Thank You for the beauty I see all around me and for the opportunity to be outside and enjoy your creation. Thank you for the increased time I have to be with my friends and family, and for the more casual pace of the summer season. Draw me closer to you this summer. Teach me how I can pray no matter where I am or what I am doing. Warm my soul with the awareness of your presence and light my path with your word and counsel. As I enjoy your creation, create in me a pure heart and a hunger and a thirst for you.

Amen.

With my every blessing,
+Geoffrey