



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

The Anglican Church of Canada

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Dear Friends,

This is my third letter to you in just over a week. Events are now moving so quickly because of the grave concerns regarding the Covid-19 pandemic that it seems each letter is out-of-date almost from the time it is published. Last week I asked our churches to withhold the Common Cup from the congregation and to refrain from other types of direct contact such as shaking hands. Then, within days, I asked for our diocese to cease all large gatherings such as public worship and to put in place other ways of being the church. On Wednesday of this week our province declared a state of medical emergency that further restricted our patterns of behavior in the interest of safeguarding everyone from the Coronavirus.

In this letter I will address a number of emerging and developing concerns identified by members of our diocese and others. My words today follow six teleconferences with the clergy of our diocese this week as well as dozens of telephone conversations and emails. In all decisions taken by the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador we are seeking to be responsive to local situations and to adhere to the most current medical advisories in our province. As I have previously stated, I am extremely concerned for those who have been identified as being at greater risk due to age and other health considerations.

It seems clear right now that the Covid-19 pandemic will not be resolved in the near future. We are probably talking months instead of weeks. We hope and pray that matters will be resolved much sooner than that, but we need to plan for all eventualities. I have asked our diocesan leaders to put in place a three-month plan that will bring us as far as June to ensure the continuation of our parish and diocesan ministries and to prepare us for a longer such journey if necessary. The Diocesan Synod Office is now closed to the public but will continue to operate in a limited fashion to ensure that essential services in our diocese are maintained throughout the current crisis. My priority is the care and well-being of our people, and that includes the members of our parishes and employees of our parishes, our clergy and their families, and all who find comfort and care in the Anglican Church. Obviously, we have to severely curtail social gatherings and worship services and face-to-face contact but that does not mean that the ministry of our church is suspended. It means that we will ensure our ministry of prayer and pastoral care continues in other ways. I am extremely moved by the emerging plans among our clergy and pastoral leadership to maintain weekly telephone contact with seniors and others in need, and to offer many other supports including things like grocery shopping, prescription pick-up, and transportation to medical appointments. *May Almighty God bless and protect all who are engaged in such ministries of care right now.*

My conversations with clergy this week identified many concerns over the administrative and financial needs of our churches. It is also clear to me that every parish is unique in its life and ministry and every one of our churches is in a different place right now. Some parishes have advised me that they are able to continue operating for the time being even with the reduction in income that they have seen from the winter storms of December, January

and February followed by this global pandemic. Other parishes are already in crisis mode and uncertain of their future.

Effective immediately, the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador will offer payroll supports so that no person in the employ of our churches should fear the loss of their income. We also recognize that many parishes are not able to continue their full support of diocesan ministries through synod assessment and ask that nobody be distressed by that. We understand the difficulties facing everyone and will endeavour as long as we can as a diocese to maintain all our ministries such as hospital chaplaincy among many others. If your parish is facing financial difficulty as a result of this current situation, I ask that you contact the Diocesan Executive Officer, Archdeacon Sam Rose, as soon as possible for guidance and assistance in this matter. Our Diocesan Finance Officer, Mr. Fred Dinham, will also assist parishes and treasurers in planning appropriately. The Finance Officer is currently reviewing the announcement from the Government of Canada offering assistance to small businesses and charitable organizations and will advise us regarding that. I emphasize that my intention right now is to maintain the ministry capacity of our diocese until June at which time we will reassess the appropriate steps beyond then. Further to this decision, I have asked our diocese to review our current insurance obligations and I request that all repairs and maintenance that are not urgent be deferred to a later date so that we conserve as much of our resources as possible should the current shutdown affecting our faith community continue beyond June. I have also directed that all diocesan travel and conferences cease until further notice.

This coming Sunday, March 22, at 11 a.m. I will celebrate the Holy Eucharist on behalf of our Diocese at our Cathedral. This service will be livestreamed on our Diocesan Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/AnglicanEastNL/> - for all who wish to join online as a church family during this time of special need and concern. I end with these prayers from the Church of England:

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you taught us to love our neighbour,
and to care for those in need
as if we were caring for you.
In this time of anxiety, give us strength
to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick,
and to assure the isolated
of our love, and your love,
for your name's sake.
Amen.

With my every blessing,
+*Geoffrey*