



ANGLICAN DIOCESE MONTREAL

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Dear Colleagues and friends in Christ,

I hardly know where to start in this letter. There are so many concerns to address, and some news and resources to share which are attached.

First, I hope that you are keeping well and being as gentle and attentive as you can with yourselves, your families and the people of God entrusted to your care. Many of us are experiencing strain from this challenging time and you may be feeling more tired and perhaps also more invigorated from the ministry that is flowing more richly and in new ways. Please do not forget to take some time off to be refreshed. Working from home is still work and reorganizing our brains to new functions is hard! Stay well.

Celebration of Life

The Ven. David Conliffe died peacefully March 27th, aged 90. A celebration of his life will be planned at a later date. **Mrs. Bernice Camacho**, Lay Reader Emeritus, died March 31st. She would have been 90 in May. Please keep their families in your prayers as we remember and give thanks for their lives and witness in our own diocesan and parish communities. Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord, and let light perpetual shine on them. May they rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen

A provincial government decree prohibits practically all indoor and outdoor gatherings. As a result, **no funeral services may be held in church buildings**. Where cremation is not an option and a burial cannot be delayed, a brief graveside service may take place in the presence of a presider and no more than 10 other people, each respecting the two-meter personal distance recommended by health authorities. Even though funeral homes remain in operation, because of the high risk of transmission, clergy and lay readers of the diocese may not preside at funerals in funeral homes at this time. It is worth noting that 44 cases of COVID-19 have been traced to individuals who all recently attended funerals at the same funeral home in St. John's, Newfoundland last week.

These provisions, as well as the overall suspension of public liturgies and all other physical church-related gatherings, remain in effect until further notice. Like all of these efforts, they are aimed at protecting public health and especially the most vulnerable among us.

Diocesan Assessments & Stipends

The Diocesan Finance Committee met March 26th and Diocesan Council met yesterday afternoon via Zoom technology, and approved a relief package for the parishes in our diocese. Council approved a 6-month suspension of Diocesan assessments (from April-September) and the Diocesan payment of the salaries of all stipendiary clergy for the equivalent of one month (April).

I am very grateful for Diocesan Council's support of this relief package to our parishes. It is clear that such measures will have a significant impact on our own Diocesan finances but this is necessary to help parishes weather this current crisis. Council will continue to meet monthly and will review the situation and our ability to respond.

You will have heard that the government announced on Friday that they are providing employers with a Canada Emergency Wage subsidy that would be equivalent to 75% of salary (capped at a maximum of \$58,700/per employee). We are only now receiving [more information](#) about it. If the government is able to follow through with this promise and provide a wage subsidy up to 75% of salary, then the diocese would be able to extend that to top up the remaining 25% of salaries of all stipendiary clergy for up to 4 months (April-July). We will give you more news as the government provides us with more details.

If you have lay employees (secretary, organist, verger, etc.) on payroll, parish corporations will need to decide if they are able to continue with payroll obligations. Should the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy be provided, they would also be accessible to the parish if they are currently on our payroll. If the parish has not made decisions to lay off lay employees, the Diocese would apply for the subsidy for them and would bill the parishes their portion of the 25% salary top off what was not covered by the subsidy.

Please be in touch with Stephen Tam and Sophie Bertrand in our office if it is the intention of the parish to change the employment status of any lay employees. Sophie has prepared a very helpful explanation document for you and I have attached it to this email. If you intend to make adjustments to your employment of any of your lay employees, please keep in mind the deadlines for payroll processing:

April 9 (for pay of April 15), April 24 (for pay of April 30)
May 11 (for pay of May 15), May 25 (for pay of May 29)
June 9 (for pay of June 15), June 23 (for pay of June 30)

Again, as the government provides us with more details about how the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will take effect, we will provide you with more details on the impact to salaries of all stipendiary clergy.

Meanwhile, Diocesan Council also agreed that this relief should be an opportunity for parishes to focus on ministry and on finding creative ways to ensure financial sustainability in the long run. It is imperative that parishes share with their communities the need for continued good financial stewardship and providing their communities with easy opportunities to contribute to the parish – Canada Helps, PAR, e-transfers, mailed-in envelopes, etc are some examples of ways to facilitate that continued support in these times where physically passing the offering plate around is not possible.

Liturgical Life

This has turned out to be a different Lent than I first imagined. When I wrote to you on February 14th, two weeks before Lent, I invited the whole Diocese of Montreal to dedicate this Lent to fasting and praying for renewal and revival throughout the Diocese. Since then we have been thrust into a situation which we could not have imagined, and yet I see God's hand renewing and reviving our Diocese in so many ways. This gives me hope! So does the motto we have been working with: *"Living in Trust, Acting with Courage and Nourishing Faith."* Even under these challenging circumstances, I see so many of you bearing this out in your ministry, with creativity and love.

I don't know how long this time of social distancing will go on. So many gatherings and celebrations have had to be postponed! I do know that you are all missing meeting together face to face in your ministry settings and I miss being with you. We may be able to meet up through social media but we have to fast from gathering together in person.

Fasting is not easy! I miss celebrating the Eucharist with you and I miss receiving. We have been encouraged to **"fast from the Eucharist while we feast on the Word"** and this extended fast from Holy Communion has also been very difficult for many of you. The Primate asked The Rev. Dr. Eileen Scully to write a reflection paper on this for us and I asked our own Canon Theologian, the Rev. Canon Dr. Jesse Zink to reflect on it for us too. I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Victor-David Mbuyi Bipungu for translating Jesse's helpful article into French for us. These reflections are attached for you to read and share. In the meantime, **I am asking you to continue the fast until such time as a public gathering in close proximity of more than two people can be held.** What joyful celebrations they will be!

In the meantime, please try to record what you are doing, the services and meetings and gatherings that you hold and the methods you use, the estimated responses and the outcomes. If you haven't been doing so, please enter the services in your vestry book – or keep notes to enter when you next get back to the vestry book. All of your efforts and experiments are for the glory of God and the building up of the Church.

Palm Sunday: If you haven't seen this yet, I saw a suggestion that we encourage our people to put palms or other seasonal branches on our doors. Several of you have already worked out the reading of the Passion of our Lord on whichever platform you are meeting on.

Easter: I will be preaching for the Cathedral on Easter Day and will also pre-record an Easter message and see that it is made available for those who would like a guest preacher!

Easter Bells: Our Primate suggested that we join with the Province of Ontario and all ring our bells together to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection. **The Dioceses of Quebec and Montreal have chosen to ring them at 11am** – the same time as the Roman Catholic Churches. If this comes in the middle of the service that you are holding online, perhaps you can build in a pause and enjoy listening to the bells of your church and the other churches nearby. Please only do so if you live near enough to the parish church and do not need to drive very far to get there. We are still supposed to be staying home and avoiding driving any distance. Those without access to bell towers might encourage participants to ring bells in their homes in celebration of the Resurrection of Christ.

Diocesan Staff & Support

Please remember that Archdeacon Robert Camara and I, as well as the synod office staff are here to support the ministries of the diocese. Our congregational development officer, the Rev. Canon Dr. Neil Mancor has set up a variety of opportunities to gather (via Zoom) for prayer, conversation and study – I hope that if you find these helpful, you will participate as much as possible. If you have questions or concerns or are uncertain about what to do in a particular case, please reach out and ask.

We are about to enter the holiest of seasons for the Church as we remember the passion of Christ, grieve his death and celebrate his resurrection. It has always been a week of pain and disruption, fear and loss and amazement. This year, with a global pandemic, we are even more disrupted and lacking our bearings. I share some reflections by Karoline Lewis, "[When the Ground Shakes](#)":

“Matthew may very well be the good news we need here and now. Because before it became salvation, before it became forgiveness of sins, before it became a sign of God’s sacrificial love and a symbol of a church, the cross was a crisis of unfathomable proportions. And the death of Jesus, in no uncertain terms, was an earthquake. “The earth shook, and the rocks were split.”

When the earth shook and the rocks split all that we assumed, all that we knew, all in which we had become complacent, basking in overfamiliarity, was twisted upside down. Overturned. Never to be the same again.

At Golgotha, the ground literally shifted under our feet. Theological constructions capsized. And the meaning of community, kingdom, and citizenship unmoored.

What does this mean? It means that biblically and theologically we are more than equipped for now. It is in our DNA and always has been. It means that Christologically, when we feel unanchored, that just might be where God needs us to be. And it means that ecclesiologically, when it seems that structures and systems are on the verge of being toppled, that’s when the church can truly and unquestionably be the light of the world.”

May you be rooted and grounded in your faith and go trustingly into this Holy Week and Triduum, knowing Whose you are. I am confident that God will use us and everything we are going through for God’s glory.

**Almighty God, as we stand at the foot of the cross of your Son,
help us to see and know your love for us,
so that in humility, love and joy
we may place at his feet
all that we have and all that we are;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.** Common Worship, Night Prayer, page 352

Every blessing, grace and peace,

+ Mary