



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

April 29, 2020

Dear friends,

Well, we are in week seven. We have met the yearly celebration of our Lord's crucifixion and Resurrection with as much reverence and celebration as we are able in these circumstances. And we reached that marker in our year with intention and energy. In case I haven't said it enough – it was all so very, very well done. Your planning, your creativity, and your care for our people was evident and tangible. It was not a non-event as many had feared, it was a different celebration of the week of weeks. Thank-you so much for all that you've done to make that so.

Now, we are very firmly in Eastertide. We can all be forgiven, I think, for feeling a little low. The first burst of energy has been expended and the emergency declaration is still in place and we in truth don't really know when it will be lifted. We are still in the midst of the pandemic. And it's – well, it's uncomfortable. And it has us asking some tricky questions – wondering, what will our vocations, our communities look like in this new normal?

Well I reckon that's not a bad place to be as Good Shepherd – or Vocations – Sunday approaches this week. I rather think it's a good thing for us to consider questions like:

- Where is Jesus leading us?
- How are our vocations being shaped in these times?
- Will we follow?

The easy thing is to talk about the internet and livestreaming and worship delivery. But you and I know there are deeper things to speak about:

- The meaning of Christian community.
- The tangibility of compassionate care.
- The crucial importance of being spiritually grounded – particularly in times of crisis.
- The importance of a deep theology of stewardship when it's not easy to give.
- The meaning of incarnational ministry when it's impossible to be bodily present.
- The importance of the sacraments when we are fasting from them.
- The importance of the Word when we are feasting on it.

These may seem difficult questions, and they are, but this crisis has also concentrated our minds and helped us to see what is essential. It's also helped us to begin to redistribute cultural value outside the Church too: to give renewed support for the helping professions without whom we could not survive. It's reopened important conversations such as a living wage for occupations that have not had that benefit heretofore. And while we're on the subject of wages – I was privileged to be on a call with some bishops with former senator Hugh Segal the other evening as we discussed how we can continue to support and advocate as a Church for Guaranteed Basic Income – a cause that is ever closer to my heart.

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Deirdre Pike, our program consultant for social justice and outreach, invited me a year ago to be part of a Social Audit for those who had been granted, and then had taken away, the life-changing benefit of Basic Income. It was a transformative experience and I am glad that we have been brought back to that discussion in the present crisis.

I have felt the hunger for teaching and preaching – and many of you have reflected that in your reality to me too. Perhaps there will be a renewed emphasis on the Word: on understanding it, studying it, contextualizing it, applying it. This deep study of scripture is, in Jewish tradition, a form of Prayer – that is a characterization that I value deeply. A renewal of depth and critical scholarly engagement can only be a redemptive outcome for the Church.

What is it we are being called to do by the Great Shepherd in this time and after? How will it affect our vocations as lay workers, deacons, and priests?

I ask myself these questions all the time. We will – God-willing – learn much from this time that will be valuable as we are called by our Shepherd into a renewed vocation and a new Church. That movement in itself is nothing new, because Christians have always responded in love and compassion to the world around us. Because we pattern ourselves after the Good Shepherd, this is so. We are caretakers, defenders, and symbols of unity for our people.

Easter blessings to you all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning of the first letter.

Bishop of Niagara