



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

May 13, 2020

Dear friends,

Grace and peace to you all in this fifth week of Eastertide. First and most importantly, I hope that you are able to take care of yourselves and take regular breaks in this time. As we acquire and hone new skills, we are all experiencing more fatigue than normal. We are told by countless authorities that this is to be expected. That may be so, but it must also be accompanied by intentional self-care as we prepare for the long haul. We have more to learn and to integrate into our vocational and professional practice and you'll need your energy. So, consider this a mandate from your Bishop to take your day off!

As our world is beginning to take its first steps in trying to move forward in a reality shaped by the ongoing presence of this coronavirus, it's worth reminding ourselves and those whom we serve and work alongside that while we have managed fairly successfully, to flatten the curve, we have not yet begun to understand how to live with this virus. It is safe to say that it will be with us for some time yet. And as we meet this new and sobering reality, patience will indeed be a virtue in the coming weeks and months as we climb this very steep learning curve.

As such I want to remind you of the importance of our [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#). The materials contained therein help us all to remain vigilant and up to date with both the government regulations and our own precautions during this time. We are not out of the woods yet and it is important that we adhere to the limitations that have been put in place so that we continue to place the safety and wellbeing of our people and our leaders at the forefront of our thinking and our actions. Please visit it often and read the updates.

Not only are we learning how to navigate our medical reality, but we are learning to navigate our ecclesiastical reality – one far removed from normal. On Monday, Canon Christyn Perkons sent out a ministry survey intended for us to begin to ask some questions about how we've continued to worship God and love our neighbor through this extraordinary time. We know that we are likely going to be dwelling in this season for a while and it is actually very important that we learn what we can about this new reality in order to serve God and our people as effectively as we can. I'm grateful to you for taking the time to fill out the survey. Among the very many things you are tasked with in this new normal, it may seem like one more job to do, but I assure you that the results of the survey will be important for how we think about our future.

One more word about this: I have indicated over the last couple of months my admiration and gratitude for the creativity and sheer labour you have lavished on working out how to produce new forms of online worship and faith formation activities. I have also indicated that not everyone need produce a Sunday service – especially where the resources are not sufficient in terms of equipment or people and that would be much better to direct our people toward our diocesan service on Sundays and/or a regional offering. This remains the case – and it is only good sense to steward your energy and resources in this way.

The Right Reverend Susan J. A. Bell
Cathedral Place, 252 James St. N., Hamilton, Ontario L8R 2L3 Tel: 905-527-1316
Email: bishop@niagaraanglican.ca Twitter: @BishopSBell

And while I'm on the subject, my thanks to all the regional archdeacons, and now, regional deans for representing their parts of the diocese during our Sunday service. My grateful thanks to Mike Deed for the provision of the liturgy week after week – particularly for his beautiful and thoughtful intercessions – and especially for his piano playing! And thanks to Archdeacon Bill Mous – without whose technical expertise, the entire enterprise would not have happened. Thanks also to Archdeacon Michael Patterson and the people of the Church of the Incarnation who have graciously played host to us these past weeks. All of these folks have offered their support for the diocese as a whole and I am grateful for their talents.

As you know, the bishops of the province meet each week by Zoom. We have done so from the moment the Emergency Declaration began. It has been a consolidation of the good relationships and collaboration that has developed between our dioceses. We have agreed to – as much as is possible – consult and act as a province with regard to many aspects of this crisis. One of the issues that was brought to our attention in our most recent meeting was concern about elder abuse.

Many of our frail, elderly parishioners have special relationships with us, as leaders, that we have cultivated lovingly over time as part of our duty of care for the whole Body of Christ. As a result, as trusted Christian leaders, I want to remind us all that we play a particularly important role in ensuring the safety and good treatment of the elderly in this time of uncertainty and stress. Some of our older parishioners may find themselves in unsafe situations as the tension of physical distancing and all its attendant strains is felt. As trusted authority figures, we can both inquire as to their safety and security and be assured, more than most, of an honest answer to that inquiry. It is incumbent on us to be cognizant of the rise of elder abuse at this time and to do our part to bring it to light if indeed it is happening, so I ask that you listen carefully in your care of our seniors.

The pandemic is teaching us a lot about how to be present to each other in different ways. We know that the most effective pastoral tool we have is still the telephone. And there is no substitute for the pastoral call that conveys warmth and love through the voice. There is no substitute for the gift of active, pastoral listening that hears with the heart. So I urge you, not to allow the wonders of our digital reality overtake the importance of the personal sacrifice of time and presence through the medium of the telephone. It's still not ideal, but it's the best we have in the present circumstances.

Friends, let me share what I genuinely feel in my heart: that I am awed by your determination to be Christ to one another, to our people and to the communities in which we are planted. The establishment of our Pandemic Response Fund has been met with great generosity. And I think that's because our people want to be involved in the works of mercy in this troubled world. I am so glad that we can support the important ministries you perform.

Let me end by telling you about a conversation I had with Dr. John Bowen last week. He told me of a dream he has for our post COVID-19 reality: "that people 'outside' the Church would say, 'How could we have managed without the Church?'"

Well, I believe, by the works of faith that I see, and the commitment that I witness, that we are well on our way to fulfilling that dream.

Thank you for all you do in Jesus' name. Blessings as you continue to be the face and hands of Christ in our parishes and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop of Niagara