



# OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

June 3, 2020

Dear friends,

This has been a tough week. As we continue to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, we've watched our neighbours south of the border mount a mighty struggle against the evils of racism; the brutal dehumanizing effects of systemic racism that somehow, incredibly, created a space for Mr. George Floyd to be callously murdered simply because of the colour of his skin. It is hard to find adequately condemnatory words for an act that seems so contrary to who we've been created to be. As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said in an article about these recent events: "Violence against any person is violence against a child of God, created in God's image."

And lest we think that as Canadians, we are immune to these kinds of corrosive attitudes that result in violence, our Primate has reminded us this week that we need to correct those assumptions. Racism lives in our culture: "in anti-Muslim terrorist acts; anti-Semitic vandalism and desecrations; missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; and disproportionate deaths of people of colour." And for Christians, it is a Gospel imperative to admit that and commit to end it - for racism is one of the principalities and powers that keep us from fulfilling our baptismal promise to "respect the dignity of every human being." Prejudice diminishes and wounds us all. Prejudice is bad for our souls, . . .

This is important to keep in the forefront of our minds this week as we joyfully - and proudly - celebrate Pride with our siblings in the 2S&LGBTQIA+ community through our online service on Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, which premieres at 3pm on our diocesan Facebook page and YouTube channel. The title or theme of this service is "Fiercely Loved." The long battle for acceptance and inclusion continues and we stand in solidarity with our siblings as we put on Christ together in love.

By now, you will all have read and digested the letter that the Ontario House of bishops released this past Monday. We have collectively decided not to open our church buildings until September at the earliest. This decision - as are all the decisions we have made to date, are made with the safety of our people at heart. This wisdom of the decision was confirmed by the extension of the provincial Emergency Declaration until the end of June with the possibility of another extension.

Each week the bishops of the province meet to share best practices, consulting one another over diocesan policy and guidelines. When we make decisions as a House, it is after deep consultation - and agreement has been given by each bishop to the whole. Our decision-making process is evidence-based and made in the light of the most current information and medical advice.

It's my sincere hope that this decision will allow our leaders time for rejuvenation through the summer months - and that this will also allow the opportunity for parishes to breathe, take stock and then begin to vision forward about what online worship, pastoral care, stewardship, and mission might look like in our specific contexts.

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The truth is, based on the advice of epidemiologists, we may not be able to occupy our buildings for some time. So, it's a new frontier – one that is both exciting but also demanding –which is why it is imperative for our leaders to make plans to take holidays. Hopefully without the unpredictability of a possible imminent and complicated re-opening, you will be able to rest from the crisis mode we have been existing in since March. If you have any questions about this decision, please do not hesitate to be in touch Archdeacon Bill Mous who is happy to help interpret its meaning and support you in any way.

This has been a full letter but let me say two last things. First, we have just celebrated the great feast of Pentecost. Sometimes the Spirit whispers and sometimes the Spirit uses a somewhat elevated volume to get our attention. But always the Spirit leads us in new ways - breaking down barriers and emboldening us to chart new waters with her. This work is not easy, but it is *just*, so I hope we will all search our own hearts and commit to change.

Lastly, let me say what is in my heart: you are leading *so well, so confidently, so compassionately* through this pandemic. None of it was expected and yet you have pivoted to meet the situation with grace and deep competence. That needs to be said and celebrated. As you take your rest, please know how full of gratitude and admiration I am for all that you are - and have done. We are on a journey together and are, to be sure, learning the contours of the Church of tomorrow.

May the Holy Spirit guide your footsteps and be in your heads and hearts as we walk confidently into this future together.

Every blessing,

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

Bishop of Niagara