



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

September 22, 2020

TO THE CLERGY AND WARDENS OF THE DIOCESE

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you,
I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel
from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began
a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 1:3-6*

Dear friends,

Let me echo St. Paul's words above and begin this letter with thanks: a heartfelt thanks for your partnership in the Gospel through these months of pandemic.

Not only have you kept your parishes functioning by caring for our people, and maintaining our buildings, but you have done more than that. So many of you have risen to this crisis and have even begun new ministries – contextually driven and timely ministries of connection and food sustainability. These efforts are good works; and works of faith.

The generosity we are witnessing each day is extraordinary. This is as true of these new ministries as it is of the ongoing ministries which are the bedrock of our witness. So many parishes have sought to voluntarily send along some or all of their usual Diocesan Mission and Ministry (DM&M) assessments through these many months. I know not all parishes have been in a position to do so, but I am grateful to those of you who have been able to make this a priority and have contributed according to your ability – even though you may have been concerned about the future.

I understand that fear of scarcity and how it creeps around the edges of our hopes for the future for our Church.

But here's the thing: St. Paul talks about *confidence*: confidence that the Lord, who has begun a good work in us, will sustain us in this good work until the end. There is also a certain pragmatism in this confidence: if God has supported us this far, God will not abandon us now. That's a logical and pragmatic assumption that requires trust – deep and abiding trust in God's faithfulness to us.

In fact, for Christians, there is nothing more pragmatic than trusting in God and taking a step in faith, because the alternative: to live in fear of the future, is no real alternative at all. That is not our vocation as Resurrection people. It's exactly when we fear for our existential safety that our faith is the strongest. It's then that we feel the reality of our practical dependence upon God. This pandemic has brought this to bear for us.

Christians know that scarcity is not in our vocabulary. We are constantly invited to marvel at God's generosity in the scriptures: the feeding of the five thousand, the parable of the sower, the wedding at Cana, and so many more stories of plenitude and richness when scarcity was assumed and feared.

So much of the ministry we undertake as a diocese rests on this sort of biblical generosity. You see, moved by our faith, we participate in God's mission in ways that go beyond what any one of our parishes can accomplish alone. In Niagara, the gifts shared by parishes through the DM&M assessment enable us to be a Christian community in ways that strengthen our parishes through the expertise, services, and programs provided by our diocesan staff while at the same time furthering God's mission locally, nationally, and globally.

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Mindful of this, as we said when we shared the details of our COVID-19 Parish Financial Support Plan back in April, I am hopeful that you will all, to the best of your abilities, make contributions to the DM&M assessment for the months that it has been voluntary.

In these last months, the Canada Employment Wage Subsidy has been a tremendous support and I am so grateful for the diligence and hard work of Canon Jody Beck with Greg Cook alongside in preparing these ongoing applications. The subsidy has provided much-needed financial stability as the pandemic has persisted; stability that we hope will make it possible for each parish to do their part to support the many vital ministries of our diocese and the wider Church. We have a mutual responsibility to each other to meet our obligations as we are best able, trusting that in the months ahead God will continue to provide.

As we move forward, invoicing for the DM&M will resume in October. You can expect to receive your invoice via email during the week of October 5th for your usual assessment amount, and any pre-authorized payments for DM&M will resume. To make a contribution for the months where DM&M was voluntarily received, please contact Canon Jody Beck (jody.beck@niagaraanglican.ca) or Nancy Kapusin (nancy.kapusin@niagaraanglican.ca).

For parishes where there is financial concern to the extent that their very viability is in question, rest assured that we are all in this together, as we have been since the beginning. It is my intention to work with synod council to introduce a peer-review process to consider parish requests for DM&M forgiveness for the months it has been voluntary. We'll keep you updated on the development of that process as it unfolds.

My friends, the 'outworkings' of the Gospel are more important than ever. In fact, our work – in our parishes and across our diocese – must deepen and strengthen in these times. This is a season for trust and generosity to equip the Church to meet the opportunities of our time with grace and confidence.

Like Paul, I too always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel. My prayers are unceasing for all of you as you seek to serve our Lord faithfully in these extraordinary times.

Blessings to you all.

In Christ,

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

Bishop of Niagara