



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

October 9, 2020

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ~Philippians 4:6-7

Dear friends,

The words above are what we aspire to as Christians. Never more so than on this weekend which is a time set aside to give thanks to God for all our blessings. To give thanks like this, intentionally, gratefully, is to open our eyes to the truth that everything is a gift from God.

It's my guess that we are all feeling the truth of this sense of dependence upon God like never before. And I believe this has brought us closer to God and to each other in this anxious time.

I want to take this opportunity to give thanks to all of you: for the work you have done to re-open our parishes for worship and thanksgiving. It takes, in equal measure, bravery and industry in order to do this and I thank you most sincerely for both. I especially thank your leaders for their commitment to our re-opening processes. I know that you have expended a great deal of time and effort in your preparations. Although I know we cannot meet as we did, we can still take joy and comfort in each other in this mediated and careful way.

I also want to thank you for your trust in our collective efforts to keep each other safe. I feel deeply grateful for that trust. And because of it, we must continue to be vigilant and strict in our interpretation of the ministry guidelines and re-opening plans that we have all received. We are in a liminal time with regard to the rise in numbers of those infected in our province and so now is not the time to be seeking exceptions to our processes, rather it is a time to play it all by the book.

The wearing of personal protective equipment, adherence to hygiene protocols, and maintaining physical distance are all crucial practices put in place so that we can protect each other. What is key is that we recognize that we do these things for our neighbour, so I ask that you not only fulfil the letter but also the spirit of the ministry guidelines and reopening with a joyful compliance and diligence for the care of the Body of Christ. Indeed, I pray that you will outdo one another in your preparations and carefulness.

This is doubly important now because we are embracing a new and nuanced way to deal with this pandemic. That is good and right as our behaviour is changing as we learn the contours of this virus. And we know that behaviour modification is our best defence against this disease until a vaccine is widely available.

What we do now with regard to remaining open as the pandemic surges in parts of our province will be regionally focused. We are watching the public health indicators very closely and will make decisions and determinations based on the best available evidence. Currently, the per capita numbers of infections in our diocese continue to trend lower than in the rest of the province and so we are confident that our churches will remain open for now, subject to any new provincial directives.

We will, of course, continue to communicate clearly and frequently to keep everyone up to date.

In the meantime, let me conclude by saying how grateful I am for all the many ways in which you and our churches continue to be the face and hands Christ by caring for our neighbours, radiating hope, and proclaiming our faith. These are not easy times, but it is in times like these where love of Jesus enfolds and sustains us, and as the passage from Philippians reminds us, grants us a peace which transcends all understanding.

May that peace be yours this day and always, and may you have a safe, and a heartfelt Thanks-giving this weekend.

In gratitude for you, and for all God's blessings,

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

Bishop of Niagara