



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

December 16, 2020

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ~Romans 12:12

Dear friends,

It with a strange sense of déjà vu that I write to you at this time. As the pandemic continues its steady march across our diocese, province, and country, I have taken the difficult but imperative decision to close our parishes within the City of Hamilton. In spite of the red zone level restrictions imposed by the Ontario government, the numbers of new cases have increased dramatically in recent days.

I make this decision with the safety of all in the forefront of my mind.

I know it is tough to give up the possibility of seeing our parish families at this time of the year and to give up attending and engaging in the deeply life-giving worship we had all planned for Advent and Christmas. It is yet one more sacrifice we have all had to bear in this difficult season.

The temptation might be, if your own parish is closed, to seek out another in an area that is not in lockdown. And although I understand the impulse, I must ask you not to do so but instead, to accept the responsibility – for love of neighbour – of refraining from in-person worship in a parish other than your own, lest we become unknowingly responsible for transmitting the virus to another community and unwittingly, make the entire situation worse.

It is possible that in the coming days, more closures in our diocese may become necessary. We are monitoring the situation very closely and will communicate as fully and in the most timely way we can manage about the evolving situation.

Friends, with the first vaccines being given in the province this week, we can rejoice in the hope they represent; help is on the way. But it is undeniable that there are yet difficult days to endure in the near future; days in which the utmost vigilance and faithfulness to our COVID-19 protocols will be crucial – including the closure of our churches for worship if necessary. I know this cloud will lift in the months to come but until that time, strict adherence to public health and ministry guidelines is our best defense against infection and community transmission.

Please remember that if the provision of online service is not offered by your parish that there is a diocesan Sunday service available on the diocesan Facebook page at 10am and later on our YouTube diocesan channel. For Christmas Eve, we will have a special celebration of the Eucharist with spiritual communion, livestreamed at 6pm from the sanctuary of our Cathedral. You are warmly invited to worship with the diocesan family and to draw strength and comfort from each other.

Finally, thank you for all that you have done and continue to do in every parish of our diocese to combat the impacts of this virus through your exceptionally generous and compassionate ministry. You have been simply marvellous and so willing to do your part and in so doing bear such faithful witness to the Gospel. I ask for just a little more until we are through this present crisis.

I pray that as the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord approaches that you will take the time that we have been unexpectedly given this year, to observe Christmas with sacred simplicity – giving thanks for all of God’s gifts – but most especially for the gift of Jesus: God’s son.

Blessings to you and yours for the rest of the Advent season and for Christmas when it arrives – and please know that you are all – every one – in my prayers.

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