



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF QUEBEC

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Friday, June 12, 2020
Feast of Saint Barnabas the Apostle

Dear friends,

When COVID-19 prompted the closure of our church buildings on March 13, we did not know how long this pandemic and its consequences would last. As we enter the summer, there remain many unknowns about the coronavirus and the potentially deadly disease it causes. As of this week more than 5,000 Quebecers have died of COVID-19.

The decision in March to close the church buildings across the diocese and to suspend in-person worship until further notice was made before any such request by public health officials. As I wrote at the time, the diocese chose to do so out of an abundance of caution and in the interests of not only our own members but of the common good, particularly those whose age or health makes them more vulnerable during this pandemic.

It is for these same reasons that our church buildings will remain closed for worship until at least September. A similar decision has already been made by all of the Anglican dioceses in Ontario, the Anglican Diocese of Montreal, and the Eastern Synod of our full communion partner, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The government of Quebec has included places of worship as a part of its deconfinement plan, although an exact timetable for reopening has yet to be established. I have been part of a group of religious leaders in the province that has worked fruitfully with public health authorities to develop protocols for the reopening of churches, synagogues, and mosques. However, even after a green light is received from the provincial government to reopen places of worship, these protocols will place significant restrictions on things like regulating attendance, physical distancing, disinfecting, ventilation, singing, sacramental practices, offerings, books, bulletins, and fellowship time.

Many of our congregations—particularly small churches—would be severely challenged to meet all of the provisions of these protocols. Even those congregations with such capacity would find worship significantly inhibited by these hygienic restrictions. Therefore, regardless of any forthcoming government announcement with respect to the reopening of places of worship in Quebec, the church buildings of our diocese will remain closed to liturgical services until further notice.

Many of us—myself included—deeply miss gathering in our church buildings for worship and community. At the same time, we have been blessed by the discovery of new ways of gathering as a diocesan and congregational families in prayer and fellowship through services offered via the internet (or by telephone), online fellowship and discipleship groups, phone calls and even letter writing.

These are no permanent substitute for the people of God physically gathered together in each place around the eucharistic table, nourished by word and sacrament. Nevertheless, these virtual gatherings have fed many of us in various ways. Jesus' promise is that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he is in their midst. That can be as true for an online gathering as for one in person.

The church has not been closed these past few months—only the buildings. And so even though worship services in the church buildings of the diocese will not be authorized this summer, our life and work will continue. Here are some of the ways that can still happen:

- **OUTDOOR GATHERINGS** – Public health authorities have currently authorized outdoor gatherings of 10 or fewer people from no more than three different households, with the two-meter distancing rule being respected. Clergy and congregations may wish to take advantage of this provision to have such small outdoor gatherings for pastoral care, teaching, and/or fellowship. The current limitations on the size of such gatherings may make outdoor worship services impractical, but those limits may increase according to the directives of public health authorities. Any outdoor worship should be a service of the word rather than a celebration of holy communion.
- **ONLINE SERVICES** – Weekly worship services, Bible studies, fellowship and discipleship groups will continue to be provided (likely in a slightly reduced form) during the summer, via the internet.
- **FUNERALS** – Funerals and interments may take place, but only at the graveside, and respecting the public health authorities' guidelines on outdoor gatherings. If the deceased's family so desires, a more fulsome liturgy, such as a requiem or memorial service, can still take place at a later date. Communities without access to a mortuary may continue to use their church buildings as a temporary resting place for an individual's remains prior to burial.
- **BAPTISMS** – Since baptisms normally take place within the context of a worshipping community's main service, they should be delayed until a usual pattern of worship resumes. In the case of an emergency, any Christian can baptize the individual and a celebration and recognition of the baptism can take place at church at a later date.
- **WEDDINGS** – Couples seeking marriage in the church should consider postponing their wedding until our return to our church buildings. If a couple nevertheless wishes to proceed, a dispensation for an outdoor wedding can be

granted, provided that the stipulations of public health authorities regarding outdoor gatherings are respected.

- **HALL RENTALS** – The use of parish halls/basements by church groups or short-term renters continues to be suspended until further notice.

The pandemic and its consequences have had a predictably negative impact on the finances of all of our congregations and, as a result, on the diocese as a whole. Our financial state is fragile at the best of times. This global crisis has made it only more febrile.

I am therefore deeply grateful for those of you who have continued to contribute financially to your local congregation during this challenging time. I would ask you to continue to be generous, and to invite those of you who have not yet made a regular offering to do so. I recognize that COVID-19 has created economic hardship for some of you, and so my request is only that “all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you” (Deuteronomy 16:17). Every congregation with a stipended minister has benefited from the federal government’s COVID-19 wage subsidy program, but that financial aid is scheduled to end in August. Your individual contributions will therefore help support, among other things, our faithful clergy and diocesan staff, who have been working diligently—if often in unseen ways—throughout these months of confinement.

There are at least three ways you can give:

1. **ONLINE** – Visit <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/church-society-of-the-diocese-of-quebec/> and use a credit card to donate to your local congregation, or the diocese directly, or both. To donate to a specific congregation, use the pull-down menu labelled “APPLY YOUR DONATION TO A SPECIFIC FUND SET UP BY THIS CHARITY” to find the name of the local church you wish to support.
2. **CONTACT YOUR CONGREGATION’S TREASURER** – You can mail to or drop off a cheque to your local congregation’s treasurer. If you’re not sure who that is, you can contact Church House (info@quebec.anglican.ca or 418 692 3858) and we can probably tell you. You can also mail a cheque directly to the diocesan office: 31 rue des Jardins, Québec, QC G1R 4L6.
3. **ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY COLLECTION** – In the current circumstances, going door to door to collect offerings is not advisable. However, members of the community can be invited to drop off their donations at an appointed time and place outdoors (perhaps the front door of the church), with two people designated by the parish corporation present to receive the donations.

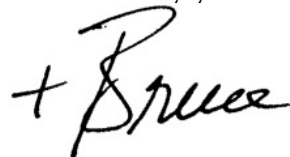
The church, of course, is not alone in needing extra financial help in the midst of this pandemic. So I would also invite you to consider also making a charitable donation to an organization that helps support the least, the last, and the lost in your local community. You can also contribute to meaningful and effective projects across

Canada and around the world through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (<https://pwrdf.org/world-of-gifts/>).

We will continue to monitor the evolving situation with respect to COVID-19 during the course of the summer months, so that when the time comes we will be able to return to our church buildings in as safe, responsible, and joyful manner as possible.

This is not the letter I hoped I would be writing at the cusp of summer. As our gospel reading this past Sunday reminds us, Jesus promised that he would be with us always—“until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). He did not promise that our life's journey would be without obstacles or hardship. We continue to be the church in this challenging and unsettling time, confident that Jesus journeys with us through it, trusting that Christ is as we speak redeeming it.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'B' followed by the name 'Bruce' in a cursive script.

The Rt. Rev. Bruce Myers
Bishop of Quebec