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Friday 18 January 2019

Dear faithful people of the Diocese of Quebec,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

A new year is upon us, and in the life of our church that means that congregations all over the vast expanse of our diocese will be coming together for annual vestry meetings. These gatherings can sometimes seem bureaucratic, even tedious—focused as they often are on procedure, finances, and property.

While discussions at annual vestries about things like money and buildings may be inevitable, my hope is that we can discuss these matters while keeping in mind that they are not ends in themselves, but instead some of the means by which we can help reveal some of God's kingdom in each of our communities. This is what the church is supposed to be about.

A prayer that I've often used to open annual vestries puts it this way: "We pray that this may be something more than just a business meeting, but rather an occasion when we receive fresh encouragement in our work, catch a wider vision of God's purpose, and dedicate ourselves anew to God's service." This is my prayer for each of our congregations as you gather to take counsel for the life and work of the church in your communities across our diocese.

As you do so, I wish to bring to your attention two especially important matters in the common life of our diocesan family. One has to do with another important meeting of our church; the other regards our collective responsibility to safeguard vulnerable people in our midst.

Synod 2019

Synod is the highest and most representative decision-making body of our diocese. It is composed of clergy and lay representatives deliberating with the bishop about matters concerning the life and work of our diocesan church. Synod last gathered in 2015 and it typically meets every two years. However, at the request of the Diocesan Executive Council, I refrained from convening Synod in 2018 because of financial constraints. Although money continues to be a challenge, it is my intention to convene Synod this year. As a Christian tradition that is not only episcopally led, but also synodically governed, it is essential that our diocesan family gathers together in Synod. God willing, we will meet November 21-24 in Quebec City.

At its last meeting in 2015, Synod made important changes to its size, composition, and the manner in which its members are selected. The secretary of Synod, Canon Stephen Kohner, wrote to clergy and wardens in December about the details of how this new selection method works.

The Synod gathering this fall will be the first to implement this new way of doing things, one that functions on a relatively tight timeline. It is therefore essential that (with the exception of summer congregations) your church's annual vestry meeting take place no later than early March and that the Congregational Annual Report (available at quebec.anglican.ca under "Resources") be sent to the Synod Office **no later than March 15**. Congregations which do not return their annual report by this date will be ineligible to have their lay nominees to Synod considered for election. So that this may be a Synod as representative of the diversity of our diocesan family as possible, please ensure that these deadlines are respected. My hope is that every congregation will offer the name of at least one individual who feels called to participate in what I hope will be a prayerful and Spirit-led time of discernment for our church.

Sexual misconduct policy

It has been deeply disturbing and distressing to have been reminded in recent months of the extent to which the sexual abuse of vulnerable people—especially children and youth—remains a reality, including in the church.

The Anglican Diocese of Quebec is committed to the protection of all members of the church community from sexual misconduct, particularly children, youth, and vulnerable adults. To this end the Diocesan Executive Council recently adopted a revised Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct. It is the first time the policy has been updated in nearly 20 years, and the changes reflect new churchwide norms and expectations in the safeguarding of vulnerable people in our churches.

Among the more significant changes to the diocesan policy is an expansion of the categories of people in the church who will be required to submit to a background check. Under the updated policy, a Criminal Records Check (also informally known as a "police check") will be required for church staff and volunteers who do not work directly with vulnerable people. Individuals in this category have in the past included members of diocesan committees, officers of Synod, and diocesan staff. We will now also be asking churchwardens in this diocese to furnish a Criminal Records Check.

Staff and volunteers who in their church work are in contact with people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults (such as the elderly or those with physical or mental challenges) will also be required to furnish a Vulnerable Sector Check. This would apply to clergy (including the bishop), lay readers, pastoral visitors, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, and choir or music directors who work with minors or vulnerable adults.

These measures are in keeping with the practice of several other dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada and are becoming standard practice across the church and other organizations. They are not intended to imply a lack of trust in our faithful clergy, staff, or volunteers, or to create a new layer of bureaucracy. Our hope is to foster transparency and accountability. Above all we wish to maintain a safe and secure environment for everyone in our churches—especially the most vulnerable among us.

The revised and updated Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct will take effect on March 15, 2019, and **those requiring background checks will have until June 1, 2019 to have them completed.** The chancellor of the diocese, Malcolm McLeod, will soon issue a letter with more details concerning its implementation.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to direct them to the small but committed team of people with whom I have the privilege of working at the Synod Office and on the Diocesan Executive Council. The Diocese of Quebec is nothing without its congregations of faithful people, and the diocesan staff and structures exist to serve you as together we seek to fulfil our calling to be God's people in and for the world God so loves.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Myers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Bruce Myers OGS
Bishop of Quebec