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Friday 19 February 2021

Dear faithful people of the Diocese of Quebec,

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

There's an old cliché that says, "The only thing certain in life is uncertainty." True or not, I think it's at least safe to say that the only thing certain in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic is uncertainty—uncertainty about when vaccines will be widely available, about when restrictions will be relaxed, about when we can return to some form of our pre-pandemic lives, including in our churches.

That's the reason this annual vestry letter is coming to you a little later than usual this year. My colleagues and I in the diocesan leadership have—in the midst of the uncertainty and frequently changing guidelines concerning COVID-19—been attempting to determine how best to address the matter of congregational annual vestry meetings, which would normally take place between now and April 15.

As I write this letter, most indoor gatherings in the province are prohibited, and this would include an annual vestry meeting, whether it's held in a church, hall, or individual's home. While many church activities have moved online during the pandemic, many of our members do not have the means to participate in, for example, an annual vestry meeting convened on Zoom.

I am therefore advising that congregations delay holding their annual vestry meetings until this autumn. Doing so will greatly increase the chances of holding an in-person annual vestry meeting, assuming the COVID-19 situation—including the vaccination program—improves. More specific direction about this will be offered later in the year, in the light of ongoing developments respecting the pandemic.

I realize that for some congregations this will mean going nearly two years between annual vestry meetings, and asking volunteers like churchwardens to remain in office for a while longer. But, as we've been reminded repeatedly in the past year, these are unprecedented times, including for our church's worship and governance. My hope is that we will be able to return to a more usual pattern for our life and work—including for annual vestries—in 2022.

In recognition of the unprecedented challenges many of our congregations are facing because of the pandemic, the Diocesan Executive Council has authorized measures aimed at easing some of the financial strain caused by COVID-19. Therefore, **this year every congregation will see their Fair Share contributions reduced.** The amount of this reduction will be applied equitably, varying from congregation to congregation based on how much of its revenue is generated from investments.

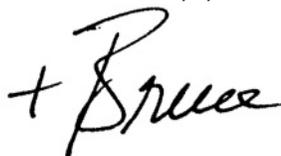
Congregations with significant investment income will receive a smaller Fair Share reduction than congregations with little or none, since the proceeds from investments in 2020 were relatively stable. However, every congregation in the diocese will have a credit applied to their 2021 Fair Share assessment. I hope this will ease at least some of the financial burden the pandemic has imposed on many of our local congregations, and help see us all through to the other side of this challenging time.

Offering this temporary financial relief to the congregations of the diocese means that the revenue of the Synod—whose budget supports, among other things, the ministry of the bishop and administrative and programmatic support for the diocese as a whole—will drop by approximately 50% in 2021. This means that Synod’s budget for this year, which in its original form was balanced, will instead post a significant deficit.

We are certainly not the only organization facing such a shortfall as a result of the pandemic, and Director General Marie-Sol Gaudreau and Treasurer Mike Boden have made major efforts in mitigating the economic effects of COVID-19 for our congregations and for the diocese as a whole, and we can be grateful for their leadership.

As Christians, we don’t really believe that cliché about uncertainty being the only certain thing in life. Rather, even (or especially) in uncertain times such as this, we echo the words of the apostle Paul: “For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

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
Bishop of Quebec