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To: To Clergy and Parishes of the Diocese

Date: April 15th, 2020

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Most years I find myself emotionally and mentally exhausted in the week following Easter Day. If you want to “push a button” for most clergy, ask for a meeting on Easter Monday! This year is not like “most years”. Our season of Lent was marked by the declaration of a Public Health emergency. The restrictions on gathering and movement added to the penitential nature of the season, as has the underlying message that beneath the “giving up” of these normal freedoms there is a desire for health and a care for others in our communities. As churches, we joined in the broader societal scramble to adapt our way of being to these new realities. Video conferencing for meetings, live streaming, audio and video recording for our worship, additional resources to turn every home into a place for worship and study. In the back of my mind for the past month was the question, “Would we be able to gather for Easter?” The answer was no. No, we did not gather in the ways we did in the “before Covid” time. No, the traditional liturgies of the church did not take place at least not in the ways we have known them. They did happen- but in new ways. We celebrated and we continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We continue to celebrate God’s great ‘yes’ to life in the face of death. The upside down view of the world which Jesus lived and proclaimed (the kingdom of God) came to its pinnacle on the cross.

Once again I want to say thank you to those who have worked so hard to maintain contact within congregations over the past month. For those who have learned new technologies to gather people for worship and study. For those balancing work at home with the increased demands of home schooling and disrupted family life. For those who continue to provide the financial support necessary for ministries to continue. Please continue to pray for those who are dealing with the reality of this pandemic every day. For healthcare workers, first responders and those whose jobs in serving the public have been deemed essential. Please pray for those who live with anxieties and those cut off from family and physical support networks. Please pray for those who are mourning without the kinds of community support that is usual and vital in those times.

Lent is over, we made it to Easter. A lot of energy has gone into getting us this far, but this is not the end of the fight against Covid. The Public Health Emergency is not going to end soon. Everyone is asking the question “How long will this go on?” - including me. The answer is we don’t know and the only way to keep it as short a time as possible is to follow the directions we have been given. I have previously asked you to plan for the restrictions to continue to the end of May. According to the modeling released by the Nova Scotia Department of Health that may be an optimistic target. The race we are in is not a sprint, it is a marathon. We need to pace ourselves if we are going to finish this race.

We need to appreciate the “upside down” nature of the kingdom in which we are now living. There have already been things which we have “set aside” in this race? Are there others that we have come to realize are irrelevant in this moment (or maybe even permanently?) How do we draw more people into the new ministries we are creating? Are we continuing to discerning the gifts necessary for the Good News to be proclaimed in this moment?

The public health people keep reminding us that we won't know we have hit the "peak" of the pandemic until after it has past. In the middle of it we can't do the proper analysis. It is too soon for us to appreciate how many of the changes we have entered into, will impact us well beyond the end of the Covid pandemic. Despite the longing to return to normal we need to remember two things 1) What was normal was not perfect, no matter what kind of normal you are thinking about. 2) This experience has taught us lessons, both good and bad. When anyone has a significant disruptive experience they are changed. We have been changed.

Perhaps there is a third thing we need to remember: A virtual hug is no substitute for the real thing.

Alleluia, the Lord is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Cutler".

The Most Reverend Ron Cutler
Archbishop of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island