



Roman Catholic Diocese of Peterborough

May 19, 2020

Easter Season

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Diocese of Peterborough,

We know that, in the Church's calendar, Advent is the traditional season of longing and expectation, of waiting for the coming of the Lord. How very strange to us that this past Lent and Easter have turned into a prolonged period of waiting and expectation: waiting for the flattening of the curve, longing for an easing of the public health restrictions with which we have been living, and looking forward to meeting the Lord again in the celebration of the sacraments - and to meeting with family, friends and neighbours in our parishes.

In this remarkable time, faith communities have been called upon to do their part within society to help fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by staying home as much as possible. I know what a sacrifice it has been for you to forgo the public celebration of the Mass in this period and I thank you for your patience and understanding. We have had to make sacrifices as a faith community, but they pale in comparison to the risks taken on by so many in our society who are serving others in health care and various fields during this crisis. With that in mind, we must be patient for a little longer, even as we see the gradual, staged re-opening of our province's economic, social and cultural life.

Although there is no clear timeline yet, we know that we are approaching the stage when our parishes may begin to open again on some basis. In anticipation of this day, I have formed a Re-Opening Committee for our Diocese, comprised of priests and lay people, Diocesan staff and individuals with specific expertise. We are in consultation with the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, who are working to develop a set of guidelines and benchmarks. We will also draw from the expertise and experience of other dioceses, applying these learnings to our local situation. All this will proceed in concert with directions from the provincial government and the various medical officers of health. We have made them aware of the importance of faith communities gathering again and of our specific needs and challenges and they are including us in their planning.

While we are still lacking specifics, we know that a return to parish life will entail certain necessary features. We expect that it will be gradual and staged, with limits on gathering numbers at first. An emphasis on sanitation, good hygiene practices, physical distancing and the use of protective equipment will be a crucial part of the re-opening. Some schedules and liturgical practices may have to be adapted

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as we adjust to a new reality in the foreseeable future. And it is quite possible that there will be local variations depending upon the different circumstances in the many regions of our geographically vast diocese. We must be diligent in following safety precautions, both to protect our community members and to help ensure that our province does not backslide in the gains it has made in fighting this pandemic.

I wish to thank the priests, deacons, and lay staff of our Diocese for continuing to find ways to reach out to people during this difficult time. I thank the faithful for their great patience and for making good use of Internet resources and other means to sustain their faith.

I know that I can count on your prayerful support and cooperation as we move toward a re-opening of our Church life that is gradual, safe and that aims to protect the most vulnerable among us. Above all dear friends, let us continue to trust in the Lord Jesus who does not leave us orphaned, and whose presence we will experience again in the sacramental and community life of the Church.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Daniel Miehm". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

†Most Reverend Daniel J. Miehm
Bishop of Peterborough

†DJM/dlt