



The Diocese of Rupert's Land

The Right Reverend Geoffrey Woodcroft
Bishop of Rupert's Land

Bishop's Directive March 31, 2020

To: Rupert's Land Leadership

Greetings in Christ,

Today we meet in prayer and concern, seeking the light of Christ to illuminate the Church's pathways in an extraordinary time. A time of exile is firmly upon us, we are called upon to navigate our circumstances not knowing what the final destination shall look like. We travel in faith, faith shown in God's time through the ages, faith that calls upon the most excellent gifts with which God has given. Together we are strong and capable ministers of the Word.

Yesterday our Manitoba Premier designated the closure of all non-essential services, ordered by the Provincial Health Officer, as the most recent response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. While several social service agencies were exempt, Churches specifically are not exempt. Therefore we, with all other churches, have been ordered to close until April 14, 2020.

For Rupert's Land, this means that by midnight March 31, we will:

- **Cease** use of our Church and rental spaces for: worship, gathering, food bank, mission, ministry, and office administration.
- **Cease face to face visitations** with ALL people.
- **Continue** provide pastoral care as required by non-face-to-face means.
- **Only conduct** Last Rites in person (adhering to all public health protocols).
- **Continue** to encourage all people to strictly follow public health protocols, especially in staying home to prevent the spread of COVID 19.
- **Continue** to contact ALL members of parishes to check-up on health, physical need and help shoulder fear and anxiety.
- **Continue** using creative and imaginative ideas to provide ministry of the Word and Prayer for use at home.
- **Encourage** parishioners to use the telephone, face-time or other platform to enjoy the company of one another regularly, virtually embrace extended family, and to check-up on the neighbourhood.
- Where and when possible **report** to the authorities needs that you are no longer able to meet in your neighbourhood due to the restrictions placed upon Churches and other charities.

- **Remind** the parish of the need to be mindful of our need to support the Body of Christ financially in this troubling time. We remember Acts 2.45b *[they would] distribute the proceeds to all, as had any need.*
- **Designate** one person to check our buildings and mail daily
- Not put ourselves, nor others, at risk of disease or physical danger.
- **Change** the voice-mail on your parish phone to provide an emergency contact number for those requiring emergency pastoral care. *If applicable, encourage the caller to leave a voice mail and have the voice-mail checked regularly.*

Our posture is to refrain from the celebration of the Eucharist until such time as we may be face to face and heart to heart. I know I speak with a heaviness of heart which resonates through the diocese. And yet, I rejoice that we are 'a sent people' since our last Eucharistic gathering to feast on the Word, to pray unceasingly, on our journey toward the cross and onto resurrection.

As I spoke in my March 25th Directive:

*No one really knows when this pandemic will stop impacting our lives, but when it does, **I think each and every one of us will rise in thanksgiving and celebrate The Day of Resurrection** with such robust vigor that doors and windows will shake, goosebumps will rise, and our once silenced voices will be raised in Church buildings, homes and street corners. It is the risen Lord who guides and scripts us now, not the pandemic; it is the risen Lord in the presence of the Body of Christ that is sustaining and empowering us for ministry and mission in the many and various ways we each can contribute now. It is the risen Lord who is calling us to that glorious day when together we shall sing at the top of our lungs, hear again the message that propels us through the seasons.*

I am preparing resources which will be posted on the Diocesan Website for use in observing Holy Week. Please note that I live-stream on Sundays, but **not** through Holy Week.

We are navigating a journey through uncharted territory, yet not unlike that of Jesus' earthly ministry, and that of the early Church. Regardless of being deemed non-essential, our faith and story in Christ inform our call to be minister who bring necessary care in Christ's name. We must find new ways of delivering care and ministry to the most vulnerable in our midst. I will do all in my power to engage the provincial and municipal governments, and to offer our petitions, and our help, for the many vulnerable persons who are now more at risk.

God does not leave people alone in exile, nor in a wilderness wandering. We have been groomed for this precise moment, to fully live-out this story so that others may have relief. Sisters and brothers in Christ let us remain in a posture of prayer, seeking spiritual guidance in discerning God's will and love.

God, bless and keep us. May your face shine upon us, and be gracious to us; may you lift up your countenance upon us, and grant us peace. Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Geoffrey Woodcroft" with "Bishop of Rupert's Land" written below it in a smaller, less legible script.

The Rt. Rev. Geoffrey Woodcroft,
Bishop of Rupert's Land