



The Office of the Metropolitan of Ontario The Anglican Church of Canada

The Most Reverend Anne Germond
Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario

On a Summer Sabbath Rest

A letter from the Ontario House of Bishops to the faithful in Christ

June 1, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

What a true blessing it was to join together from all parts of our vast ecclesiastical province for a special online worship celebration! On the Day of Pentecost we are reminded that God's love has been poured into our hearts, and we pray for the Holy Spirit to come and renew the face of the earth, perhaps most especially during this time of pandemic.

Strengthened by the knowledge of God's abiding love and renewed by the Spirit, the provincial House of Bishops is calling on the parishes of our dioceses to observe a sacred sabbath rest over the summer months so that we can be renewed for mission and ministry in this new season of evangelism and discipleship that is emerging for our Church.

The past three months have been difficult as we journeyed through a time of wilderness with the closure of our church buildings and as we have creatively adapted our ministries to respond to the emergency situation. Inspired from the witness of scripture, a time of sabbath rest invites our clergy and lay leaders, as well as the whole Church, to take time apart from our usual patterns in order to bring renewed energy and knowledge and skill to the practice of ministry.

What this means is that regardless of where the Government of Ontario is with its reopening plan, our churches will not be reopening for in-person worship until at least September. This decision was made in consultation with public health experts as well as our diocesan executive officers and chancellors, with the well-being and safety of all our parishioners and the communities we serve uppermost in our hearts and minds.

Online worship services and our critical food security and other essential outreach and community ministries taking place in our buildings will continue, as they have been in recent months. We are so grateful for all those enabling such ministries of praise, love and mercy during this pandemic.

As Anglicans, we have been blessed by our church buildings, legacies handed on to us by faithful stewards who have gone before us. Now we have a rare opportunity, while we are worshipping outside of them, to prayerfully explore new and creative ways to use them, as reimagined vessels for ministry in the months and years ahead.

This sabbath time of rest, reflection and renewal, while we wait to be back in our cherished and familiar sacred spaces, offers us an opportunity to discern what our worship patterns, stewardship practices, and parish ministries might look like going forward.

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To help with this, in the coming weeks we will be releasing a one-page framework document which will outline the cautious three-stage measured approach we as Anglicans in the ecclesiastical province of Ontario will undertake collectively as pandemic conditions in our communities warrant the eventual safe reopening of our church buildings.

For now, please know that you are held in our prayers unceasingly, and we are deeply grateful for the generosity, innovation and faithfulness that has been so richly demonstrated across our province. As we weather our current circumstances together, let us seek to be the face of Christ in the world in a renewed and faithful way, buoyed by the Spirit of the Living God which falls afresh on us each day.

May God's deepest peace be with you.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a cross symbol at the top left and the name 'Shane' in a cursive script.

Metropolitan and Archbishop of Algoma and Moosonee

On behalf of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario...

The Right Reverend Michael Oulton, The Right Reverend Susan Bell, The Right Reverend Andrew Asbil, The Right Reverend Dr. Todd Townshend, The Right Reverend Shane Parker, The Right Reverend Peter Fenty, The Right Reverend Jenny Andison, The Right Reverend Riscylla Shaw, The Right Reverend Kevin Robertson, The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz.