

“He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.” (Ps.23)



### Sabbath Rest in the Summer of 2020

*“Its object is to give humankind relaxation from continuous and unending toil and by refreshing their bodies to send them out renewed into their old activities. A breathing spell enables ordinary people to collect their strength with a stronger force behind them to undertake each of the tasks set before them.” (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Sabbath)*

Dear friends,

In his book on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, Rabbi Harold Kushner tells of a group of tourists on safari in Africa. They had hired several African porters to carry their supplies while they trekked. After three days the porters told them they would have to stop and rest for a day. They were not tired they explained, but “we have walked too far too fast and now we must await our souls to catch up with us.” (The Lord is My Shepherd pg. 60).

As I look around the dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee I am seeing clergy and lay people who are weary from having walked far and fast since the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic became a reality this March. We were thrust into a world that was unknown and frightening while being tasked to continue the work of being the church. Even though we were ill equipped to provide online services, we quickly found ways to make it happen and in the midst of a pandemic have found creative solutions to make ministry happen. Everything from Sunday worship to Board meetings, Bible studies and innovative children’s ministries are happening in this online world. Wardens and other lay leaders have stepped up to assist with worship, check on our church buildings, and stay connected with our congregations. Yet it has not been without its stresses and I am grateful for your ongoing support of the church and each other as we have navigated our way in this uncertain time. Thankful too for your financial support which has enabled your local congregation to support its ministries.

Now we need a breathing spell to renew our bodies, minds, and spirits, which is the primary reason that the Ontario House of Bishops called on Anglicans to take time over the summer months for a much needed rest. This doesn’t mean that we are closed for worship or that we won’t be making preparations for the safe reopening of our churches. It simply means that we won’t be gathering in our church buildings for worship during June, July, and August, even if Ontario, as a province, allows for large gatherings to occur. There are honorary and retired clergy, as well as Lay Readers who would welcome the opportunity to preach in online services, to lead worship, and to take on some of the usual pastoral offices associated with parish ministry. Instead of individual parishes continually offering online worship, perhaps collaboration within the deanery would allow for some rest for our clergy and lay leadership. Do not be reluctant to redirect your people to the myriad of online offerings that are currently available so your worship team may take time to rest and restore their souls. As innovative as you all have been throughout these past few months, I know you will find ways to offer each other a moment of restorative peace.

The decision not to reopen our church buildings during the summer months, except for food security and other essential services such as livestreaming or taping services was not made lightly, but in consultation with medical experts. Two epidemiologists the bishops of Ontario consulted are of the opinion that opening up too quickly, without properly preparing our facilities and equipping our leaders, would be ill advised.

In their excellent presentation to the House of Bishops on Tuesday June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, Dr. Rob James and the Rev. Michael Garner spoke of the 3 C's of Closed Spaces with poor ventilation, Crowded Places with many people nearby and Close Contact such as close range conversations which, if they occur at the same time, increase the risk of the spread of the corona virus. They asked us to think about whether churches are at the 3C intersection, and what we need to put into place to mitigate the traditional risk factors before returning to our buildings.

They also highlighted the concern about a second outbreak of the virus if we reopen our buildings too soon. This concern was confirmed by Dr. Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, on Thursday June 4<sup>th</sup> who says there could be an 'explosive second wave' of COVID-19 coronavirus if the reopening is mishandled.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/tam-warns-of-explosive-second-covid-19-wave-if-reopening-mishandled-1.4968986>

I am as anxious as you are to return to the Synod office to work and to see Algoma and Moosonee's churches reopen. The Ontario House of Bishops is working on a three staged plan for that reopening which will provide a framework for how each stage will look. It will be up to individual dioceses to put the fine details into place with respect to mitigating the risks as well as equipping and assisting our leaders – clergy and lay - in the specifics that will need to be in place before we can open our doors. It will take the summer months for me working with local health authorities to ensure that we have all the protocols in place, including around Holy Eucharist and music so that when we do open our doors our parishioners will enter without fear. With a slow and measured approach to reopening we may find ourselves in a combination of some indoor services but with many meetings and much ministry continuing to take place outside our church buildings. There is a great deal to think about as we reimagine ministry in Algoma and Moosonee. How will we welcome those new parishioners whom we have only ministered to online and engage them in parish life in a church that doesn't look a lot like the one you left earlier this year?

Later in June, I am planning to hold further deanery meetings in Algoma and Moosonee to answer questions you may have and to dialogue with you regarding concerns and preparations for reopening our church buildings. As stated throughout this pandemic, we are in this together and we will move forward together.

Covid-19 has often felt like a journey through the wilderness with no fixed date of re-entry into the new and promised-land. For the Israelites it was a forty year period of wandering and their leader, Moses, never saw that land flowing with milk and honey. During that time of wandering, God's providential care was upon them in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of cloud by night. We see evidence of God's presence with us as we continue this journey day by day and step by step. Keep looking for the flaming

bushes and the moments of grace given to us as we keep walking together, trusting that our lives and God's church are all held in God's loving hands.

"Be not afraid.

I go before you always.

Come follow me, and

I will give you rest." (Robert J. Dufford, S.J.)

Wishing you and yours some time for rest this summer and I look forward to seeing you on the other side.

A handwritten signature in black ink. It begins with a small cross symbol (+) above the letter 'A'. The name 'Anne' is written in a cursive, flowing script.

The Most Rev. Anne Germond  
Archbishop of Algoma and Moosonee