



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

Dear Friends in Christ,

Families pull together in times of crisis. We have seen that, and maybe some of us are experiencing that, firsthand and in new ways right now. And our Diocesan family is no different.

Last night, our Diocesan Council and Trusts Committee met online to discuss some important matters, one of which was how we can support each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, Diocesan Council serves as the “Synod between Synods,” providing invaluable support to our Diocese, especially in these turbulent times. I am deeply grateful to the members of Diocesan Council and Trusts Committee for their wisdom and leadership.

A little over a week ago, our Executive Director, Robert Saffrey, sent a financial survey to parishes, to help us get a clear picture of parish finances during the pandemic. More than 180 surveys were filled out and returned. That feedback has helped us to develop a financial plan that will allow us to share our resources and help our parishes to continue providing essential ministry and be beacons of hope and compassion in their communities.

The survey’s findings were clear: all of our parishes will be affected to some degree by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some are already struggling to pay their monthly allotment to the Diocese, or to cover payroll. This is understandable, given that the doors of our churches are closed, some of our donors are not able to give, or to give as much, and our other revenue streams are diminished.

As a family, and in response to this time of great crisis, I can announce that the Diocese of Toronto is proclaiming a Jubilee – a time of generosity and

forgiveness. For the months of April and May 2020, parishes will not be required to pay their allotment to the Diocese or to pay the costs of clergy remuneration (stipend, housing and associated benefits). It is my hope that this measure will alleviate the financial pressure that many of our parishes are under, freeing them up to carry out their ministry and to prepare for the day when their doors will open again.

I am grateful for the Council approving this measure, because it does not come without a cost. Forgiving parish allotment and clergy remuneration expenses for April and May will cost us all about \$3.6 million. To raise the necessary funds, Council approved our Diocese taking some serious steps. First, we will be seeking to extend our line of credit with the bank. Secondly, we will be seeking loans of \$2 million each from the York Rectors Fund and the Ministry Allocation Fund. We will also be seeking a loan of \$46,000 from the Etobicoke Glebe Fund. These are all funds of the Diocese. As security for these loans, we will be using vacant land that is owned by the Diocese in Ajax and Peterborough. These two parcels of land currently do not have churches on them.

As a further measure, Diocesan Council agreed to delegate some of its authority to our Executive Board and Trusts Committee, so that our Diocese can act nimbly in these changing times.

It is my deepest hope that parishes will use this time of Jubilee to be as creative as possible, and in turn be as generous as possible with each other. In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18), Jesus calls us to “pay it forward”. Let us all remember those in our midst who need our patience and our help to get back on their feet: our staff, our tenants, those who look to us for assistance. All of us are affected by this pandemic, and the Church is called to witness to God’s goodness in times of need. I know that many of you are already doing so and I am profoundly moved by your ideas and efforts. Thank you.

I know that this is a lot of information to impart and you no doubt have many questions and comments – that is good! In addition to sharing this news with you through this letter, I will be speaking to you in a video that will be posted on the Diocese’s website early next week, possibly as soon as Monday. You will receive an email when it is posted. We are also exploring holding Zoom meetings with bishops, clergy, deacons and lay leaders across the Diocese, so that we can all be fully informed of the details.

Our Diocesan Council meeting was not the only important event in our Diocese yesterday. As you know, it was also our Day of Prayer and Fasting, so that we might repent and turn to our loving God. I would like to conclude with

two prayers from yesterday, which were also said by members of Diocesan Council and the Trusts Committee:

We are not people of fear: we are people of courage. We are not people who protect our own safety: we are people who protect our neighbours' safety. We are not people of greed: we are people of generosity. We are your people God, giving and loving, wherever we are, whatever it costs. For as long as it takes wherever you call us. Amen.

Spirit of compassion, fill our hearts and give us peace. Give us strength to care for those around us even as we may be physically separated. Deepen our sense of compassion even in the midst of our anxiety. Keep us mindful of the many other needs in the world – conflicts, refugees, poverty, and many other illnesses besides the coronavirus – and all other concerns we name before you now. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

I look forward to writing – or speaking to you on video – on Monday.

Yours in Christ,

+ Andrew Toronto

The Rt. Rev. Andrew Asbil
Bishop of Toronto