

Longueuil, Tuesday March 24, 2020

To All the Diocesan Faithful,
To All Pastoral Personnel, Pastoral Agents and Priests,
To Diocesan Centre Staff,
To Fabrique Presidents,

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic health crisis, I am proud to note that our diocese has responded creatively to the calls of the extraordinary challenges we face. First of all, I would like to salute the seriousness with which everyone is making efforts to respect the rules of public health, despite the many inconveniences that this entails. Secondly, I am impressed by the resilience and diversity of the initiatives that many have put in place to maintain vital links between members of our communities. I see this as a concrete manifestation of the missionary fibre that lives in every baptized person.

Here we are with the situation changing and challenging us even more. The Quebec Government's request yesterday to close all businesses until April 13th adds an additional restriction to our Diocesan organization. The closure of our offices and rectories as well as of our churches for the past few days compounds the economic pressure already felt by the administrators of our parishes. Many pastoral teams and fabriques are rightly questioning their ability to continue to serve in such circumstances. Hence the need to speak to you once again to share with you the fruits of the reflection I have had with the Leadership Team over the past few hours.

Convictions

Since the beginning of this crisis, I have urged that our pastoral personnel, pastoral agents and priests, remain actively in service. To my mind, it is inconceivable that they are not at the forefront of the fight against the social exclusion that such a pandemic risks creating within our society. The very meaning of the mission we have received from the Lord and the seriousness with which we want to follow the words of the Gospel, i.e., to become close to every person. As we delved into this together during the Pastoral Day of March 2018, we were called, each in our own way, to become more and more artisans of community ties. We were made aware then of the importance of the realities brought about by the expression "counting on", which sums up quite well what the individual can expect from his relationship with others and institutions in terms of protection, and "counting for" which expresses the expectation, just as vital, of recognition¹. In fact, throughout this public health episode, whose duration we cannot predict, **I would like all members of our communities to know that they count for us and they can count on us.**

¹From: PAUGAM, Serge. « Chapitre 15. "Compter sur" [counting on] and "compter pour" [counting for]. Les deux faces complémentaires du lien social », Robert Castel éd., **Changements et pensées du changement. Échanges avec Robert Castel**. La Découverte, 2012, pp. 215-230.

For several years now we have been discussing our dream of acting as a Church in a new way, of renewing the community spirit, of daring to try new approaches. The Spirit is now urgently calling us to make this unfortunate circumstance an opportunity to become fully involved together in missionary conversion. Even as the coming months are critical in showing the importance and relevance of our Christian communities at the heart of our world. We must use all our resources to offer to our society what we know how to do best: to place ourselves at the service of one another.

I therefore reiterate the essential aspect of pastoral service. Having said that, I remain mindful that the conditions in which this service can be performed are more difficult and that public health must never be endangered by our actions. However, in his appeal to the public yesterday, Premier François Legault invited healthy people to offer their services to organizations that provide assistance to the most vulnerable people in society. I endorse this call for solidarity and ask that all of our pastoral personnel who are able to work do the same.

Expectations and Commitments

In keeping with these fundamental convictions, here are my pastoral expectations and financial commitments to support you.

- I expect **each parish community to help and support community organizations** in their neighbourhood or city. To this end, I invite you, if you have not already done so, to make a list of the needs they face and to see how pastoral personnel and their network of contacts can support them.
 - If physical contact is not possible, it is my fervent desire that our parish communities should always demonstrate creative initiative. Whether by telephone, social networks, mail and e-mail or local newspapers, among other means, I urge everyone to stay in touch with all those to whom the expression of pastoral charity and spiritual comfort remains essential in these difficult times, especially the most destitute, the bereaved and the lonely.
 - In this spirit, I challenge more particularly our retired priests to provide listening and support to our seniors by telephone.

- **We will release substantial financial resources for the exercise of the mission.**
 - For the next few months, and in order not to diminish the social ties between the members of our communities, the **Diocese is committed to providing the fabriques donations equivalent to the salaries of their active pastoral personnel.**
 - *You will receive in the next few days the concrete terms of this measure which will be communicated to you by the Diocesan Treasurer's Office and the Diocesan Human Resources Office.*
 - I call on **each fabrique** to make the effort to review its priorities in order to focus on services to the population. Freed from certain financial obligations, I invite them, among other things, to examine all the measures they could take to help their support staff.

- I invite **the pastoral personnel** to be generous by sharing, for example, a percentage of their salary. Those who benefit from supplementary income (pension plan, pensions, etc.) or other sources could also donate part of their salary to the diocese. They will receive a tax receipt for this amount.
- I also appeal to the generosity of **our donors**. Thank you for continuing to support your Christian communities.

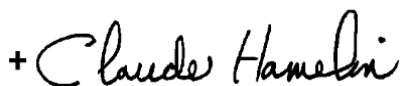
I am proposing these measures knowing full well that they will also weaken our Diocesan financial resources. However, if I am committing the Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil in this direction, it is because I am certain that it is a gesture made in faith and abandonment in the One who gives us strength (cf. Phil 4:16). It is a risky, but necessary action; daring, but in solidarity and rooted in the hope that comes to us from the Lord.

Remain Prophetic

When the crisis is over, what will we say about our Diocesan Church? What will be remembered of our actions? Do we want to be remembered as those who only know how to close churches or lay off mothers and fathers? Or will we have the pride of having opened other horizons by experiencing a pastoral care of closeness, in the image of the Good Samaritan?

I hope that these questions will inspire all of us and motivate our efforts, our sacrifices and our actions.

For my part, I hope that we will look upon this time as being one of a community in solidarity, of a prophetic and daring Church, a sign of the One who conquered death, a People who belong to God and who love the world as God loved it, giving his life out of love.

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Claude Hamelin,

Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil

In Solidarity with the members of the Leadership Team

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