



DIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN
One Bayard Drive
Saint John, NB E2L 3L5
Canada
Tel (506) 653-6802 • Fax (506) 653-6859

Office of the Bishop

May 22, 2020

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Saint John,

Re: Solemnity of Pentecost

As we approach the Solemnity of Pentecost, Sunday, May 31, 2020, it is with great jubilation that we are able to announce and celebrate the reopening of churches throughout the Diocese of Saint John. With the Government of New Brunswick's announcement today, that we are moving into the "yellow phase", churches will be permitted to have public gatherings of a maximum of 50 people, with physical distancing, as of May 29. United with the three other dioceses in New Brunswick, churches will reopen for the public celebration of Mass, after a period of being closed to the faithful. What a wonderful gift we have been given for Pentecost to have our churches reborn after a period of great suffering and sacrifice for many.

In this phase, many recreational facilities will be permitted to open. The churches are also permitted to open, and we will be offering the most important things in the world – the sacraments! The sacraments are the privileged ways in which Jesus continues to be present to his people and to share his life with them. Nothing could be more important than that, especially in these days when so many people are suffering from social isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety, job loss, violence and substance abuse. Pope Francis has said many times that the Church is a field hospital ministering to all, especially the poor and the vulnerable. We have the opportunity to gather together as communities of faith, while providing for essential sacramental life, and to do so in a way that protects the common good.

In the past couple of weeks, Diocesan Protocols have been established and distributed to each parish. These new protocols have been written to reflect both provincial and liturgical requirements for the reopening and functioning of our parishes. Be assured that every precaution is being taken to ensure your safety. Reflecting the provincial government's understanding of the current situation, no situation is without risk. The objective is to minimize risk to our faithful, including our clergy, as much as possible, while abiding by health and safety protocols. Your support in this process is essential for your parish to be able to reopen. As you return for Mass on Pentecost Sunday, please check with your parish for any information that may assist you in participating in the Mass and receiving the sacraments.

The last couple of months have been very challenging for many people throughout the diocese and the world. Although we are currently entering a phase in New Brunswick which allows for more freedom to gather, there are countless people whose lives are still greatly affected by fear and restrictions. In charity, let us continue to pray for those who are affected, and for an end to the ongoing pandemic. Within our own diocese, we fully appreciate that some people because of age, health issues or other vulnerable conditions may not be able to take advantage of our churches reopening and the public celebration of Mass. We respect you for this and

encourage you to be cautious and prudent. You are not forgotten, you are not being abandoned. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in effect for those unable to attend Mass at this time. Parishes who have been doing online outreach are being encouraged to continue for those who cannot attend in person.

As we gather again for Mass in our parishes, our churches will not only look different, they will be different. As the first disciples gathered together on Pentecost, they too experienced an event like no other. The Holy Spirit descended upon them, and the Church was born. This upcoming Pentecost Sunday, we will gather as communities of the faithful around the altar in our churches. We, like the first disciples, may still be afraid, yet we, like they, are longing for our Lord. As we experience the doors of our churches being reopened, we do so with great joy and anticipation. Trusting in the same Holy Spirit, from whose descent the Church was born, may our Diocesan Church be reborn with the same vigour and missionary zeal as the first disciples at Pentecost.

Allow me to express our deepest gratitude to our clergy for their courage and their efforts being made for the reopening of our churches, with the assistance of our wonderful parish staff and lay leaders. Please be assured of my ongoing pastoral solicitude and prayers.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

✠ Most Reverend Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John