

Dear Friends in Christ,

As Director of Pastoral Services for the Diocese I want to provide all parishioners with an update on our situation.

It is now been a month since all of us learned of the charges against Bishop Lahey, leading to this period of uncertainty, confusion and upheaval. We may wonder whether we will ever move through this time with any understanding, clarity or promise; but it is important to acknowledge that with the hurt of these times there are already some early steps toward healing and recovery.

PARISH MEETINGS:

Throughout our diocese parish communities have begun to have conversations around how they felt about this situation. These meetings demonstrate the leadership and courage of the Parish Pastoral Councils with their Pastors and show a deep concern for their people and their faith communities. These conversations are difficult and challenging, yet they produce some important ideas and learnings which must be taken seriously. Pastors and their Parish Pastoral councils are encouraged to continue these initiatives on the parish or deanery level in the ways best suited to the needs of the people.

FAMILY SERVICES:

As a diocese we are seeking ways to begin dealing with people's concerns as a first step towards understanding and healing. Family Services of Eastern Nova Scotia has been engaged to serve in two ways; providing professional staff to facilitate parish meetings and providing individual counseling to those who need more time and assistance to sort out their feelings. This counseling will be a completely confidential service ensuring that no information will be disclosed to the diocese. Family Services of Eastern Nova Scotia has been very cooperative in providing this service, and for this we are grateful.

SESSION FOR CLERGY:

In a few weeks a two-day session led by an outside facilitator is planned for the priests and deacons of the diocese. This will be an opportunity for clergy to gather and reflect upon the impact that these events have had on their personal lives, while they continue to minister to the People of God in our Diocese.

SESSION OF DIOCESAN STAFF:

There will be a session for all those employees who work in the Pastoral and Administrative offices of the Diocese. Primarily these are lay people working on the front lines who have faced the challenges of this past month in a professional and caring manner. They too need time and help to reflect upon these events.

CONCERNS OF THE PEOPLE:

In the past month, the Council of Priests has met to discuss how we might better serve our people from a pastoral and spiritual perspective in these difficult times. The Council heard from the priests who have reflected very honestly what they are hearing and experiencing at the Parish level. These are some of the main points:

- (1) Parishioners are expressing overwhelming support the clergy of the diocese. We want you know of our gratitude for this support for it is a tremendous source of affirmation for all of our priests.
- (2) Parishioners want the Diocese to take this opportunity to consider how to be more inclusive of the laity and bring new life to diocesan and parish structures.
- (3) We are very aware that the recent events have harmed the church's credibility with some parishioners, young people and their families, and as well the broader community.
- (4) Parishioners are saying clearly that the call for more transparency and openness within the structures of the Diocesan Church must be taken seriously.

The Council of Priests recognizes these as expressions of your deep concern for our Diocesan Church, and the need for ongoing, thoughtful dialogue which includes the participation of everyone.

LEGAL SETTLEMENT:

The future of the Legal Settlement Agreement and its financial impact on our whole Diocese is a critical matter. Parishes want to know more about this process, its implications and unfolding. The Diocesan Legal Settlement Committee will in time be providing an update report, which will be posted to our diocesan website (antigonishdiocese.com) and distributed in the churches.

I would ask you to understand that, while these issues are critical to the future sustainability of our church, there will be time to address them. This matter must not overshadow the immediate need to provide proper pastoral care for all concerned. It is essential, especially now, that we all make every effort to be a source of strength for each other in our Diocese.

APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR:

Archbishop Anthony Mancini of Halifax is serving as Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Antigonish. He visited the Diocese twice in October, renewed all the diocesan appointments so that the daily work may continue, and his Pastoral Letter was sent to all parishes. Archbishop Mancini will continue to serve us until we receive a new bishop of our own.

We realize that so much of what we are called to live at this time is in the area of the unknown. Even as we move forward, we cannot predict with any certainty where each step will take us. But we move forward because we are a people called to walk in faith, totally dependent on the loving Presence of our God in the midst of turmoil.

May the God who accompanied our ancestors in their challenges and fears continue to be a Presence in our lives and Church as we meet today's difficulties and struggles.

God Bless,

Fr. Paul J. Abbass
Director of Pastoral Services.