



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

The Anglican Church of Canada

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Dear Friends,

First of all, on behalf of my family, Kathy and myself, I want to thank everyone for their kind and thoughtful words over the past weeks as we said good-bye to my father and welcomed our first grandchild. With all that has happened in such a short period of time, I feel that the landscape of my life has been reshaped in ways that I cannot yet measure. I will cherish the thoughtfulness of so many who reached out.

On August 9 I became a grandfather as my son, Adam, and his wife, Magdalena, in London England welcomed their first child, Josefina Kathleen. Josefina, whose name resonates in two languages – English and her mother's native Czech – has arrived bringing great joy to her parents and their families in Newfoundland and the Czech Republic. We had planned to be in London for her birth, however, the continuing threat of COVID-19 prevented that. Travelling to the UK these days (with a 14-day quarantine required both ways – 28 days total!) requires considerable planning because a full month will be lost in isolation. The blessing I had hoped to give Josefina in person had to be sent to her long-distance: *“Welcome to this world, Baby Josefina. May your journey be long and peaceful and filled with wonder. And may God be with you each and every day.”* A Newfoundland baptism is planned for next year.

But my joy in Josefina's arrival is just a little bit tempered by my sorrow in losing my dear father on August 3, just six days before her birth. In a coincidence that I find incredible, Magda lost her own grandfather, Standa, just five days before Adam lost his. *Truly, In the midst of life we are in death, and in the midst of death we are in life.* In a very profound way, the entire cycle of life has unfolded in my family this month and, as I wrote earlier, I am not yet able to get the measure of all that has happened.

My father died in his 99th year after a life that witnessed most of the 20th Century and a significant chunk of the 21st but nobody could have predicted the nature of his final days. Although he had been declining gradually, until recently he remained active and alert. That began to change suddenly in March when the pandemic was declared. So much that kept him going was no longer available to him like visits from family and friends, drives in the car, meals out, church services, and other social events. Hillcrest Estates, where he lived his final nine years and where he also died provided wonderful care to him but after March his decline was noticeable day by day through his window. Our efforts to make video calls with him were actually distressing for Dad and we were only able to visit him in person when he was declared palliative in his last week of life. I guess I will always wonder what might have been had COVID-19 not come our way because I suspect that my father's death was hastened by the impact of his enforced isolation. He may not have died from COVID-19 but I believe his life was brought short because of it. Dad kept a diary for most of his life but abruptly stopped writing completely on March 30 with a final, stark two-word entry: “Pandemic on.”

Although Kathy and I were with Dad when he died it was so sad that my brothers and my sister were unable to be there due to pandemic restrictions. Dad's final days were lived in the company of one or two persons at a time instead of the circle of family members that he deserved. We are a railway family and we all grew up in railway housing, and in an e-mail to my siblings just twenty minutes before Dad passed, I had this to say: "... *I think [Dad's] train is pulling into the station very soon ... I have had final prayers ... and blessed him for his next journey. His bags are packed now, and he is waiting on the platform for that heavenly conductor to say, 'All Aboard!' If you listen closely here, you can even hear the train whistle in the distance ...*"

August has been a time of ending and beginning, beginning and ending for me. And so, on the theme of journeys ending and journeys beginning, I have decided to start another journey of my own and retire as Bishop of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador *by the end of this year*. With the complexities of changing COVID-19 restrictions and the possibility of a "second wave" I do hope that date gives the diocese time to plan.

I have advised The Most Reverend David Edwards, Archbishop of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, of my intention and I have directed the Chancellor of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, Canon Brad Wicks Q.C., in consultation with the Episcopal Commissary and Diocesan Executive Officer, Archdeacon Sam Rose, and the Diocesan Executive Committee to begin the constitutional process leading toward an **Electoral Synod on Saturday, November 28**.

I am grateful for the journey we have made together over the past seven years and I am grateful for my 33 years in ordained ministry since my ordination to the diaconate on September 6, 1987. The four synods we shared since I became bishop in 2014 – *You are the Body of Christ, The Church has Left the Building, The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future, ...and the Greatest of these is Love...* – have each built upon the one before it as we took stock of all that we have inherited as Anglicans and made decisions toward becoming a more missional community. We have convened important conferences on Mission, Ministry to Children, and our place in the wider social fabric (*Faith in the Public Square*). New partnerships have been formed and space provided in our diocese for Home Again Furniture Bank, the Safe Harbour Outreach Program, and Roots of Empathy among others. We have also done tremendous work with refugees. In all things we discovered new ways of being the church in the world.

I thank the members of our church for the privilege of serving as your bishop since my Consecration on January 17, 2014. Although my departure may be coming earlier than many expected, this is now my seventh year as bishop (and my eleventh at Synod Office if I include my earlier years as Diocesan Executive Officer) and it was my initial intention that this episcopacy not exceed five years. The new missional work we have all been doing recently and the particular work we have done together over the past six months of a pandemic required a little extra time. Our recent guiding document – *Many Members, One Body* – that continues to evolve will help to equip us for the days ahead. The fact that many of our churches are reopening to public worship this fall affirms for me that now is a good time to announce my retirement.

I ask your prayers for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador as it takes counsel for its future and discerns with the Holy Spirit who its next bishop will be.

With my every blessing,
+Geoffrey



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