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Dear Colleague and Partners,

Grace and peace be with you!

In the most recent series of meetings that I have convened with the rostered ministers of our synod, we have discussed potential scenarios by which in-person worship might begin in our churches as provincial restrictions begin to be lifted. Many of us, while mourning the absence of in-person worship, have grave concerns about our congregational capacity to ensure a safe and healthy environment in which to gather should current government restrictions be relaxed anytime within the next few months.

Early last week the Anglican House of Bishops in the Province of Ontario decided that their churches will not re-open for in person worship until September 2020 at the earliest, regardless of where the Government of Ontario is with its reopening plan. This decision was made in consultation with public health experts, with the well-being and safety of parishioners and the communities they serve uppermost in their hearts and minds. I have also clearly heard that our pastors and deacons would welcome a directive of this kind. As such, it is my strong recommendation that our synod's congregations not contemplate initiating in-person worship experiences within our church buildings until the beginning of September at the earliest.

I fully recognize that the four provincial jurisdictions that our synod encompasses will each establish different schedules for the easing of restrictions. In addition, it is possible that regional distinctions might be established within individual provinces. Still, I believe that there is great value in all of us anticipating a more distant horizon for potential reopening than we might be hoping for.

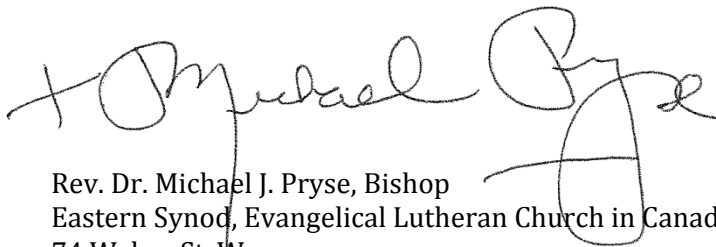
For almost three months now we have been physically distancing from one another for the love of our neighbour. That same motivation needs to be paramount as we plan for the future. I encourage you to use these coming months as an opportunity to plan and put in place comprehensive plans for what in-person worship will look like once we have decided that it is both prudent and safe to physically gather in our church buildings once again. It is my intention to provide our rostered and congregational leaders with resources to help in that process in the coming weeks.

I am also hoping that our rostered leaders will take much needed vacation time over these summer months and be encouraged to do so by their congregational leaders. Our ELCIC Bishops and Assistants to the Bishop are preparing a series of video and text sermons that can be accessed for each Sunday from June 14 through to September 13 to help ease the burden.

I have been profoundly moved and deeply inspired by the faithful witness that our leaders and congregations have provided during these immensely challenging days. You have responded to the pandemic with dexterity, generosity and deep faithfulness. You have made it abundantly clear that although our church buildings are not open for public worship, the church has not closed. In many ways, it has never been more open! The Spirit, whose descent we marked just days ago on the feast of Pentecost, is alive and active and is working among and through us.

May God continue to bless us with abundant gifts of hope, forbearance and patience as we navigate the significant decisions and choices that will need to be made going forward. Peace be with you!

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Pryse". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Michael" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Pryse" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The signature is positioned above the printed name and address.

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