



Two weeks ago, I gathered with some of our priests via internet to talk about our experiences during the Christmas season. For a second year in a row, this high point of the liturgical year was disrupted by an outbreak of the pandemic in our region.

The priests spoke about the generous commitment of their team members as they tried to meet government demands while managing the diverse emotions of parishioners. On the one hand, they faced the frustration and even the anger of those who felt excluded from the community because they were not doubly vaccinated. On the other, they had to reassure the many faithful who feared contracting the disease and who would have preferred even stricter rules. They told me how they themselves felt torn over these community-dividing policies. They deeply desire that people not turn against each other, but rather seek to understand each other and respect each other's decisions.

Of course, the lockdown of all places of worship on New Year's Eve changed the situation. It took a few hours to reach people and offer various alternatives for prayer and celebration. Several pastoral teams used the internet to bring parishioners together to experience interactive Liturgies of the Word; others opted for the transmission various Eucharistic celebrations; some offered communion at the church door for those who so wish.

Several priests shared their concern about the future. What impact will this new closure have on our communities? How long will this last? Will we still have to require vaccine passports when we reopen? Will some who were faithful to the liturgy simply abandon this practice, satisfied with personal prayer in front of a screen? How will we carry forth the Church's mission in the midst of such a chaotic world, with increasingly diminished resources?

These concerns worry us, but no one seems ready to quit. I heard and felt their conviction, their desire to remain faithful to a ministry that is more necessary than ever in this time of crisis. We brought forth some possibilities for renewed ministry and spoke about paths of creativity. We discussed the possibility of continuing the synodal process through small groups on the Internet. Above all, we want our communities to continue to live, celebrate and engage with their neighborhoods. Obviously, our approach needs to be adapted to our reality, but it will continue to be dynamic and generous.

The priests asked me to invite all the faithful of the diocese to lift up their heads, to join hands and to continue to walk together, despite the challenges of the moment. The

strength of our faith is measured by the obstacles that stand before us. As Psalm 108 says, "With God, we shall do valiantly!"

With all the priests of the diocese, I wish each and every one of you a blessed 2022, full of grace, light and joy ... in spite of everything!

+ Paul-André Durocher