



# MARTYRS' SHRINE

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## SHRINE MESSAGE

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RELATION  
DE CE QUI S'EST PASSE

## *A Message From* **the Director of Martyrs' Shrine**

“ Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to labour and not to seek to rest, to give of myself and not ask for a reward, except the reward of knowing that I am doing your will ” - St. Ignatius Loyola

In 1631, Jesuit priest, Fr. Paul Le Jeune, arrived in Nouvelle-France (New France) with the knowledge that he would face extraordinary circumstances. In a new land, amidst a new culture, and with many challenges before him, he was to lead the Jesuits in their efforts to reveal the active presence of Jesus Christ among the First Nations Peoples. Soon after his arrival, he began to write of his experiences and, in 1632, his reflections were published as the *Relation de la Nouvelle France* (Jesuit Relations of New France); read by hundreds of people in France. These Relations would subsequently be published annually and, form together, a series that reveal much of the earliest days in Canadian history.

Amidst the extraordinary circumstances that have arisen with the COVID-19 Pandemic, and its subsequent effect on Martyrs' Shrine, I thought that it would be

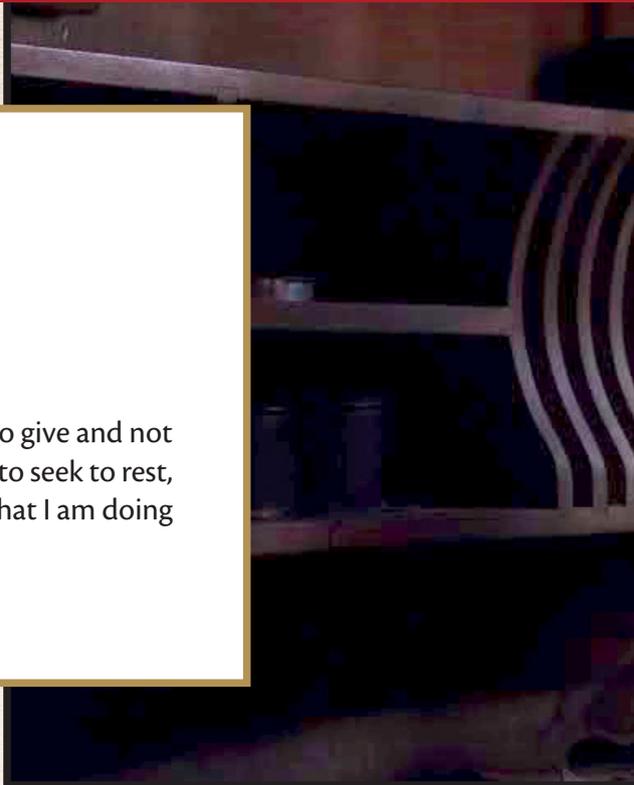
appropriate to write to each of you in a more personal way, and so, like our forefathers, centuries ago, this *Shrine Message*, is written as a single letter. A personal one from me to you. I wish to share with you here our struggles and successes – along with our difficult decisions – as we have had to navigate new territory, and face many unexpected challenges.

### **CHAPTER I: Moving from a Positive Start, to a COVID-19 Reality.**

This past March, the Jesuit Fathers and staff were all in a very good humour. Our apostolic work, performed in the autumn and winter months, was winding down, and we were preparing for another season of service to our pilgrims. A new, full-time, and energetic, Programme Leader had been hired, and pilgrimage groups were already being contacted to help plan their 2020 visits. A new strategy of hiring our seasonal staff early was

a great success and, I think, produced what would have been an excellent group of co-labourers in our mission. The renovation of a building on our property was proceeding without a hitch, and our decision to keep more grounds crew on, for a longer period of time, last autumn, meant that the land around us would soon be ripe for tilling, weeding, and planting!

Then, I, like many around the world, was hit with the very sad news of COVID-19. Soon, details of its pandemic effect consumed much of my mind and my conversations with others. Like you, I was seeing the number of cases rise each day, and terribly saddened by the number of those who lost their lives as a result. Daily, the Prime Minister, would give us up-dates, and then, only some six weeks away from our opening day, the Premiere of Ontario announced necessary emergency measures that effectively closed most public spaces;





► including places of worship.

All of a sudden, the Fathers could no longer offer public ministry. All of my permanent staff had to work from home. I was unable to hire any seasonal staff. Work projects on-site were all but halted. And, all scheduled pilgrimages were postponed until 2021. But, how long would these measures last? At the time, we felt it safe to change our opening date to 4 July, and my staff worked very hard developing a plan to serve, on weekends only, a reduced number of

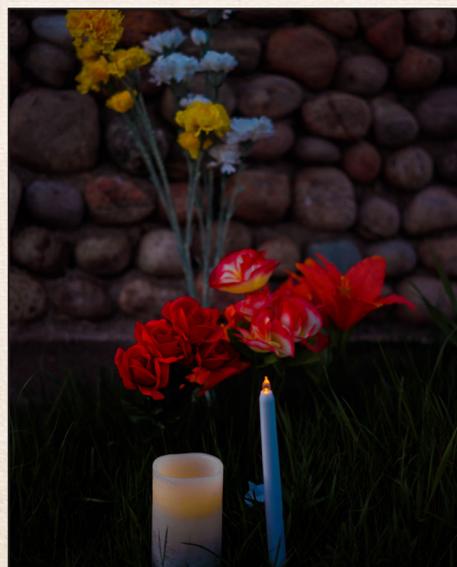
visitors. They themselves willing to work, in diverse roles, to make sure that the Church of St. Joseph, our ticket booth, front office, gift shop, and some washrooms, were open. Seven people, rather than the usual twenty, working to keep us at the service of others.

**CHAPTER II: The Decision to Remain Closed When Other Churches Were Opening.**

Happy when, in June, the announcement for the re-opening of places of worship in Ontario was made, it was for us, as it were, bitter-sweet news. The bishops of Ontario put forward an excellent plan for parish communities, with the aim of keeping everyone safe and healthy, but, for us, it was in many ways, unsuitable to our unique circumstances. Parishes could welcome 30% of their building's



Fr. Stephen LeBlanc, SJ, lights a candle in the votary for a petition received on-line.



Flowers and candles left by pilgrims saddened by the closure of our shrine.



The Church of St. Joseph sits empty, as a result of the closure due to COVID-19.



Fr. Patrick Coldricks, SJ, gives a homily during the filming of one of our on-line Masses.

► capacity to Mass at one time – asking them to leave the parish confines immediately afterwards. For us, this would have meant allowing 75 people on-site, at a time, who would all need to leave before more could come.

Parishioners were asked to register prior to attending Mass, so that if anyone were to become ill with COVID-19 at church, health authorities could trace it. For us, this would have meant pre-booking visits on-line, and refusing anyone who came to the gate without having registered. Washrooms in parishes were also to be closed, and only made available in an emergency. Meaning that, any pilgrim who made the journey here would need to leave our site should they require a washroom.

It was also required that candles, statues, and other tangible parts of churches be roped off, leaving any pilgrim who did visit us, unable to touch the relics of St. Jean de Brébeuf and his companions, or light a candle.

Most importantly, however, these factors meant that, over the course of our season, we could only welcome some 4,000 pilgrims, turning away over 100,000 others who did not register in time. With these facts in mind, the choice was painfully clear, the property of Martyrs' Shrine could not open for its 2020 season.

### **CHAPTER III: The Immediate Effect of Martyrs' Shrine Not Opening This Season.**

The effect of my decision was large and long reaching. It meant that we could not be, as we had been for 94 years before, present to our pilgrims. It also meant that the necessary gate fees and donations that allow us to serve were all but gone. As a result, further action had to be taken. Sadly, we were unable to hire any seasonal staff. Moreover, I had to inform most of our permanent staff that they would be laid-off in the autumn. We had to cancel all but two events for the season. And, I even had to ask the Jesuits of Canada for a substantial

loan just to keep us afloat.

Circumstances as they were, three important questions emerged, and remain, to this day, at the forefront of my mind: 'how can we be as present to our pilgrims as possible whilst remaining closed?', 'how can we maintain our Church, buildings, and grounds, until we welcome everyone back in 2021?', and 'how will I pay our bills this winter, while properly caring for the Jesuits who live here?'

### **CHAPTER IV: Open to Pilgrims in New Ways.**

Though Martyrs' Shrine is closed to pilgrims and visitors, my staff, all the more committed (despite their immanent departure) did not simply want to 'close up shop', but rather, worked hard for us to be open, to all pilgrims, serving them through our website. This began with the idea of offering Sunday Mass, each week, on-line; an idea that has led to a growing audience of faith-filled viewers. Each week, the Jesuit community gathered in the Church of St. Joseph, and a different Father offered the Mass, whilst the others con-celebrated.

With the Church set up for filming, we then invited priests from different pilgrimage groups to offer Masses in their own language, allowing for different cultural groups to still, in a sense, have their pilgrimage on-line. Then, an idea came to offer pilgrims the opportunity to have a candle lit for them, in our votary, by a Jesuit Father. Since its conception, large numbers of pilgrims have offered their petitions; many of which I have

► prayed myself.

We also began offering weekly reflections, and eventually streamed prayer periods with the relics, Stations of the Cross, and a tour of our Church – all experiences that are still available to pilgrims right now. Feeling a certain wave of enthusiasm, we even created a virtual and interactive fundraising event being held this September!

Many people have sought our prayers, and a few struggled with our closure. We have strived to be present to everyone, offering always the intercession of our holy martyrs, proclaiming the merciful love of God.

**CHAPTER V: Caring for Our Sacred Lands.**

Having no pilgrims visiting us, one might think that there is little to be done on the grounds. However, I quickly learned that this was not at all the case. Yes, washrooms are closed, many buildings locked down, and the lands themselves empty. Nevertheless, buildings still need to be cared for, machinery and vehicles

maintained, and the gardens and grass tended to.

Moving towards perennial flowers and plants throughout the property meant that hundreds of them still needed to be protected from weeds and properly watered. Leaves and sticks still fell from the trees and needed to be collected. Our aquifer, and its pump houses, along with our fire suppression system, hot water tanks, and septic system, kept under a close watch. Spaces required constant cleaning to keep the cobwebs away, and the Jesuit residence still needed to function. All of this, usually handled by up to eight people, had only one.

For this to be possible, priorities had to be set, and additional help was required. This has meant that I, and two of the other Fathers here, had to learn quickly about gardening and maintenance. Working alongside our Caretaker, every week since April, we have been out picking up leaves and sticks, or weeding, or watering, or still again tending to garbage, or cleaning; basically, whatever has needed to be done, we were there to help make

it happen. Our next big task being snow removal!

**CHAPTER VI: Begging your Support.**

The question of course still remains, ‘how can we keep it all going until next spring?’ Most of our permanent staff are gone right now. And I, with a handful of dedicated members of the Board of Trustees, am keeping the administration going. But, with over ninety percent of our revenue coming from donations, and much of that during the summer months, I still wonder what will happen after Christmas. Many people, knowing of our plight during this pandemic, have given generously to help us, but to preserve this Sacred place we still need the help of many more.

For this reason, I must here, even during these times difficult for everyone, beg your financial support. If you have given to help us, I thank you sincerely, if you have not, I humbly ask that you please consider it. Any amount, even the smallest, will help much.



LEFT: Fr. Michael Knox, SJ, our Caretaker, Mr. Evan Lamoureux, and Fr. Patrick Coldricks, SJ, repair a post near our West gate. TOP: Fr. Coldricks back-fills the hole of the post. BOTTOM: Mr. Lamoureux uses a chainsaw to cut the post to the correct size.



► **CHAPTER VII: Walking with St. Jean de Brébeuf and His Companions to Jesus our Lord.**

Each of us, this year, have faced particular challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I have shared with you some of mine. Each of us too face other challenges that we wish to bring to God in prayer. Enclosed in this edition of the *Shrine Message* is our usual invitation for you to join us in a Novena with St. Jean de Brébeuf and his companions, bringing to Christ all our needs. Indeed, I know, for one, that it is the prayers of our martyrs and the help of God that will sustain our mission here, just as I have absolute faith in their loving help for you.

I end this rather candid report by reminding you, as always, that you can count on the prayers of all the Fathers here, and with the hope to see you next season at Martyrs' Shrine!

**REOPENING SATURDAY, MAY 1<sup>ST</sup> 2021**

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PROTECT OUR MISSION

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**YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT IS NEEDED.  
PLEASE DONATE TODAY, SO WE CAN BE WITH YOU TOMORROW.**

The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic has not only had a drastic impact on the spiritual work that our Mission continues. It has also had devastating financial impacts. We rely almost entirely on the donations made by the pilgrims who visit our National Shrine.

With the closure of our site, we are now in critical need of your generous financial support to continue our work and protect our Mission.

If you can, please donate today using the enclosed slip, or otherwise on our website at [www.martyrs-shrine.com](http://www.martyrs-shrine.com). Donations over \$25 are eligible for a receipt for income tax purposes, and will allow us to continue to pray for your intentions through the intercession of our Martyrs.



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## MESSAGE FROM MR. BRIAN BEAL, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Dear Pilgrims,

It gives me great pleasure to communicate with you on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Martyrs' Shrine. There is no doubt that 2020 has been an incredibly challenging year thus far, and we hope and pray that everyone who receives this newsletter has been able to stay healthy, safe, and connected with loved ones.

So many things that we have come to take for granted in our lives have been changed this year. We could never have imagined our schools and

churches closing, and a transition where much work had to be completed at home.

Similarly, it was very difficult for the Jesuit Fathers and the Board to decide that, for the safety of our staff, our visitors, and our pilgrims, we would not be able to open this year.

Nonetheless, the work of Martyrs' Shrine continues. We are busy tending to our sacred grounds. We are providing mass weekly for our supporters. We have enhanced our on-line presence, by providing masses for our various pilgrim groups who

traditionally come to our shrine annually, so that they may stay connected with us.

I invite you to join the Jesuit Fathers of Martyrs' Shrine on-line as they pray the Novena to the Canadian Martyrs daily from September 18 to 26.

We are so hopeful that this worldwide pandemic will be brought under control shortly, and that we are able to resume full operations in the spring of 2021.

We encourage you to continue supporting us with your kind donations. We encourage you to please continue to engage with us through our website. We encourage you to continue to pray for us.

Finally, please know that each of you remain in the prayers of our Jesuit Fathers.

Sincerely,  
Mr. Brian Beal,  
Chair of the Board of Trustees

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### VISION

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That all people have joined St. Jean de Brébeuf and his companions in building a culture of love with Jesus Christ.

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### MISSION

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Martyrs' Shrine offers a holy and historic space of education, spiritual conversation, and Sacrament, sharing with people, of every faith and culture, the divine mystery of self-sacrificing love, witnessed in the lives of St. Jean de Brébeuf and his companions, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

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### VALUES

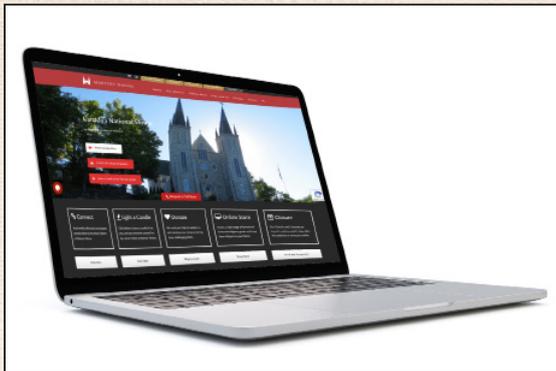
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Loving Service,  
Sacramental Life,  
Stewardship,  
Hospitality, and  
Education

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## HOW WE'RE PRESENT TO YOU ONLINE

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Although the Church and Grounds remain closed to pilgrims, our National Shrine remains open for your prayers and intentions through new ways.

We have worked to transform all of the ways our Mission invites pilgrims to journey with St. Jean de Brébeuf and his companions, to a format that can be accessed through our website.

**Please visit us on-line at [www.martyrs-shrine.com](http://www.martyrs-shrine.com).**

Once there, you can join us for Mass every Sunday as of 8:00 am, from the comfort of your home, to hear the gospel broadcast from the National Shrine to the North American Martyrs. You can also submit prayer petitions, request that a candle be lit at Martyrs' Shrine for your intention by one of the Jesuit Fathers, request an announced or unannounced Mass for your intention, read weekly spiritual reflections to help you in prayer, or view one of the many videos that we will be posting over the months ahead.

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AND FUNDRAISER

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