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Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

At the beginning of May, a month dedicated to our Blessed Mother, Pope Francis initiated a “Marathon of Prayer” for an end to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pope appealed to all people – all Catholics, all people of good will, and all the sanctuaries throughout the world – to place into Mary’s hands the whole human race which has suffered greatly because of the pandemic.

Each day of May, Pope Francis has been entrusting to Mary, the Mother of Mercy, the people who have been affected by the virus. He has asked us to pray for the sick, those who have lost loved ones; those who assist the sick, doctors, nurses, personal support workers, priests and pastoral workers; scientists and world leaders. He has prayed the Rosary with young people and representatives from different groups and blessed special Rosaries for the thirty-one Marian shrines participating in the Marathon of Prayer.

This month as we join together with our Holy Father in prayer, I would like to invite our diocese to remember in a special way our brothers and sisters who are struggling with mental illness. Over the past year, we have come to understand that the suffering caused by the pandemic has a direct relationship with mental health. Our schools, for example, are aware of the extra stress on families and the pressing need to support student mental health and wellness.

The pope has been particularly concerned for people with mental illness and the impact that the lockdowns have had on them. To address this issue, he commissioned a study of mental illness in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study, recently released by the Vatican, confirm that many factors – the experience of confinement, the disruption of social activities and relationships, the anguish in the face of so many unknowns – have amplified the mental fragility of people who are isolated from others.

The Gospels speak of the tenderness and compassion of Jesus. They relate that he reached out to people, especially the sick and those who were suffering, spiritually, mentally and physically. As disciples of Jesus, we are to be living witnesses of his presence among us. By our words and actions, by our kindness and thoughtfulness, we can draw people to know and experience the Father’s love that Jesus reveals. When we encounter someone who is lonely and in distress, we can be present, close to that person, offering a listening heart, tenderness, patience, respect and love. By our prayerful presence, our parish communities can be sanctuaries to support, comfort and encourage people with mental illness and their families.

To unite our entire diocese with our Holy Father and his Marathon of Prayer initiative, I am asking that in every parish or Family of Parishes, there be a Mass celebrated for the intentions of “all who are suffering during the pandemic” on one of the days of the last week of May, from 24 May until 28 May.

May we make our own Pope Francis’ prayer at the beginning of this month:

Most loving Mother, grant that the sense of belonging to one great family, in the awareness of the bond that unites us all, might grow in the world; so that, with a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we might come to the aid of the many people who are poor and the many situations of misery. Encourage firmness of faith, perseverance in service, constancy in prayer.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB
Bishop of London