

# The St. Michael's Youth Conference

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Bede, Presbyter, Doctor, and Historian

Dear Friends of St. Michael's;

It is with deep sadness that I write to inform you that, in light of the regulations surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, as well my heartfelt concern that we not risk the health of our conferees and staff, I have made the difficult decision to cancel this year's St. Michael's Youth Conference.

In some ways, the decision is obvious. The provincial restrictions against large public gatherings until the end of the year would seem an obvious barrier; although it could be argued that St. Michael's does not constitute a 'large' gathering in the understanding of provincial regulations.

But more obviously, regardless of what measurement we use to define the word large, public health statements in New Brunswick have been clear that social and physical distancing will be required for a long time yet and almost certainly until an effective vaccine is available, likely not until next year. So, even if an event the size of St. Michael's were allowed to function by the provincial government, (and the government has recently indicated that overnight camping will be allowed after June 19<sup>th</sup>) it is impossible for me to imagine a St. Michael's Youth Conference operating effectively under the rules of physical distancing. Our shared life at the Conference, whether in the Chapel or the Dining Hall, or in the very physical games that make up our recreational programmes, as well as the fact that we house conferees and counsellors in close proximity in cabins, are all integral parts of our Conference. Even with much thought and prayer over the past several weeks, I have not been able to imagine how we could have a successful conference under those conditions. And the fact that provincial borders are currently closed to non-essential travel make it unlikely that we would have any participants from outside the province. On top of that is the likelihood, in my opinion, that parents and guardians would be reluctant to send their children to the Conference until the risk of catching COVID-19 is completely past.

I do note that the Diocesan Choir School and Camp Brookwood here in the Diocese of Fredericton and the St. Michael's Conference in New England have all cancelled their programming for this year.

Perhaps you have already drawn the same conclusions; so my decision may come as no surprise. If you were expecting the Conference to go forward under some modified structure, I ask for your understanding. ***It is my hope that St. Michael's will be able to return in August 2021 with renewed energy and focus; and it is my hope that later this year we can begin to plan together how to make that happen.***

It is also my hope, if public health conditions allow, that we might be able to explore the possibility of holding a few regional 'mini-St. Mike's' in the upcoming Fall or Winter as a way to encourage each other and staying together. We'll have to see what the public health landscape looks like then; and we'll have to be sure that we can do so prudently and wisely. But it's my thought that smaller local non-residential day events may be possible. Obviously, we'll not know for sure whether that will be the case until later this year.

I share the disappointment that many of you will be feeling. St. Michael's has been a central event in my life each year since 1989. I cannot even begin to think what the month of August will be like without the wonderful, crazy, blessed, and joyful chaos of preparing for, and sharing in, the Conference. But I know that God is good and, if it is his Will, that he will call us together as a Conference in 2021. In the meantime, I hope that I can count on your prayers for the Conference and for all of our hundreds of conferees and staff, past and present, wherever they live and serve around the world. Each year we come together as a Family for one week; and it is as God's Family that we are being called right now to support and encourage each other.

In Christ's Love and Grace and under the protection of the Holy Angels,

Fr. Kevin M. Stockall,  
Director