



## Office of the Bishop

*“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (John 6: 54-56).*

2021-2022 Pastoral Year Letter – “Towards a Renewed Encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist”

A Call to the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Saint John

As we begin a new pastoral year, I am filled with gratitude that so many have responded to the call issued in my pastoral letter last year to engage in three activities for the renewal of our diocese: Eucharistic adoration, evangelization, and outreach. I want to thank you for these efforts, which have indeed born much fruit and will continue to enrich parishes as more people renew their commitment to grow in holiness and mission.

Over the past year, many things have challenged us on a human and spiritual level, and at times have tested our unity as Catholics. Yet in all of this we cling to Jesus as the surest way through every difficulty. “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 27). What a privileged task to share Jesus with a world in such desperate need of the hope he promises. For all its challenges, the pandemic has provided an opportunity for the Church to return to its missionary roots – we must never forget that our most important mission is the care of souls!

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, and the nourishment we need to persevere as his missionary disciples. “From the Eucharist comes strength to live the Christian life in all its fullness, and zeal to share that life with others” (Saint John Paul II, Address to Bishops of the Ecclesial provinces of Bombay, Goa, Hyderabad, Nagpur and Verapoly on their “Ad Limina” visit, December 12, 1995). It is notable that the pastoral year begins with the lifting of the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass (effective September 1, 2021) which became possible when the mandatory order in the Province of New Brunswick ended on July 30. Despite the many obstacles we have endured, Jesus has never abandoned us. Through the Eucharist, Jesus remains faithful to his promise of Mt. 28:20 to be with his Church always, to be with those he loves until the end of the world. I encourage our priests to always celebrate the Mass with faithfulness to the texts of the Church, which draw us more deeply into the mystery

of Christ truly present in the Eucharist. In thanksgiving for the ability to worship with less restrictions, let us renew our commitment to the celebration of Mass with joyful hearts!

Led by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, we are called to raise up disciples who joyfully live out their mission of proclaiming the Good News and making disciples of others. Mindful of this, at the outset of this new pastoral year, I would like to encourage a deepening of our commitment to the three activities that were proposed last year for the renewal of our diocese.

### **1) Eucharistic Adoration**

We need to stay close to Jesus in the Eucharist and return to him often in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The sacraments are privileged moments of encounter with the living God, where we receive the grace we need to persevere in the Christian life. I have been encouraged over the past year by the many parishes who have taken up the call to offer Eucharistic adoration. This time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament and other prayerful encounters with the Lord propel us into the midst of society, responding to real needs as spirit-filled evangelizers firmly rooted in prayer. In such moments we come to truly experience what the Holy Father speaks of when he says, “how good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that ‘we speak of what we have seen and heard’ (1 Jn 1:3)” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 264). I pray that many more parishes and faithful will take advantage of opportunities to adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and be missioned regularly by the Eucharist. More specifically, I ask you to pray for the following intentions:

- **Diocesan Renewal:** I am asking the faithful to pray specifically during times of Eucharistic adoration for the renewal of the diocese. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy is a powerful devotion that could be said prayerfully before the Blessed Sacrament or in personal prayer for this intention. As we entrust our diocese to God’s mercy, let us join St. Faustina in her great proclamation – Jesus, I trust in you!
- **Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life:** In October, I will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood, an occasion which fills me with deep gratitude. I am humbled daily by the beauty of this vocation, and the support of my brother priests who witness to me by their gift of themselves to the Lord and his Church. We need vocations; it is for this reason that I am asking that we double our efforts in praying intentionally for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

### **2) Evangelization and Discipleship**

My sincere desire is for all the faithful to have a deep and personal relationship with Jesus and his Church, and led by the Holy Spirit, to be missioned to the peripheries to make disciples of others. I am always edified to hear of parishes that offer opportunities for people to encounter Jesus through effective tools of evangelization such as Alpha or a CCO Discovery Faith Study. As a community of evangelizers, we need to equip and form people to be intentional missionary

disciples, inviting others to encounter and come to know Jesus and his Church. While continuing our evangelization efforts by offering various tools of evangelization, we must also be attentive to discipleship opportunities, offering participation in small discipleship groups and encouraging growth in the spiritual life, prayer, catechesis, and formation opportunities for people who have fallen in love with Jesus and are hungry for more.

- New Confirmation Formation: In the fall, our diocese will be investing further in our youth through a new and exciting two-year confirmation formation which will help candidates encounter and re-encounter Christ and prepare them for a deeper engagement in the mission of the Church.
- The Catholic Disciple Formation Series: On September 14<sup>th</sup> I will be celebrating the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross – the Feast Day of my Community, the Companions of the Cross, with Mass at 7:00 pm at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The Mass will be followed by an information session on the legacy of our late Founder, Fr. Robert Bedard, CC, as well as the charism, mission, and spirituality of the Community. In response to a growing desire for more intentional community and spiritual growth, we will be offering a weekly series on Fr. Bedard's *The Catholic Disciple* beginning Tuesday, September 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm for eleven weeks following the recitation of the rosary at 7:00 pm (now on Tuesdays beginning that same date). The faithful are invited to join in person at the Cathedral or virtually. More details will be forthcoming.

### **3) Outreach**

When we encounter Jesus and his Church, most profoundly in the Eucharist, and our hearts are on fire for him, we discover a new desire to fulfill our God-given mission from baptism to be the missionary disciples that we are called to become. We are compelled to reach into the community and serve in various areas of need as apostles of mercy. As the Holy Father tells us, "When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 282). It is through such acts of charity that we encounter the Lord.

- Healing and Reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples: We are currently in dialogue with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) as well as our local Indigenous communities to discern possible educational and fundraising initiatives that will help to support healing and reconciliation efforts both nationally and in our diocese. More information on this will be forthcoming as it becomes available.
- Cathedral Restoration and Outreach: In the next few months, we will be re-instituting our major Cathedral restoration project, which is urgently needed for the safety of all who enter. Situated in one of the poorest neighborhoods of our diocese, the Cathedral is an oasis, especially for the marginalized and those on the peripheries, whom we are called to reach out to and serve. In the last few months, a lay-led apostolate entitled "Pizza and Prayer" has grown to serve food and drink to the residents of Waterloo Village and provide an opportunity for fellowship and prayer. This has been a positive outreach, with several

people accepting the offer of prayer ministry and even coming to the Cathedral for Mass. It is my prayer that by attending to the physical needs of this property and the spiritual needs of those who frequent it, it will truly become “a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach,” in the heart of our diocese (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 28).

We are grateful for these and other initiatives that help to grow the mission of the Church. I ask your prayers for all missionary and evangelization efforts that help spread the joy of the Gospel throughout our diocese.

I also take this opportunity to advise you of a synodal process which the Holy Father has requested on the topic, “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission,” which will begin in the Vatican and the local churches in October. Finally, I will be continuing my first round of parish visits throughout the diocese and hope to be finished by Christmas or shortly thereafter.

Let us pray for the transformation of our parishes into vibrant and invitational communities where people are evangelized, disciplined, and missioned to go and make disciples of others (see Matthew 28: 19-20). Pope Francis tells us that, “in every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 12). Returning often to Jesus in the Eucharist and drawing on his grace, with great expectation we give God permission to move in power in our diocese.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization – pray for us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC  
Bishop of Saint John

September 14, 2021  
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross