



Office of the Bishop

“Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth.”
(Isaiah 12: 4-5)

2023-2024 Pastoral Year Letter – “Know! Grow! Go! Towards a Renewed and Revitalized Diocesan Church”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As I reflect on this past Thanksgiving weekend, I am filled with gratitude that the Holy Spirit is clearly present and on the move in our diocese. We are called, from our baptism, to lead others into a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. Led by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, we are called to raise up disciples who are joyfully living out the mission, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and making disciples of others. In a world plagued by hurt and confusion, the need for the experience of the mercy, love, peace, and joy of Jesus is so needed. Jesus relies on his missionary disciples to be messengers and channels of his grace.

Jesus invites us to **know** him personally. He calls us into a dynamic and life-changing relationship with him, where we find the strength to face daily challenges with peace and joy. I have been deeply moved to witness people across our diocese being transformed through the reception of the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Eucharistic Adoration, and other moments of prayer. Jesus never ceases to make himself available to us through the sacraments, bestowing his grace and drawing us into deeper communion with him. When we are tempted to doubt his presence, let us pray “Jesus if you’re real, show me.”

Jesus wants us to **grow** in that personal relationship with him and with one another as his disciples. We see this at work in our diocese through various evangelization initiatives, including Alpha, Symbolon (formed.org), RCIA, and CCO Faith Studies. We are also seeing the flourishing of apostolates, including rosary and prayer groups at the parish level. A recent survey of recently ordained priests in Canada and the U.S. indicated that the most common devotional and prayer practices prior to entering the seminary were Confession, Eucharistic Adoration, and the recitation of the rosary. The Lord moves powerfully when we provide opportunities for people to receive his love for them in the sacraments, devotions, and other faith formation opportunities. If ever we doubt Jesus’ love for us, let us pray “Jesus if you love me, show me.”

I have found great joy in investing more deeply in our priests through regular Days of Reflection as well as the *Called For More* program through the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI). This program supports and builds up priests, assisting with critical ministry transitions and providing a resource to parishes that can help them understand their unique role and opportunities as a faith community. Through a generous grant to CLI, this program is being offered to the diocese at no charge and will support the previous work undertaken by CLI several years ago, with a particular thrust towards revitalizing our parishes and encouraging and strengthening our priests. Please keep our priests in your prayers and be attentive to ways that you can support them, including participating in a refreshed *Disciple Maker Index (DMI)* survey, which was conducted as part of the 2016-17 process and is being repeated to provide more current data. More information on this will be forthcoming in the months ahead.

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. Jim Anderson as Director of Missionary Discipleship Formation for the Diocese of Saint John. Jim will be working to help empower and equip lay leaders for their role as missionary disciples. He will be curating future retreats and other formation offerings to help form people more deeply in their relationship with Jesus in the Church, including the upcoming Catechists Retreat at the Villa Madonna Retreat House in January 2024.

We are also working to strengthen the relationship between diocesan and parish staff by offering a Parish Administrative Staff Workshop at the Villa Madonna in October. Through prayer, support, and fellowship we hope to empower and equip our parish staff for the important work they do serving the faithful on the front lines of our parishes.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, we are called to **go** forth into the world, embracing our baptismal mandate to make disciples of all nations. I have been encouraged to see many outreach initiatives growing and thriving at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, where the need is so great. Diocesan faithful have risen to the task and responded, offering support in prayer, providing meals, and growing in relationship with the poor and the marginalized living in the Cathedral neighborhood. There have also been several missionary outreach events in our parishes and at the diocesan level, including a youth rally in August at the Villa Madonna, which attracted more than 60 youth and leaders from the Saint John and Fredericton regions. A second youth rally is planned for the Miramichi region on October 15. I am also eagerly anticipating the last of three “Know! Grow! Go!” regional missions to be hosted in the Saint John region at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on November 27-29, 2023. If ever we doubt Jesus’ call to us as his missionary disciples, let us pray “Jesus, if you’re calling me, show me.”

As we embark on this new pastoral year, I encourage each one of you to know, grow, and go. Engage more fully in the sacraments, cultivate a rich personal prayer life, participate in evangelization and catechetical programs. Go and share the joy of knowing Jesus with others. Get involved in parish outreach efforts and invite others to encounter Jesus within your parish community.

If we are faithful to Jesus and his call to each of us, we will see continued growth in our diocese as more people fall in love with Jesus; as faithful families become more rooted in Christ and bring others into relationship with him; as priests become more fulfilled and alive in their priestly ministry supported by dedicated leaders with hearts for the mission of the Church; and as more and more young people open their lives to Jesus in the priesthood, religious life and faithful Christian marriage. Be encouraged in the good work you are doing (I am!), and seek opportunities to multiply disciples, leading more people into a transformative encounter with Jesus, who never disappoints or abandons us.

In light of the Synod on Synodality deliberations that have commenced in Rome this past week, I invite us to renew our commitment to build a synodal Church and together to entrust the work of the Synod to the Holy Spirit.

May we look to our Blessed Mother as our model, embracing our mission and proclaiming with confidence, "the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name!" (Luke 1:49) With expectant faith, let us fix our gaze on Jesus, giving God permission to transform, renew and revitalize our diocese!

Faithfully yours in Jesus with Mary,

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

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

October 10, 2023