



Office of the Bishop

“Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)

Dear fellow Pilgrims of Hope!

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus proclaims himself as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy spoken by Isaiah 700 years earlier as he reads aloud, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19). In an ancient tradition of Israel, a “year of the Lord’s favour” was set aside, a Jubilee Year, to commemorate, celebrate and rejoice in the mercy and goodness of God. In the Jewish tradition, the Jubilee was directly connected with the importance of Sabbath rest and blessing. The Church, the new Israel, continues this tradition by celebrating a Jubilee every twenty-five years, a Holy Year during which the people of God are blessed with a special opportunity to experience the healing, mercy, renewal, freedom, life and joy offered us by Christ in and through his Church—and 2025 is a year of Jubilee!

With great anticipation we await the prophetic act of Pope Francis that begins the Jubilee Year, “when once more the Holy Door will be flung open to invite everyone to an intense experience of the love of God that awakens in hearts the sure hope of salvation in Christ.”¹ This throwing open of the holy doors in Rome with expectant faith calls to mind the words of Saint John Paul II, “Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ.”² Brothers and sisters, let us prepare our hearts to encounter Christ anew in this Jubilee Year which begins on December 24, 2024, and continues until January 6, 2026.

As *Pilgrims of Hope*, the theme for the Jubilee 2025, we embark on the path of this year with jubilation as sure signs of hope to our world, rejoicing in our faith, in our Church, and above all in our Lord Jesus, who manifests the merciful heart of the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us live deeply the great jubilee tradition of pilgrimage which invites us into an experience of transformation in Christ, when “one’s very being conforms to the holiness of God.”³ With joy then, let us “set out...with haste” (Luke 1:39) to bring Jesus to others on our pilgrimage to our Father’s house.

Pilgrimage to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’” (Psalm 122:1)

The Cathedral, a symbol of unity and beacon of hope for our diocese will be designated as a special place of pilgrimage during the Jubilee Year. As we celebrate the 170th year of our beloved mother church, I

¹ Pope Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, par. 6.

² Pope John Paul II, Homily for the Inauguration of his Pontificate, October 22, 1978.

³ <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en/giubileo-2025/segni-del-giubileo/il-pellegrinaggio.html>

invite all the faithful to make an inaugural pilgrimage to the Opening Mass for the Jubilee Year at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on Sunday, December 29 (Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph) at 5:00 pm, with a reception to follow. In the coming weeks, parishes will be contacted with special invitations to make a pilgrimage to the Cathedral on designated First Saturdays throughout the year for the celebration of Mass, Adoration, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, veneration of relics, historical tours, and special Jubilee prayers and reflections. Those who are physically unable to participate in person due to age or infirmity will be able to make a pilgrimage of the heart, celebrating with their parish community via private livestream. The faithful are also encouraged to make personal pilgrimages to the Cathedral at any time during the Jubilee Year. As we move forward in hope towards the physical restoration of our beautiful Cathedral church, we pray first and foremost for the Jubilee grace of the spiritual restoration of the living stones of our diocesan church, the hearts and souls of all people in the Diocese of Saint John.

Pilgrimage to Diocesan Shrines and Minor Basilica

“Jesus said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while’.” (Mark 6:31)

In our diocese we are blessed with holy sites that are testaments to the faith of generations past and have always invited pilgrimage. During the Jubilee Year, the faithful are encouraged to make a pilgrimage to our diocesan shrines and our minor basilica, when possible, and particularly for Mass on their annual Feast Days:

- ***Our Lady of Mount Carmel Shrine in Howard*** (Good Shepherd Parish)
Annual Shrine Mass July 13, 2025, 3:00 pm
- ***Saint Francis of Assisi Shrine in Skiff Lake*** (St. John the Baptist Parish)
Annual Shrine Mass August 10, 2025, 11:00 am
- ***St. Michael’s Basilica*** (St. Michael the Archangel Parish, Miramichi)
Mass for the Vigil of the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, September 28, 2025, 5:30 pm

The desire of every pilgrim is to experience God’s presence and mercy and then to be a channel of that mercy to others. Indeed, the life of every Christian is marked by mercy received and mercy given, but in the Jubilee Year, as “a year of the Lord’s favour”, there is an extraordinary grace and outpouring of divine mercy in and through the Church. We encounter the unfathomable mystery of divine mercy in the Sacraments, in the gift of indulgences, and works of mercy. All of these direct us to the primary purpose of the Jubilee – our spiritual renewal in Christ.

Works of Mercy and Penance

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

“The works of mercy...educate us to be attentive to the most basic needs of ‘the least of these my brethren’ (Mt 25:40), in whom Jesus is present.”⁴ Through the corporal works of mercy (which assist with material and bodily necessity) and spiritual works of mercy (which assist with spiritual necessity and ease suffering) we become tangible signs of hope to those who experience hardship and poverty in its many

⁴ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, October 12, 2016

forms, ‘in a sense making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them (cf. Matthew 25, 34-36)’.”⁵ I am inviting parishes to perform these works in an intentional way, responding prayerfully to the unique needs present in their local communities. We will be using our diocesan communications platforms to share photos and stories from around the diocese as signs of hope throughout the year. I encourage you to send photos or stories of hope that are inspired by the works of mercy in your parish to communications@dioceseofsaintjohn.org.

Pilgrimage involves sacrifice: small deaths to self to more deeply experience life in Christ. During the Jubilee Year, I encourage you to rediscover the importance of fasting and penance. In addition to the seasons and days prescribed by the Church, the Holy Father encourages us in a particular way to embrace a spirit of penance on Fridays, abstaining not only from meat but also from “futile distractions (real, but also virtual distractions, for example, the use of the media and/or social networks), from superfluous consumption” and “by donating a proportionate sum of money to the poor; by supporting works of a religious or social nature, especially in support of the defence and protection of life in all its phases [and circumstances in society]...by dedicating a reasonable portion of one’s free time to voluntary activities that are of service to the community or to other similar forms of personal commitment.”⁶

Missions, Retreats, Spiritual Exercises and Faith Formation Activities

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

During this Jubilee Year, we are encouraged to participate in popular missions, retreats, spiritual exercises, or faith formation activities, particularly on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, held in a church or other suitable place, according to the mind of the Holy Father. Some opportunities that will be available in the diocese during the Jubilee Year include:

- Regional missions with Bishop Riesbeck in Saint John (tentative date March 31-April 2, 2025), Fredericton (tentative date June 2-4, 2025), and Miramichi (tentative date September 29-October 1, 2025) on the theme of hope
- In-person retreats at the Villa Madonna Retreat House and online diocesan offerings relating to the Jubilee theme (more information to come *or* check the Villa Madonna website regularly for upcoming retreat opportunities: www.villamadonna.ca)
- CCCB Webinar Series, which can be incorporated into the pastoral year as individuals or in a group setting:
 - *The Four Constitutions of Vatican II*, CCCB Webinar Series, available at <https://www.cccb.ca/evangelization-catechesis-catholic-education/video-resources/the-four-constitutions-of-vatican-ii/>)
 - *A Great Symphony of Prayer: The Our Father as a Programme of Life*, CCCB Webinar Series, available at <https://www.cccb.ca/evangelization-catechesis-catholic-education/video-resources/a-great-symphony-of-prayer-the-our-father-as-a-programme-of-life/>)
- CCCB Jubilee Year Resources, including Catechetical Activities for Children and Youth and Adult Faith Resources, available at <https://www.cccb.ca/evangelization-catechesis-catholic-education/the-ordinary-jubilee-of-the-year-2025/>

⁵ *Decree on the Granting of the Indulgence during the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025 called by his Holiness Pope Francis*, part 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, part 3.

Jubilee Indulgence

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

One of the unique graces of a Jubilee Year is the opportunity to obtain a plenary indulgence, which is “the remission before God of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned.”⁷ The Jubilee Indulgence is a way of discovering the unlimited nature of God’s mercy; as an act of mercy it is intended to be focussed outward on the other, the faithful being invited to be agents of this mercy to those most in need of God’s mercy. For this reason, the Jubilee Indulgence is applied to the souls of the faithful departed. The normal conditions for obtaining a plenary indulgence include the sincere desire to be detached from sin, reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, and prayer for the Holy Father’s intentions, as well as a specific act of piety or worship as designated by the Church. During the Jubilee 2025, with its emphasis on pilgrimage, mercy and hope, a special Jubilee Indulgence may be gained by participating in Pilgrimages, Pious Visits to Sacred Places, and Works of Mercy, including any of the above-mentioned activities in our diocese.⁸ You are invited to consult the CCCB’s [*Catechetical Resources on Plenary Indulgences during the Jubilee Year*](#) for information on the specifications to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence for each of these categories.

Jesus is the long-awaited hope whom we yearn for and seek. In this Jubilee Year may we, as Pilgrims of Hope guided by the Holy Spirit, truly recognize the spark of hope that dwells in the heart of each person we encounter, that desire for and expectation of good things and happiness. May we, Pilgrims of Hope, enkindle and fan into flame that hope with our proclamation in word and deed that Jesus is alive, that he loves us, and is the fulfillment of all our truest desires and dreams!

Please join me in praying our diocesan Jubilee Prayer now, and throughout the year in your homes and before or after the Lord’s Day Masses in your parishes at least once a month:

*Gracious Father,
you are the hope that does not disappoint.*

*May we experience the grace of this Jubilee Year
as an outpouring of divine mercy
for the renewal of hearts in the Diocese of Saint John.*

*May we be nourished in prayer
and through frequent encounters with Jesus Christ in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.*

*Embracing the joy of the Gospel,
may we be cultivators of hope
in a world in desperate need of the saving love of Jesus.*

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 1471

⁸ Those who are unable to participate in the various solemn celebrations, pilgrimages and pious visits for serious reasons including illness may still obtain the plenary indulgence under the same conditions, if they are united in spirit with the faithful taking part in person. The opening Mass for the Jubilee Year on December 29, as well as our parish pilgrimages to the Cathedral on First Saturdays will be livestreamed to provide the opportunity for shut-ins to unite themselves to the prayer of the diocese.

*Anchored in hope, may we be led by the Holy Spirit
to take up our baptismal call, joyfully living out the mission,
proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ,
and making disciples of others.*

*Through our works of mercy, may we be signs of hope
to those who experience hardships of any kind,
to prisoners, the sick, the young, migrants, the elderly, the poor.*

*May Mary, Mother of Hope,
intercede for all her children to be Pilgrims of Hope
during this Year of Jubilee.*

Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Mary, Mother of Hope, pray for us!

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

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

December 1, 2024