



Office of the Bishop

“Rebuild My Church”: A Jubilee Year of Saint Francis

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Matthew 5:9

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

With the fruits of grace from the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025 still fresh among us, we have a new occasion for jubilation and sanctification – a special Year of Saint Francis of Assisi, from January 10, 2026 to January 10, 2027, marking the eighth centenary of Saint Francis of Assisi’s death on 3 October 1226.

Long remembered as an instrument of Christ’s peace, Saint Francis continues to form disciples through his example and intercession. In a world torn by conflict at every level, we need the peace only Christ can offer. This extraordinary jubilee is an opportunity to imitate the Poverello, the Little Poor Man, in his radical surrender to Christ in poverty, humility, fraternity, and joyfully living the Gospel. Pope Leo XIV urges us: “May the example and spiritual legacy of this Saint, strong in faith, steadfast in hope and ardent in active charity towards his neighbour, inspire in everyone the importance of trusting in the Lord, of living a life faithful to the Gospel, and of accepting and illuminating every circumstance and action of life with faith and prayer.” (<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/letters/2026/documents/20260107-lettera-morte-sf.html>)

The Lord’s urgent appeal to Saint Francis deeply touches my heart: “Francis, go and repair my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruin.” These words, spoken to the young man from the crucifix in the chapel of San Damiano, were not merely about stones and mortar but a summons to rebuild the living Church through conversion, poverty of spirit, and fraternal charity. In my own personal prayer, I hear these same words spoken to me often. I invite you, the faithful of this local Church of the Diocese of Saint John, to receive them as well, as an urgent appeal from the heart of Jesus: “Rebuild my Church!”

“Rebuild my Church” means revitalizing our diocesan family through docility to the Holy Spirit, nourishment in the Gospel and the Eucharist, healing and strength in the sacraments and prayer; building up parishes as active hubs of discipleship and missionary activity; and fortifying our families as the domestic church rooted in Christ, where parents disciple children in love of God and neighbour. It encompasses the important task of responsible stewardship and maintenance of our church properties, never losing sight of the ultimate goal of inviting every person into a transformational relationship with Jesus, the Prince of Peace, in the Church. By our radical surrender to Jesus in imitation of Saint Francis, we can expect the fruits of peace and unity in our communities, and a joy that attracts others to seek communion with Christ and the Church.

In this special Jubilee year of Saint Francis, the Holy Father grants a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions—sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion, prayer for the Pope’s intentions, and sincere detachment from sin—to those who prayerfully visit a church or site associated with Saint Francis. The elderly, sick, and homebound may receive it by spiritually uniting themselves to the

celebrations and offering their prayers and sufferings in a spirit of peace. This plenary indulgence can be offered in mercy for the souls in purgatory, the most poor in the Church, who have no means of helping themselves but rely completely on the assistance of others.

In our diocese, pilgrimage sites include Saint Francis of Assisi Church (Lincoln) of Saint John Paul II Parish; the Saint Francis of Assisi Shrine at Skiff Lake (Saint John the Baptist Parish) where I will celebrate the annual Shrine Mass on Sunday, August 9, at 11:00 am; and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, where relics of Saints Francis and Clare may be venerated on First Saturday pilgrimages (beginning at 10:30 am with adoration, confessions and personal devotions, and concluding with Mass at 12:10 pm). On Saturday, October 3, at 4:00 pm, I invite you to join me at Saint Francis Church in Lincoln for the Vigil Mass for the Feast of Saint Francis marking the 800th anniversary of his death.

As we enter the holy season of Lent, Pope Leo XIV invites us to place the mystery of God back at the center of our lives through attentive listening in prayer, abstinence, and the self-discipline of fasting, practices that free our hearts from complacency and direct our desires toward God, inspiring us like Saint Francis to embrace simplicity, conversion, and a renewed openness to the cry of the poor. Inspired by Saint Francis, may we devote ourselves to rebuilding the Church in communion with one another in Christ so that the world may see and believe that Jesus is Lord.

As pilgrims of hope and apostles of peace, let us commit to living daily the words of the well-loved Peace Prayer often attributed to Saint Francis, whose spirit it truly reflects:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.
 O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand,
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive,
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
 Amen.*

Faithfully yours in the peace of Christ,



✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC

Bishop of Saint John

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