



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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December 2, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg,

It is with joy and gratitude that we welcome the Holy Year of Mercy, recently announced by Pope Francis. We have just completed a wonderful anniversary year in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, a year in which we gave thanks for the 100 years of faith present in our community and a year where we re-dedicated ourselves to *Proclaiming Christ Always* in our province, cities, towns and indigenous communities. The Holy Father has now given the Universal Church the gift of a Jubilee Year of Mercy. For us in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, it is a privileged moment to deepen our conversion to Christ and move forward from our Centennial Year.

The Holy Father invites us to open our hearts during this Holy Year so as to experience the closeness of the Father. He invites us to wake-up to the tenderness and mercy of God which is “almost *tangible*” in our lives, and by so doing, our faith will be strengthened. The Holy Year of Mercy is inspired by the Gospel of St. Luke and its many accounts of Jesus’ love for the poor. It would do us well this year to read the Gospel of Luke for ourselves so that we can live in the light of Scripture’s teaching on mercy: “*Be merciful even as the Father is merciful.*” (Luke 6:36).

In the Archdiocese of Winnipeg the Holy Year of Mercy begins on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2015, with Mass at St. Mary’s Cathedral, and concludes on the Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe, November 20, 2016. In celebrating the Immaculate Conception we recall with joy, Mary’s Magnificat when she sings that the Father has *remembered his promise of mercy in every generation*. In celebrating Christ the King we recall that in Jesus we see the living countenance of the Father of Mercy. This is what the face of mercy looks like.

Pope Francis emphasizes three areas for our consideration during the Holy Year of Mercy. Each of these important pastoral areas is explained in more detail in my longer Pastoral Letter found on the Archdiocesan Web Site. It contains many practical suggestions in celebrating this Holy Year and I look forward to each parish, school and community creatively incorporating the theme of mercy in their pastoral planning. The three areas of focus for the Holy Year of Mercy are:

- 1) **The role of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a means of encountering God’s mercy in our lives.**
 - ❖ During the Holy Year of Mercy we are encouraged to begin anew the practice of regular confession as a pathway to a deeper conversion to Christ. The grace of the Sacrament will bring us healing and will encourage us in turn, to be merciful to others.
 - ❖ During the Holy Season of Lent, we as an archdiocese will be called upon to explore new ways to live out the discipline of Lent as a community, both striving to live in the light of God’s mercy and focusing on the needs of others.

2) The Jubilee Indulgence and the Holy Door:

- ❖ Our Centennial Year incorporated a special Jubilee Indulgence. Certain pilgrimage churches were designated throughout the archdiocese as part of a special spiritual program. In the Holy Year of Mercy we have an even greater grace given to us, a Plenary Indulgence that is granted only by the Holy Father. It is the Holy Father's desire that all members of the Church avail themselves of this Plenary Indulgence. The conditions required for the Indulgence and the great variety of possibilities are explained fully in my Pastoral Letter.

- ❖ Holy Doors are sacramental symbols of entering and welcoming the grace of the Holy Year of Mercy. Besides St. Mary's Cathedral, certain other churches will be dedicated throughout the archdiocese as pilgrimage sites with Holy Doors. The shrines located in the three archdioceses in Winnipeg will also be designated pilgrimage sites.

3) The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy:

- ❖ Throughout this year, there will be an emphasis on the Spiritual and Corporal works of mercy. These are practical pastoral initiatives that can be undertaken so as to make the mercy of the Father tangible for others. I look forward to hearing about creative ways we can act upon these works of mercy.

- ❖ We are also encouraged to be agents of mercy to those alienated from the Church, those who are vulnerable and those on the peripheries of society and the Church.

The Holy Year of Mercy is not only an excellent way to continue our proclamation of Christ following our Centennial Year but it is also a wonderful way to mark the 50th Anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council which occurred on December 8, 1965. St. Pope John XXIII sought to move the Church towards the model of a merciful mother rather than a church of severity. It is my hope that the Archdiocese will fully live this year of grace both in a greater experience of God's mercy for each and every one of us and as disciples living merciful lives reaching out to others through meaningful encounters.

May God be with all of you during this Jubilee of Mercy,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

✚Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg