



January 2023

Dear Parishioners, Clergy, Friends and Anyone who's interested,

I used to write a monthly letter to the Archdiocese. At the time I became the bishop of this diocese, there was little other communication coming from the bishop. There was a periodic newsletter that one of the Sisters would distribute -- thanks be to God at least for that. But nothing from the bishop. I decided to change all that, and so for many years, I penned two pages almost every month of the year. We engaged Maureen Fisher and then Allan Forsberg part time to watch over the web page and try to elicit news and events from around the archdiocese, so that we might all know what's happening. It's when we hired Kyle Greenham, with a recognized background in communications, that things started happening in a big way. In time, I saw little need for my monthly letters. Communication was happening in new and improved ways.

Well, now I'm being told to start writing a regular letter again. So I will. I don't want to duplicate what you're getting through other channels. What I intend now is to write four times a year, roughly every three months. This will be news and comments from my point of view. Beginning today. Here goes ...

### **Camp St. Martin.**

Youth ministry around our vast archdiocese has been a challenge. One success story, however, has been Camp St. Martin. When Denis Blanchette returned home from the Legionnaires of Christ in Ireland, we just happened to be looking for a youth minister. Denis had been doing youth ministry with the Legionnaires, and the model of youth ministry that he was used to was summer camp. As Denis began to shape his ministry, its focus was a summer youth camp. He located Camp Artaban, on the shores of Lac Cardinal just north of Grimshaw, and began to develop what has become a popular experience named after the principal patron of our archdiocese, St. Martin of Tours. The program was further developed by our next archdiocesan youth minister, Jocelyne Garant. Several others helped Jocelyne develop what has now become Camp St. Martin. This is a living program, so it grows and develops and changes somewhat each year, but the philosophy is the same: provide young people with a strong experience of faith, fellowship and fun out in the woods near a lake. What could be better?

Plans are moving ahead for Camp St. Martin this summer. The leadership team that we have put together is made up of Father Eucharius, Father Emmanuel, April Fogle and RJ Mallannao. They're the leadership team – there will have to be plenty of others engaged in this endeavour. I leave it to the leadership team to propose the senior and junior counsellors and other workers for camp. Keep your eyes and ears open for other details as these become available.

### **Church Fully Alive!**

Another project that engages me and several others right now is what I call **Church Fully Alive!** We're facing some real challenges right now in our faith community. Due to several factors, our parishes and the archdiocese as a whole is struggling with diminishment. Some of this is due to COVID19 and the lasting effects of the pandemic. But it's more than that. We have fewer parishioners in the pews on Sunday, smaller collection results, fewer people who are fully engaged in the life of the Church. I want us to reflect on and try to address in ways that are proper to our time and place our need for what I call three "currencies": time, talent and treasure. The end game is for more of us to be more fully engaged in the Body of Christ, the Church. He calls us to be intentional disciples.

A first exercise in this process is "synodal sharing sessions" that I and Kevin Walker (my partner in this endeavour) are having, one session per deanery. During this month of January and into the very beginning of February, we're meeting with priests and people by deanery. (Let me just remind you that we have five deaneries in our archdiocese. These are five geographical clusters of parishes around our archdiocese.) We call on every priest to bring with him two lay faithful from the communities that he serves, to take part in a sharing session. We follow the synodal practice that Pope Francis is promoting in the universal Catholic Church, as a means of spiritual discernment. We've already had a few of these deanery sessions; more are planned in the coming weeks.

### **First Annual Archdiocesan Report**

A few months ago, we published and distributed our first annual report on the archdiocese. This was chock full of statistics, photos, stories, financial graphs and reflections by me and others about our diocese. It's meant to be a snapshot of where we're at in our "local Church" (this is how the Vatican describes a diocese). All the material is taken from 2021, which is the latest year for which we have numbers of the faithful, Catholic schools, sacraments received and financial income and expenditures. This first report got rave reviews! Several people told us, "This is wonderful! We've always wondered about these things – you've given us all we wanted to know, under one cover! Thank you so much!"

We intend to do this every year, so this coming fall watch for our next annual report, this time for 2022. Let us rejoice in all that almighty God gives us.

### **Pope Benedict XVI**

The faces of the Bishops of Rome (this is another term for the Pope) have been in our media and our thoughts and prayers a great deal this year. The visit (pilgrimage of penance) of Pope Francis brought him in July to Canada, but more precisely to our Province of Alberta. The visit itself and his words of apology to Indigenous Peoples of Canada were truly historic. Many of us “were there”. Even though other Catholic leaders have expressed apologies over the past decades, there was an urgency to hear this from the Pope ... truly an expression of the honour and respect with which he is esteemed. The theme of his visit, “walking together”, has been taken up by the Canadian Bishops’ Conference as the spirit of future relationship building in Canada.

Our beloved Pope Benedict XVI passed away on New Year’s Eve, December 31<sup>st</sup>. A man of deep faith and confidence in the love of God for every person, Pope Benedict guided the Church through some stormy waters in his term as supreme pontiff (the word “pontiff: means “bridge builder”). He contributed greatly to the discussions and drafting of conciliar documents at Vatican II. As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and later as Pope, he worked tirelessly to present an honest “hermeneutic of continuity” between the honoured traditions of the Church and the mission of the Church to evangelize the current society.

Thank you, Lord, for giving us such noble and courageous leaders!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan