



The **Catholic Bishops**
of **Alberta** and the
Northwest Territories

Les **évêques catholiques**
de **l'Alberta** et des
Territoires du Nord-Ouest

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Our Schools as Islands of Mercy

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Pope Francis has proclaimed a Holy Year, an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to begin on December 8th, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Mercy.

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. By his words, actions and his entire person he reveals the mercy of God.

Pope Francis describes the mercy of God as his loving concern for each of us. "He desires our well-being and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other." (MV 9)

There are a number of ways that our Catholic school communities might mark this jubilee. In our classrooms or general assemblies, we might reflect on the abundance of God's goodness toward us, not only in the blessings of this earth but in showing us – each of us, personally – infinite compassion and forgiveness. This year of jubilee is an opportune occasion to promote the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Church seasons of Advent, Christmas, Holy Week and Easter speak clearly of God's compassion for all of humanity in sending his Son Jesus among us, to share intimately in our life.

To speak of our human expressions of mercy, Catholic Christians have a tradition of expressing mercy, by means of what we call spiritual and temporal works of mercy. These are very practical ways in which we can exercise mercy and compassion to those in our immediate community. During the Jubilee of Mercy, some attention may be paid to understanding and promoting this age-old teaching.

The corporal works of mercy are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbour the harbourless (think refugees), to visit the sick, to ransom the captive (think victims of human trafficking) and to bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to admonish sinners, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive offences willingly, to comfort the afflicted and to pray for the living and the dead.

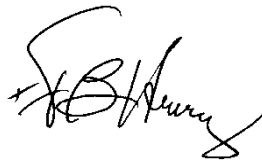
During the first Angelus after his election, on March 17, 2013, Pope Francis stated: "Feeling mercy ... is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient". Less than two years later, he further reflected: "There is so much need of mercy today, and it is important that the lay faithful live it and bring it into different social environments. Go forth! We are living in the age of mercy, this is the age of mercy". Then, in his 2015 Lenten Message, Pope Francis expressed: "How greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the mist of the sea of indifference!"

Let's work together this year to make our schools islands of mercy in which we encounter and share with one another the tender mercy of our Lord."

Catholic Bishops of Alberta and NWT



Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton



Most Reverend Frederick Henry
Bishop of Calgary



Most Reverend Gregory J. Bittman
Auxiliary Bishop of Edmonton



Most Reverend Gerard Pettipas CSsR
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan



Most Reverend David Motiuk
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Edmonton



Most Reverend Mark Hagemoen
Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith



Most Reverend Paul Terrio
Bishop of St. Paul

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