



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

## Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

With great joy and hope I write to you on the eve of this *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, established by our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who will inaugurate it on December 8<sup>th</sup>, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. In communion with the whole Church, our honouring of this year will commence with the blessing and opening of the “Holy Door” at Saint Joseph’s Basilica on the Third Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2015. The Jubilee will close on the Feast of Christ the King, November 20, 2016. The Archdiocese of Edmonton welcomes this season of grace as a wonderful opportunity to renew and celebrate the foundation of our Church’s life and mission.

We experience the beautiful mystery of mercy in the person of Jesus Christ. Saint John Paul II wrote: “Not only does He speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it” (*Dives in Misericordia*, 2). We know of mercy because of our deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the face of the Father’s mercy (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 1).

In Jesus Christ, we discover the depth of the promise, “For his mercy endures forever” (*Ps* 136). Nothing can overcome the mercy we experience in our encounter with the Lord. The parable of the Prodigal Son (*Lk* 15:11-32) is often also aptly referred to as the parable of the Merciful Father. For it is the father, “filled with compassion,” who ran down the road to meet his repentant son, to hold him in his arms, to bring him home, to clothe him, and to feed him. This truth of the Father’s love renews and strengthens the Church’s message of mercy to be proclaimed in our families, communities, Church and throughout the world.

The Lord pours out his mercy upon contrite hearts in many ways. The privileged place of this encounter with God’s merciful love is in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. Transformed by mercy, we are moved to become its agents through what the Tradition of the Church calls the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. In this regard, I make my own the appeal issued by the Holy Father: “Let us rediscover these *corporal works of mercy*: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the *spiritual works of mercy*: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 15)

In a world compromised and wounded by sin, ours is a time where “mercy” is urgently needed. I think of wounded relationships in our families, of depression and anxiety among many of our children, of those suffering from job loss in an uncertain economy, of the homeless on our streets, and of the elderly who feel

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abandoned. Not far from anyone's mind is the current plight of countless refugees seeking a new and secure life, or the victims of terror in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Yes, the need for mercy is real and pressing, yet it is all too often misunderstood. In the name of mercy, practices are promoted and even legalized that, in truth, embody its opposite. This past year the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Canada's existing laws prohibiting euthanasia and physician assisted suicide, whereby the facilitation of the killing of another is presented as an act of "mercy".

In this great and extraordinary Jubilee it is not enough simply to point out and lament what is wrong in our world. We must go further to heal the illnesses of confusion, poverty, hatred and violence with the antidote of mercy. As always, our call at this moment is to echo Mary's great praise of God's fidelity to his promise of mercy for every generation (cf. *Lk* 1: 50), and actively to extend that greatest of gifts to others.

My prayer is that this Jubilee of Mercy be an occasion of deep and joyful conversion for each and every member of this Archdiocese. May the Holy Spirit search our hearts and make known to us our need for God's mercy. Let us not hold back from seeking the Lord's forgiveness and healing through the confession of our sins. Renewed by his love, may mercy so become our lifestyle that our homes, our parishes, our schools, our institutions, and indeed any other place where Christians gather will become true "oases of mercy" (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12-13). Since its beginning, the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese of Edmonton have reached out in mercy to those in need. Indeed, the proclamation of mercy and engaging in works of charity and justice have always animated the Church everywhere. In this Jubilee year let us ask the Lord to show us how we can strengthen and expand our efforts.

Appended to this letter is a list of suggested ways to live this moment of grace. I ask that our pastors, together with their pastoral teams, pastoral councils and other appropriate bodies discern together how some or all of these might be put into practice in their parish in accordance with available resources. I make the same appeal to our Catholic religious communities and institutions.

Through the intercession of Our Blessed Mother, may we be renewed by the mercy which has come to the world in the gift of her Son. May we be strengthened by the Holy Spirit for mission as agents of mercy in our world.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

✠Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton

December 2015