



30 March 2023

Dear Parishioners, Reverend Sisters, Priests and Deacons,

I was tricked by the warmer weather into thinking that spring had arrived. I've lived in northern Alberta long enough, I should have known better. I greet you all nonetheless with thoughts of warmth and sunshine. May these last Lenten days lift our spirits as we look forward to the proximate celebration of our Salvation by Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. I won't say the "A" word in this letter, but you know what I mean.

Father Eucharius Ndzefemiti.

Father Eucharius, the rector of St. John the Baptist Cathedral in McLennan, has recently been received in the archdiocese as a diocesan priest. Father Eucharius came here in 2017 as a member of the Society of Divine Vocations (Vocationists). He has felt the called to become a diocesan priest in the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan, and after prayer and discernment, he has asked to be released from his community and incardinated into our archdiocese. In the Catholic Church, no priest is a "free agent" ... all priests must be a committed member of a diocese or a religious congregation or society. In order for him to pass over to the Archdiocese, he first had to be released from the Vocationists. I warmly welcome Father Eucharius as a permanent member of our diocese. I recognize that his Vocationist community will miss him; I am grateful for the fine formation that he received from them as a seminarian and young priest.

Priests Leaving our Archdiocese.

Over the coming months, five priests will be leaving our archdiocese: Father Antony Raj Iruthayam, HGN, presently the pastor of St. Martin of Tours Parish in Wabasca/Desmarais, and also serving St-Leon le Grand Mission in Calling Lake, has come to the end of his ten-year term with us. A member of the Heralds of the Good News in India, we have not yet learned of his next assignment.

Father Remi Hebert, C.Ss.R., presently pastor at St. Joseph Parish, Grande Prairie, is going to be a director of seminarians at the Redemptorist North

American theology program in San Antonio, Texas. He will not be teaching theology as such, but will be in charge of the Redemptorist seminarians studying there from all over North America.

Father Leo English, C.Ss.R., presently associate pastor at St. Joseph's Parish, Grande Prairie, will be assigned elsewhere in Canada. Because the Redemptorist superior and his council have not yet finalized appointments for the next four years, Father Leo's whereabouts and ministry are not yet known, but I have been told that he will be moving this summer.

Father Christian Ogbonna, SVD, presently pastor of Notre Dame de Lourdes Parish in Girouxville, also serving St. Francis Xavier in Eaglesham and Sts-Martyrs Canadiens in Tangent, is being recalled to his Vocationist community.

Father Bernard Akum, SVD, my Episcopal Vicar for Indigenous Peoples and Pastor of St. Bernard Parish in Grouard, also serving St. Benedict Mission in Atikameg, as well as St. John Bosco in Gift Lake and St. Agnes in Peavine, is also being called back to his Vocationist community. His and Father Christian's assignments will be made known at a later date.

All of these priests will be leaving us between early August and mid-September 2023. This is a great loss to us, all at once. My advisors and I are planning an appropriate celebration with them all, and our expression of gratitude for their many years of service among us. We will miss them all! The Redemptorists will replace their own priests in Grande Prairie; I have no news yet who these might be. Over the past several months, I have been trying to get other priests to come to our diocese. For some reasons not totally known to me, this is proving to be a long and challenging task. I anticipate that among us, we may have to make interim plans for priestly ministry in all of the affected parishes, until we get sure word that the priests I have invited here do in fact arrive. For the time being, I count on your heartfelt prayers and collaboration.

Prayer for Vocations.

Over the past couple of years, our Vocations Committee has been working towards a concerted effort to pray for and promote vocations in our own archdiocese. Given all that I have said above, we have not succeeded in raising up priests from our own families. Our one and only diocesan priest, born and raised here, is Msgr. Charles Lavoie. Father Ed Eherer, C.Ss.R. is from here, but being a Redemptorist, he may be called away at any time. Cards with a Prayer for Vocations, and posters for our churches and schools, are now being distributed around the diocese. I call on all of us to become promoters of religious and priestly vocations in our communities and in our homes. Pray this prayer yourselves; pray it as a family.

Do not be afraid to suggest to your daughters and sons, your grandsons and granddaughters that they pray about and consider their calling from God. God is not going to call them all to become priests and religious sisters,

permanent deacons or religious brothers. But I believe that God is indeed calling some of them. Over the years, I have often asked young people “what they want to be” when they grow up. I now think that’s the wrong question. I shouldn’t ask them what they want to be, but what does God want them to be. God gives them life itself, and God loves them as His own daughter or son. Would God not want them to become the best self possible, happy and bringing joy and faith to others?

Holy Week and Easter

As I write this letter, Holy Week is virtually around the corner. Where did Lent go? While fasting in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights may feel like a long time, this Lent has sped by. This is undoubtedly the most solemn week of the year. From the triumphal arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem celebrated on Palm Sunday, to the solemnity of Easter the following Sunday, this week is filled with ceremony and profound meaning, sorrow and joy. Even in the busy days and celebrations, this week has always felt like a spiritual retreat. I look forward to it every year.

A highlight for every diocese is the celebration of the Chrism Mass. Traditionally held on Holy Thursday morning, it more recently has been allowed on almost any day around Easter. In our diocese, it is celebrated on the Tuesday of Holy Week; this year, on Tuesday April 4th at 7:30 in the evening. All the clergy are called together to celebrate this Mass with their bishop. During the Mass, the priests renew their vows of priestly service and commitment; as well, the bishop blesses the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens, as well as consecrates Chrism Oil. The lay faithful from around the archdiocese come in such numbers that this Mass has the flavor of a whole-family gathering. Fellowship in the cathedral hall sees us off into the crisp air, headed for our homes.

The Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord’s Supper, Good Friday service and Easter Vigil) are structured as three moments in one three-day celebration. For this reason, they should be celebrated as such. Christ’s death and resurrection frees us from eternal death. This is a cause for great joy. I pray that in our homes and parishes, we will feel the strength of the freedom of this event.

Easter is often an occasion that brings families together. I pray that as you gather, with whomever you celebrate, this may be an occasion to rejoice and be glad!



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