



7 January 2024

Dear Faithful and Clergy of the Archdiocese,

I write this letter from my retreat at the Benedictine abbey in Mission BC, near Abbotsford. Each year the bishops of western Canada come here for four days. I was looking forward to attending this retreat, because I had to miss a number of events because of my treatments for prostate cancer earlier in the fall. I am not yet over all the challenges of my treatments and their effects, but I am well enough to get away for these days, which bring me joy. Our retreat director is Cardinal Thomas Collins; many of you may remember him as the former archbishop both of Edmonton and of Toronto.

Call to Holiness

As you might imagine, a retreat for bishops (or any Christian retreat, for that matter) calls out for us to grow in holiness ... this is the case with this retreat. I am reminded of the motto that I took for myself when I became a bishop, 17 years ago: *what God wants is for you all to be holy*. I chose that motto with not only myself in mind, but all of the archdiocese that I was called to serve and lead. This motto still holds true. I pray and labour for the holiness of us all. Either we are becoming saints, each in our own life situation, or we are wasting our time! I encourage all of you to ponder this lofty vocation to which Jesus calls us all: to be his faithful disciples, and grow in holiness.

Over the coming months ...

As we step forward from the Christmas season, that special time of year when we celebrate the coming to earth of our Saviour, I pray that we get back into the spirit of some important initiatives in our archdiocese. Let me mention a few of them:

- **Youth ministry in our parishes.** You will recall that we sought out and encouraged those in our parishes who could initiate programming for youth ministry. I have heard from a couple of parishes the success that they have had in this. I hope to see evidence of this in other parishes as well. Our young people have a spiritual hunger that often they cannot describe, other than to say that they yearn for a community of persons (peers) and for meaning in their lives (built on faith and truth). I want to remind all of our parish communities of this need among your youth.

- **Clergy Study Days.** The Office of Evangelization and Catechesis (the OEC) guided our clergy through an in-depth reflection last year on **Divine Renovation** –

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transforming our parishes from maintenance to mission. This mission of the Church was begun by Jesus Christ – to bring the Good News to everyone. This is still true today. The OEC is continuing this year with a similar focus for our parishes. Let us all show our support for these initiatives.

- **Church Fully Alive!** was a reflection and discussion that Kevin Walker and I had in the five deaneries last year. There we asked: How can we offer our time, talent and treasure for the life of our church – from each parish or mission, small or large, to the archdiocese as a whole? Realizing that many of our communities were struggling with a lack of financial resources for everyday operations, we developed a short video that was shown and made available recently across the archdiocese. I have received many favorable comments about this video. Parishioners appreciated that it was sensitively done (not always easy when asking for financial support), that it included many voices from across the archdiocese, and that the suggested actions were clear, simple and reasonable. If any of you reading this letter have not seen the video, it can be found at <https://www.archgm.ca/churchfullyalive> It is about five minutes long.

Clergy Replacements

Some of our parishes and missions are recently experiencing the loss of their priest, or have fluctuating priestly service. Our archdiocese is in the midst of several changes in our priest personnel. I know this can be upsetting for parishioners and their whole community. If you are among these, please know that I and the chancery staff are working diligently to get new priests in our archdiocese to replace those who are being sent elsewhere by their bishop or superior. The circumstances are not all under our control.

Indigenous Reconciliation Fund

We continue to develop our process for allocating the funds that we have accumulated so far for projects that are eligible for financial support from the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund. The new year will see Marge Mueller and I, the co-chairs of our Projects Approval Committee (PAC), meeting with the Indigenous inter-agencies in this archdiocese, to make this fund better known, and advertise the process for applications. We will share this good news as it develops over the coming months.

Ask the Archbishop

Many of you have seen the videos we have produced in the series, Ask the Archbishop. These are available on-line at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzoV4beHz6GKfy1NYymw5CUrNRHJKEs1M>. Is there a question that you would like to ask? Simply e-mail it to our Communications Officer [here](#).

Thank you for your prayers!

Many, many of you have shown such kindness in your questions and concern about my health. I am deeply touched by your kindness! Please know that I am

confident in the care that I am receiving from my doctors and the whole medical system we enjoy here in Alberta and Canada. I will be seeing my oncologist for a follow-up appointment in early February. I may have an update to share with you all then.

In this new year 2024, I send all of you my greetings and best wishes for a calm and joyful year ahead. Let us all keep one another in our prayers and kind thoughts.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

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