



Diocese of Calgary

# Spiritual RENEWAL



DUC IN ALTUM | PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP

BISHOP MCGRATTAN'S  
LETTER TO THE PRIESTS



My Dear Brother Priests,

May the peace of Christ be with you.

1. We have just begun the season of Lent, a time of grace and conversion. You have also received my pastoral letter to the Faithful of the Diocese announcing a period of spiritual renewal that will then lead into pastoral planning for the future of the Diocese.

2. Pope Francis has often stated the following: the renewal within the Church must always begin with a renewal of the priesthood. It is my hope that in issuing this *Letter to the Priests* it not only supports this principle but more importantly it recognizes the critical role of leadership that you, the priests, will have in the pastoral renewal of the Diocese. It is therefore essential that we embrace this renewal and become a more authentic witness of our own vocation by deepening our priestly life and ministry.

3. Pope John Paul II, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, states, “it is fatal to forget that ‘without Christ we can do nothing.’” (cf. Jn 15:5) It is prayer which roots us in this truth. It constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. When this principle is not respected, is it any wonder that pastoral plans come to nothing and leave us with a disheartening sense of frustration? We then share the

experience of the disciples in the Gospel story of the miraculous catch of fish: ‘We have toiled all night and caught nothing.’ (Lk 5:5) This is the moment of faith, of prayer, of conversation with God, in order to open our hearts to the tide of grace and allow the word of Christ to pass through us in all its power: *Duc in altum!*” (NMI no. 38)

4. In *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis – The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, “the term ‘ongoing formation’ is a reminder that the one experience of discipleship of those called to the priesthood is never interrupted. The priest not only ‘learns to know Christ’ but, under the action of the Holy Spirit, he finds himself with a process of gradual and continuous configuration to Him in his being and his acting, which constantly challenges the person in inner growth. One must constantly feed the ‘fire’ that gives light and warmth to the exercise of the ministry, remembering that, ‘the heart and form of the priest’s ongoing formation is pastoral charity.’” (RFIS no. 80)

5. On the Second Sunday of Lent, the Gospel of the Transfiguration of our Lord is proclaimed. Peter, James and John were privileged not only to walk with him but to witness this vision of his divinity in which he was preparing his disciples for his suffering, death and resurrection. It was intended to strengthen their faith in order to face the scandal of the Cross. In a similar



way this period of renewal, of ongoing formation, in our priestly life and ministry can also serve as a moment of transfiguration that strengthens each of us to appreciate the sacramental origins of our priestly witness and service especially in the midst of current scandals.

6. The Ratio states that, “ongoing formation is intended to ensure fidelity to the priestly ministry in a continuing journey of conversion, in order to rekindle the gift received at ordination.” (RFIS no. 81) The renewal of our priestly life and ministry must also be transfigured by the Risen Lord if we are to be spiritually strengthened to begin the renewal of the Diocese but also to humbly accept with courage and faith the impending scandal of clerical sexual abuse.

7. When we consider our own spiritual renewal as ordained ministers, it would be

beneficial for us to ground this in the context of our identity as ministers of the Word and Sacrament and shepherds of a community which is the Church, the Body of Christ. It is in this spirit, in being called to be icons of the Good Shepherd, that I offer to you the following reflections on the Parish, the Sacraments and Prayer, the Word and Homily, and the Pastor’s Heart and Priestly Spirituality.

## THE PARISH

8. In my parish pastoral visits it is very evident that the experience of the Church for the lay faithful is mainly grounded in the experience of a parish, and secondarily in the relationship that exists through the schools and the institutions the parish serves. Parishes are never to be isolated or closed in on themselves. They form part of the whole of the local church. The parish is first of all our home, and it is where we meet the people.

9. As I have cited in the Pastoral Letter to the Faithful, Pope Francis states in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be the ‘Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters’... We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer the people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.” (EG no. 28)

10. We are well aware that parishioners who are mobile have the practice of belonging to a parish of their own choice. We do not frown on this practice as long as they make the conscious decision to belong and maintain a sense of stability by officially registering themselves in a parish. We rejoice that they have found a spiritual home, and we invite them to the fullness of the rhythm and life of the Church found in the parish.

11. Some parishes struggle with the reality of a lack of living communion and participation. The decline in the practice of the faith is strongly influenced by external and internal realities. There is often a long litany of woes and lament, in both the rural and urban parishes, posing different challenges.

12. It is important, therefore, that our parishes have the flavour of being “near the people”, the flavour of being a welcoming home and at the same time one that is “mission-oriented.” Our parishes need to be accessible, and we are to make an effort ourselves to be available. Our task as pastors is to welcome them home to a life of community and invite them to the Christian way of life where they can encounter the love of Christ.

13. Pope John Paul II states that the urgent pastoral task before us is that of stressing “the universal call to holiness.” He recalls,



“the Council Fathers laid such stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic aspect of their teaching on the Church... It is a duty which concerns not only certain Christians: All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the Christian life and the perfection of charity. The time has come to re-propose

wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths of holiness are personal and call for a genuine 'training in holiness,' adapted to people's needs.” (NMI no. 30, 31)

14. Our parishes must serve the faithful in such a way that they not only encounter the call to holiness in their lives but are in fact trained in holiness. In moving forward, all pastoral planning in our parishes and the Diocese must be placed under the

Christian spiritual journey of life which is to be marked by holiness.

## THE SACRAMENTS AND PRAYER

15. Prayer, both personal and communal, develops a pathway of conversation with Christ which makes us intimate friends. This spiritual friendship is the soul of the Christian life and is necessary for the pastoral activity which is undertaken through the parishes and the Diocese.

16. Learning the Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully in the liturgy allows the faithful to know the source and summit of the Christian life. As Pope John Paul II states, “ Our Christian communities must become genuine ‘schools’ of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion until the heart truly ‘falls in love.’” (NMI no. 33)

17. Through the Sacraments, we receive the graces necessary for the Christian way of life. It is through the Sacraments that we are fed, strengthened, sustained, and united with the Lord in love. Thus, parish ministry revolves around growing in the celebration of prayer and the Sacraments. Particular attention is to be given “to the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter... It is a privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through the sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord’s Day also becomes the Day of the Church.” (NMI no. 35, 36)

18. Despite the current trends within our culture in which we continue to face the crisis of a loss of “the sense of sin”, Pope Francis in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, invited the Church to rediscover the love and compassion of God the Father in the face of Christ. It is this face of Christ which the faithful encounter when we invite them to return to the Sacrament of Penance. “It is probably necessary that pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it.” (NMI no. 37)

19. As pastors we are entrusted with the pastoral care of souls within the given territory of a parish through teaching and formational activities, the celebration of the Sacraments and making readily available the celebration of the Sacraments of Eucharist and Penance, and pastoral activities that promote an active spiritual life. (Can. 528) Through these celebrations and pastoral activities, hearts are formed for Christ.

## THE WORD AND HOMILY

20. Since the Second Vatican Council, the pre-eminent place of the Word of God in the life of the Church has resulted in the homily being the primary activity of our teaching in the context of the celebration of the Sacraments. “To nourish ourselves with the Word in order to be ‘servants of the Word’ in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium ... we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul who cried out: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.’ (1 Corinthians 9:16)” (NMI no. 40)

21. It is necessary that our listening to the Word of God be a life-giving encounter for us and that through the explanation of scripture, we relate it to people’s experience of life. Through our homilies, we open them up to the reality of God’s presence in their daily lives. As such, it is important that much time and effort is placed on the preparation of our homilies.

22. We received the authority and power to preach at our diaconal ordination and so it

is good to recall the following words by the ordaining bishop, “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” We recall that with the responsibility to preach to the faithful, we must preach to ourselves first. Our daily homily preparation should shape our minds and hearts.

23. The aim of preaching is for the Word of God to be heard and understood. Aside from the spiritual and intellectual preparation, we ought to consider the manner of our delivery and presentation in addition to the practical considerations of a good sound system and the effective use of technology. If we invest in the improvement of our preaching and our homilies, we can inspire souls to be drawn closer to God through the Word.

## THE PASTOR’S HEART AND PRIESTLY SPIRITUALITY

24. Pastors, after the Lord’s own heart, must work towards having a better understanding of the faithful who belong to his parish. He must endeavour to provide ordinary means to reach out to the people he serves and to make himself available so that whenever needs arise, the faithful may receive pastoral care either directly provided by him or by organizations that are able to provide the required assistance. (Can. 529)

25. In order for priests to genuinely provide for the spiritual nourishment of the people they are called to serve, it is imperative that priests cultivate a healthy spiritual life. Otherwise, priests may find themselves busy serving the people either effectively or ineffectively at the peril of their physical and mental health and spiritual life. Pope

Benedict XVI, in his Letter proclaiming the Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the “Dies Natalis” of the Curé of Ars, states, “Saint John Mary Vianney taught his parishioners primarily by the witness of his life. It was from his example that they learned to pray, halting frequently before the tabernacle for a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. ‘One need not say much to pray well’ – the Curé explained to them – ‘We know that Jesus is there in the tabernacle: let us open our hearts to him, let us rejoice in his sacred presence. That is the best prayer.’” The Lord guides us by being faithfully present to us in our experience of life, we also need to be faithful in being present to him so that our minds and our hearts take on the likeness of his mind and heart.

26. In the second reading of the Office of Readings on the feast of Saint Charles Borromeo, the Saint implores parish priests, “Do not neglect the parish of your own soul, do not give yourself to others so completely that you have nothing left for yourself. You have to be mindful of your people without becoming forgetful of yourself.”

27. We have to be careful, especially in this day and age, that we do not interpret the words of this great saint as to pertain only to the physical level or to an excessive level of self-care. In fact, in this same sermon that he gave, to care for the parish of our own soul is to embrace the practice of meditation, “We must meditate before, during and after everything we do. The prophet says: ‘I will pray, and then I will understand.’ When you administer the sacraments, meditate on what you are doing. When you celebrate Mass, reflect on the sacrifice you are offering. When you pray the Office, think about the words you

are saying and the Lord to whom you are speaking. When you take care of your people, meditate on how the Lord's blood that has washed them clean. In this way, all that you do becomes a work of love."

28. The priest needs to have a life of prayer. Without it, we become mere activists without a true spiritual vision or compass to guide us in our life and ministry. We become shortsighted, narrow-minded, less compassionate, and irritable.

29. We must take great care to never neglect the basics of the priestly spirituality. We must return to a more disciplined and intentional time of prayer daily with God. We should plan to celebrate Mass daily. We must be faithful to our promise of praying the breviary. We should work towards a regular schedule of confession and even rediscover spiritual direction for ourselves as brothers walking the Road to Emmaus. We should invest time in spiritual reading. We should turn to the power of simple prayers such as the rosary. An hour spent before the Blessed Sacrament would also be an hour well spent. In fact, St. Francis de Sales is known to have said, "Every one of us needs half an hour of prayer a day, except when we are busy – then we need an hour."

30. The celebration of the Sacraments in the parish especially the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Penance must never be seen as burdensome, as if merely added to our real work. Through the attentive celebration of these Sacraments, priests also receive special graces prompting their own growth in the spiritual life. As we experience our own unworthiness in celebrating the sacred mysteries, we are inspired to bring others closer to Christ since we ourselves have not earned our

own worthiness. As we impart the gift of his forgiveness to others, we also grow in our dependence on his mercy and compassion. Pope Francis, in his letter to priests on the 160th anniversary of the death of the CURÉ of Ars, St. Jean Marie Vianney, writes, "Thank you for celebrating the Eucharist each day and for being merciful shepherds in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, neither rigorous nor lax, but deeply concerned for your people and accompanying them on their journey of conversion to the new life that the Lord bestows on us all. We know that on the ladder of mercy we can descend to the depths of our human condition – including weakness and sin – and at the same time experience the heights of divine perfection: 'Be merciful as the Father is merciful.' In this way, we are 'capable of warming people's hearts, walking at their side in the dark, talking with them and even entering into their night and their darkness, without losing our way.'"

31. If we wish to "put out into the deep" and effect an authentic spiritual renewal in the parishes of the Diocese of Calgary, this renewal has to begin in our own spiritual lives as ordained ministers. Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of recalling that we have been called by Christ to this vocation without merit, which leads us to a space of gratitude. "Gratitude is always a powerful weapon. Only if we are able to contemplate and feel genuine gratitude for all those ways we have experienced God's love, generosity, solidarity and trust, as well as his forgiveness, patience, forbearance and compassion, will we allow the Spirit to grant us the freshness that can renew (and not simply patch up) our life and mission. Like Peter on the morning of the miraculous draught of fishes, may we let the recognition of all the blessings we have

received awaken in us the amazement and gratitude that can enable us to say: ‘Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.’ (Lk 5:8) Only then to hear the Lord repeat his summons: ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men.’ (Lk 5:10) ‘For his mercy endures forever.’” (Letter to Priests, 160th Anniversary of the death of the Curé of Ars)

32. With the Lord working with us, we can raise the level of parish life if we ourselves are convinced that the parish is the hub of spiritual growth, and we ourselves are growing in it. We can elevate the people’s experience of the Sacraments and our homilies can move hearts or inspire a faith-filled outlook in life if we first preach to ourselves. We can have a pastor’s heart when we serve generously and our needs do not get in the way of serving the people. We can encourage and support the faithful to grow spiritually if we ourselves draw close to the Lord’s heart like Saint John the Beloved who reclined on the bosom of the Lord.

### THE PATH TO RENEWAL

33. “What awaits us therefore is an exciting work of pastoral revitalization – a work involving all of us.” (NMI no. 29) As further sources of practical guidance and encouragement, I have identified some

basic areas within our priestly ministry where we can have a renewed experience of the Lord working with us. These are found at the presbyteral, deanery and diocesan levels. They can be implemented throughout the year as practical steps in facilitating our renewal and that of our parishes. The list is not exhaustive, and it will evolve with the input from you, the priests.

34. Finally, in writing this letter I want to affirm and encourage us in our priestly ministry. I also acknowledge with gratitude your dedication to your vocation and invite you to cast your nets into the deep in a bold response to the Lord’s invitation to follow Him. May these upcoming years of renewal be for us a time of grace in which we experience the unfathomable love of God the Father, and rediscover the joy in our ministry in helping those we serve to draw closer to Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Mary Mother of God, pray for us, your priests. Saint Joseph, help us to grow in intimacy with Christ.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



+Most Reverend William T. McGrattan  
Bishop of Calgary





# Special Initiatives for the Spiritual Renewal of Priests

## PRESBYTERAL LEVEL

### 1. Ongoing Priestly Formation Programs

- Fall Study Days – 2020 Workshop: Priestly Heart; 2021 Workshop: Celebration and the Liturgy; 2022 Workshop: Preaching and Word of God
- 2020 Annual Priest Retreat by Priests of the Madonna House, Combermere, Ontario
- Special Seminars
  - Seminar on Moral Issues
  - Seminar on Sacraments & Canon Law (TBD)
  - Series of Talks by Professors of St. Joseph Seminary (TBD)

### 2. Jesu Caritas Fraternity Gatherings (Mount St. Francis)

- Monthly Fraternity Meeting with the Bishop and Priests
- Regular Confessors & Spiritual Directors

### 3. Day-Event at St. Joseph Seminary (TBD)

A collaboration with St. Joseph Seminary and with the Archdiocese of Edmonton and the Diocese of St. Paul.

### 4. Ongoing Enculturation Program for Priests (Chancery)

### 5. Spiritual and Pastoral Resources for Priestly Renewal

- National Federation of Presbyteral Councils (Canada)
  - A Practical Guide to Priestly Wellness
  - The Priest as Servant Leader – Developing Values of Priestly Ministry
  - Enhancing your Ministry – A Resource Kit for Priests
- *Novo Millennio Ineunte* – 2001
- *Evangelii Gaudium* – 2013
- Other resources

### 6. Gatherings for Celebrating Priestly Fraternity

- Jubilarian Mass & Dinner

- Mountain Do
- Knights of Columbus Padre Night
- Anniversary Mass and Parish Celebrations

## DEANERY LEVEL

### 1. Coordination of the Weekday and Sunday Mass Schedule (Urban)

- In order to encourage the faithful to go to daily Mass, the deaneries should coordinate their Mass schedules so that there can be an early morning Mass before work, 9:00 am Mass, noon Mass and a Mass after office hours in each deanery. This may mainly apply to parishes in cities and takes into account location of parishes.
- Parishes in every deanery should coordinate their Sunday Mass times so that there may be 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm Masses on Saturdays, and early morning, mid-morning, noon, 4:00 pm, 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm Masses on Sundays. This may mainly apply to parishes in cities.

### 2. Increased availability for the Sacrament of Penance on Weekdays

- Offer Confessions at least half an hour before every weekday Mass.

### 3. Increased availability for Eucharistic Adoration & Devotion

- Consider providing more opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration following week-day masses
- Consider having extended hours of adoration on First Friday or Saturday of each Month

### 4. Group Study and Discussion

- Read and reflect on the following documents and discuss possible deanery-wide initiatives
  - Novo Millennio Ineunte, 2001
  - The Missionary Dynamic of the Parish Today, CCCB, 2014
  - Use Spiritual and Pastoral Resources for Priestly Renewal at meetings for reflection and discussion

## DIOCESAN LEVEL

1. Diocesan Days of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests
2. World Day of Prayer for Vocations – Fourth Sunday of Easter
3. World Day of Prayer for Priests – Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

4. **Personal Consecration to Saint Joseph in preparation for the Dedication of the Diocesan Shrine**
  - 33-day preparation from March 30 to May 1, 2020
  
5. **Dedication of the Altar of The Shrine Church of Our Lady of the Rockies**
  - 7:00 pm, Friday, May 1, 2020, Town of Canmore
  
6. **Visit of the Relic of Saint Jean-Marie Vianney in Canada**
  - Timeframe: May 1 to June 15, 2020.