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Dear Father and Deacon,

With the approach of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy designated by Pope Francis for December 8, 2015-November 20, 2016, I would like to focus on several points so that the celebration of the Holy Year will be for all in the Diocese a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God. As I reflect on my experience of the mercy of God in my life, I realized that the mercy of God has been a sustaining experience for me as a priest. Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation has given me a renewed experience of being forgiven, with the accompanying joy and freedom. Our life of discipleship calls us to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, an encounter that invites us to know the mercy of God, an experience of being known and loved by the all-merciful God.

Parishes have been asking about projects for the Year of Mercy and what can be done for parishioners. I would like to propose the following suggestions, with the understanding that each parish would discuss this list and focus on a few activities. In the end, this extensive list of suggestions is presented so that we can experience the mercy of God in a deeper way:

1. Reflection on the document from Pope Francis that described Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, April 11, 2015: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html
2. The Holy Year will begin on December 8, 2015, with the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica. On December 13, 2015, the Third Sunday of Advent, Pope Francis will open the **Holy Door** of the Cathedral of Rome, St. John Lateran and call for the opening of Holy Doors in all cathedrals. Thus, on December 13, 2015, in our Diocese, a Holy Door at the Cathedral of Saint Ninian will be opened. As well, a Holy Door will be opened on December 12, 2015 at the designated Church of St. Marguerite Bourgeoys in Sydney. These churches will be designated as pilgrimage churches for the year, where pilgrims may visit and celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Parishes might consider making a parish pilgrimage to these designated churches. Throughout the Year, the Cathedral will have Eucharistic Adoration every Friday after Mass until 3 pm. As well, St. Marguerite Bourgeoys will have a Holy Hour with Eucharistic Adoration at 3 pm on the third Sunday of each month, beginning on January 17.
3. Since December 27, the Feast of the Holy Family, will be celebrated as a Jubilee for the Family, perhaps parishes might consider how they might honor this special day for families.
4. Parishes might consider a concerted effort, when many people have left a regular participation in the life of the Church, to provide the gentle call to reach out, to invite, to let people know that they are welcome back to the family of faith; this can be a concrete action of mercy.
5. Parishes might provide special care for those in prisons, inviting them to experience God's

mercy and a renewal of faith.

6. Parishes might participate in the outreach ministry of mercy connected with the situation of thousands of refugees who have been forced from their homelands and who are in desperate need of security and peace.

7. Parishes might promote the sanctity of life by ongoing work to protect life from conception to natural death; those promoting assisted suicide may use the term “mercy” but it has a very different meaning and interpretation from its root in scripture. Mercy and the care for every person in every moment of life’s journey are woven together.

8. Parishes might assist parishioners to dispose themselves to listen to the Word of God, rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us, contemplating God’s mercy and adopting it as our lifestyle.

9. Parishes might consider projects to reawaken our conscience to the *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.

10. Parishes might consider projects to reawaken our conscience to 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.

11. Parishes might consider the initiative of “24 Hours for the Lord,” to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the Fourth Week of Lent, as an opportunity of returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and so touching the grandeur of God’s mercy with their own hands and experience true interior peace. This could be a time for a communal service with individual confession.

12. Parishes may wish to distribute the Gospel of Luke to all parishioners, encouraging them to read this Gospel of mercy during the Year. The Canadian Bible Society has copies of the Gospel available.

13. In our personal lives, mercy in action is the welcoming smile, rather than the judgmental frown; the outstretched hand, rather than the crossed arms; the unscripted kind word, rather than the lengthy speech. Mercy is a choice, a going out of the comfortable, the safe to the uncomfortable areas of the world where mercy is most needed.

14. Priests are invited to make the Day of Recollection for Priests on February 16; the theme shall be the “Year of Mercy”.

15. On April 3, the Second Sunday of Easter, perhaps parishes might consider planning something to highlight Divine Mercy Sunday.

16. Catechists and those who serve in liturgical ministries are invited to attend a retreat on April 8 and 9, on the theme of the “Year of Mercy”.

17. Parishioners may also receive a **Jubilee Indulgence** on the occasion of the Year of Mercy. An indulgence reaches the pardoned sinner through the power of the Church and frees the sinner from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling the person to act with charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin. To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, provided the pilgrim celebrates the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist, making a profession of faith and offering prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father. Those who are sick and people who are elderly and alone, often

confined to the home may receive the indulgence by living their sickness and suffering as an experience of closeness to the Lord in his Passion, death and Resurrection. Living with faith and joyful hope this moment of trial, receiving communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer, even through the various means of communication, will be for them the means of obtaining the Jubilee Indulgence.

18. Those who suffer serious illness or are of advanced age will be invited to share in a particular way the Year of Mercy as they cope with their struggles. “For them it will be of great help to live their sickness and suffering as an experience of closeness to the Lord” (Pope Francis).

19. Parishes might consider the following resources which may be found at The Pastoral Centre at Twenty Third Publications <http://www.thepastoralcenter.com/emercy.html>:

Questions of the Week - Year of Mercy Edition (provides a complete outline of each week’s Sunday Readings along with themes for each weekend’s liturgies throughout Year C -- Questions for faith sharing were drawn from the Readings for both adults and youth. Could be used as a great bulletin resource)

Works of Mercy PowerPoint Presentation (A summary presentation on the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, designed to stimulate conversation and discussion in your group. It’s filled with “talking points” (on the notes slides) and excellent questions to start people talking.)

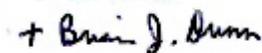
Having Mercy: 6 Small Group Sessions on Mercy (These sessions are filled this with rich examples, Scripture, and questions for discussion and sharing. *Author: Fr David Knight*)

Heartily Sorry: A Gathering to Reawaken an Appreciation of Reconciliation (This will lead you through the preparation and implementation of a parish catechetical gathering with older children (grades 4 and up), teens and adults, preceding a communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. Included a handout for home use as well as intercessions and an examination of conscience for use in the communal celebration. *Author: Leisa Anslinger*).

20. Parishes might want to consider a book study on these or other books: *A Year of Mercy with Pope Francis: Daily Reflections*; *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, by Cardinal Walter Kasper, 2014; *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love* by Cardinal Walter Kasper, 2015; *The Name of God Is Mercy* by Pope Francis, Jan 12, 2016; *Mercy: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics* by Mitch Pacwa 2015; *Crossing the Threshold of Mercy. Spiritual Guide for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy*, Edited by Mark-David Janus, 2015.

Again I want to emphasize that I would like to see every parish take on at least one project for the Year of Mercy. It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and each person’s testimony be ever more effective. I hope and pray that this coming year will provide an opportunity for all to know the wonderful, amazing experience of the Love and Mercy of God.

Sincerely in our merciful Redeemer,



† Brian Joseph Dunn
Bishop of Antigonish