



## BISHOP OF HAMILTON

November 23, 2015  
*First Sunday of Advent*

Dear Friends in Christ,

We will soon cross the threshold of the *Jubilee Year of Mercy*, proclaimed by Pope Francis and set to begin on December 8<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Throughout this Jubilee Year, we are called to contemplate divine mercy so that we may become “*merciful like the Father.*” Mercy is both an attribute of God and the clearest indicator of those who are his children. Having encountered God’s steadfast love, it is our mission to bear His mercy to others.

Mercy is a theme that has long been close to Pope Francis’ heart, as his motto reveals. The words “*By having mercy and by choosing him*” refer to the call of Matthew the tax collector. Although Matthew was a sinner, the Lord looked upon him with loving mercy and called him to be a disciple. Sacred Scripture is filled with reminders of God’s mercy, parables of forgiveness, stories of sinners reconciled. In this holy year, let us listen to God’s word with hearts more deeply attuned to the wonders of His love and kindness.

We live in a world often sorely lacking in forgiveness, understanding and compassion. Wars and civil strife have led to a refugee crisis on a scale not seen for many years. Acts of terrorism and violence deprive individuals and whole communities of a sense of peace and security. Families are often beset with anger and division. More than ever we need to hear the call of our Lord in the beatitudes, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*” (MT 5.3ff.) More than ever the Church must be steadfast in proclaiming mercy as “*the beating heart of the Gospel.*” (*Misericordiae Vultus*)

It is my hope that the *Jubilee Year of Mercy* may be experienced in a vibrant way by individuals, groups and parish communities in the Diocese of Hamilton. As a local Church, let us take up the invitation of Pope Francis to be credible witnesses of God’s mercy, professing, living and celebrating it in all that we do.

Five days after the Opening of the Holy Door of Mercy at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the same will be done in Dioceses around the world. On **Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.** we will celebrate the **Opening of our Door of Mercy** at the Cathedral Basilica of Christ the King in Hamilton. I invite the faithful from across Hamilton Diocese to join us for this solemn celebration.

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The Holy Father has emphasized that the practice of pilgrimage has a special place in a Holy Year, since it represents the journey of our life. Some people may be especially blessed to make a journey to St. Peter's in Rome this year. But for most our own Cathedral Basilica is a more realistic destination. This is why it is the principal place of pilgrimage for us. *I invite you to come and pass through the Door of Mercy*, to spend time in prayer, and to experience God's mercy in the Sacraments. Four pilgrimage days have been set on various Sundays and are advertised on the Diocesan website. Special arrangements may be made on other days for groups and parishes.

So that the practice of pilgrimage might be experienced widely across our Diocese, I have designated six Sacred Heart parishes (one in each region of the Diocese) as additional pilgrimage sites. This seems appropriate, since the Sacred Heart is such a vivid image of our Lord's compassion and love. These parishes in Hamilton, Kitchener, Paris, Georgetown, Guelph and Walkerton will offer Mass, Confessions and other devotions on First Fridays during the Jubilee Year. Once again, the *Jubilee of Mercy* page on the Diocesan website is the place to find more detailed information.

As Catholics we are blessed to receive God's grace and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to hear the words of mercy and experience profoundly the Lord's pardon and peace. It is my hope that all Catholics will strive to receive God's grace in Confession this year; even if – and especially if – it has been many years since you have approached the sacrament. I trust that you will find wise and compassionate confessors in our Priests. With the universal Church, we will celebrate “*24 Hours for the Lord*” on Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, March 5<sup>th</sup>. Extensive hours of confessions will be offered at six parish locations across our Diocese, so that the Lord's mercy may be offered in abundance.

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has shown great concern for the poor and the marginalized. In this Holy Year, he calls us to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy with renewed devotion: to attend to people's physical and spiritual needs with compassion. Let us look once again to the Gospels where the poor so often have a special experience of the mercy of God. I am pleased that a *Diocesan Youth Rally* to be held this spring will focus upon the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Moreover, I urge all parishes this year to review their programs of charitable and social outreach, so that we may ensure that we are a Church that responds generously to the cry of the poor.

Within the Diocese of Hamilton we can look forward to many blessings and graces in the coming year – a time to encounter God's mercy and to extend His loving compassion to others. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy and patroness of our diocese, be our constant companion in this Jubilee Year. United in faith, confident in hope, fervent in charity, let us journey together throughout this Holy Year, rejoicing in the inexhaustible riches of God's mercy.

Yours in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

+ *Douglas Crosby*, OMI

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Bishop of Hamilton