

## **PASTORAL LETTER ON THE YEAR OF FAITH**

My dear friends in Christ:

In the ninth chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark we are presented with a story in which a father brings his son to Jesus to be healed of an unclean spirit. Jesus tells the father, “All things can be done for the one who believes” (v24). The father responds to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief” (v.25). The father loves his son and desperately wants him to be healed and yet there is still doubt... does he really believe that Jesus can heal his son. Doubt is something that we can easily identify with when it comes to faith for it is not always easy to trust God and believe, especially when faced with fear and uncertainty. We can only trust and believe someone that we know. The more that we come to know the Lord the easier it becomes to believe. The way that God “helps our unbelief” is to continually draw us closer so that we know, love and serve Him. As a diocese we are beginning a Year of Faith together with the universal Church. During this year we will be coming to Christ like the father in the Gospel of St. Mark and asking the Lord to help strengthen our faith.

### What is the Year of Faith?

In his apostolic letter *Porta Fidei* (door of faith) our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI announced a Year of Faith which began on October 11, 2012, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Catechism. It will conclude on November 24, 2013. Our Holy Father believes that reflecting upon these significant events along with other activities throughout the year will help us to rediscover the joy of believing.

### Why a Year of Faith?

Pope Benedict has stated the Year of Faith is a “summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the One Savior of the world” (*Porta Fidei*, 6). We are invited to open “the door of faith” and enter into a renewed and deeper relationship with the Lord. This year will provide many opportunities to evangelize and energize our parishes, homes, schools and community. The pope has recognized that over the last number of decades there has been a growing spiritual void and it is hoped that this year will help to fill that void with faith.

### How will we celebrate the Year of Faith in our Diocese?

We have a number of activities planned in the diocese throughout the year. Dr Josephine Lombardi, professor of theology at St. Augustine Seminary in Toronto, will be offering a faith formation series for adults at Mt. Carmel Spiritual Centre in Niagara Falls. Each session will focus on a particular aspect of the year of Faith: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Vatican II, The Catechism, The Creed, The Lord's Prayer and the last session will be a day of prayer and reflection. Posters containing specific details have been sent to each parish in the diocese. Our clergy study days will have a particular focus on the Second Vatican Council and ways that we can strengthen our families and parishes in faith. Father Craig Morrison, O.Carm, professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and a native of Niagara Falls, will present a series of articles for the *Vineyard* offering a scriptural perspective on the Year of Faith. We have also written a special prayer for the Year of Faith which has been distributed to all of our parishes. It is my hope that this prayer will be said on a daily basis throughout the coming year. There are two parish programs that we will be highlighting throughout the year. This is being done in cooperation with Branches Catholic Ministries which is located in St. Catharines. The Great Adventure Bible Study and Father Robert Baron's "Catholicism" series are the programs that will be made available to parishes. It is hoped that a number of parishioners will participate and deepen their knowledge of the Church and sacred scripture. We are also planning a youth symposium for the diocese. We will invite youth and adult representatives from all of our parishes. I know that throughout this year there will also be local events in our parishes and schools that celebrate the Year of Faith. We will officially mark the beginning of the Year of Faith in our diocese at the Diocesan Anniversary Mass on November 26, 2012.

### What do we Hope to Achieve?

I have often said that I want to be able to set this diocese on fire! This fire is the fire that the two disciples experienced on the Road to Emmaus. It is the fire of God's love that refines, renews and fills us with hope. On the evening of October 11, 2012, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the beginning of the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict spoke to a large crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square. He said, "The fire of the Holy Spirit, the fire of Christ is never one that devours nor a destructive one. It is a quiet fire, a small flame of goodness, of goodness and truth that transforms with its light and warmth". My hope for the Year of Faith is that we will be able to fan the flame of goodness and truth in each one of us so that more and more people will be able to bask in its light and warmth. My prayer is that all of us will be able to rediscover the joy of believing!

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.  
Bishop of St. Catharines