



1 September 2019

Dear Fathers, Pastoral Assistants and Parishioners,

The summer break is over, and we return to customary routines. So also, I return to my usual monthly letter and calendar. The summer was both eventful and refreshing. The adage “a change is as good as a rest” does apply here. It was a good couple of months, both busy and relaxing at the same time.

Father George Okoye, SMMM

In my last letter, I told of several moves of clergy happening in our archdiocese. One that I didn't know at the time came from the Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy. Father George Okoye is being assigned to a parish in the Diocese of Pembroke, Ontario. Father George came to our diocese in March 2010. His first couple of years were in the Little Red River Cree Nation (Fox Lake, John D'Or Prairie and Garden River). Then he was assigned to High Prairie, also serving the Métis Settlement of East Prairie. I am grateful for his years of service in our diocese. May God guide him as he makes the present transition in his life.

His Congregation is sending us as a replacement, Father Cornelius Amaechi. We are presently awaiting Father Cornelius' arrival. He will not necessarily be assigned to High Prairie.

Sisters of the Holy Cross

The last of the Sisters of the Holy Cross left our diocese during the summer. Sisters Edith Boucher and Pauline Granger moved from Falher to Edmonton, marking the end of an era. At the end of June, about 30 Sisters of Holy Cross visited the archdiocese. They visited Hillcrest Mennonite School (what used to be Holy Cross Academy) next to St Joseph Church in Grande Prairie. They then proceeded to Falher, where they joined in the centenary of the town of Falher, and were honoured at the Mass that day for their contribution to the development of faith and education in the region. I am deeply grateful for the presence and ministry of the Sisters in our diocese over so many years. They will be missed.

We now have only two religious women in the Archdiocese: Sisters Mary Jeanne Davidson and Connie Harkin, both School Sisters of Notre Dame, in Peace River. This is a far cry from the two hundred who worked in schools, parishes and hospitals fifty years ago. The face of our archdiocese has changed, and continues to do so.

Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows

Along with some other Canadian dioceses, I have decided that we will pray each year in a special way for the victims of clergy sexual abuse on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, September 15th. This year that date falls on a Sunday, so we cannot celebrate that particular feast. We can nonetheless pray in a special way for those who have been victimized by priests. Msgr. Charles Lavoie will be sending the parishes some materials to be used on that day at the Masses in our churches.

Munus Docendi: The Sacraments: Sacraments of Initiation

Three of the seven sacraments of the Church are classified together as the “sacraments of initiation” – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. This is because in the early Church, these sacraments were distinct but celebrated at the same time for adults who were entering the Church as it spread quickly in the first few centuries. Converts to the Christian Church (called “catechumens”) would be in the catechumenate process (what today we call the RCIA) for a few years, as they were instructed and formed morally and spiritually to take on their new identity as Christians. On the day of reception, which was usually at the Easter Vigil, these catechumens would be baptized and confirmed, as well as receive their first Holy Communion. By reception of these sacraments, the new Christians “put on the garment of salvation”, and were counted as members of Jesus Christ in the Church.

In subsequent generations, as the baptism of infants became the norm, these three sacraments were separated in their celebration, as well as in the order in which they were celebrated. A child would be baptized as an infant; they would be confirmed by the bishop at a date suitable to the bishop, and finally they would receive First Holy Communion shortly after that. Pope Pius X in the early 1900s was concerned that children be able to receive Communion as soon as possible in their life, so he decreed that young people make their first Communion as early as possible. This was deemed to be at the “age of reason” (about age 7), when a child would be able to understand the distinction between the Eucharist and “ordinary bread”. In most instances, Confirmation ended up as the last of these sacraments to be celebrated. This gives the erroneous impression that Confirmation is the apex of Christian initiation ... that honour really belongs to the Holy Eucharist.

Seen together, the Sacraments of Initiation are understood as the process by which we “put on Jesus Christ”, become “members of Christ’s Body”, or as St. Paul puts it about his initiation, “I live no longer my own life, but Jesus Christ lives in me.” In this light, I have often wondered if some parents truly understand the significance and consequences of having their child baptized. Much more than simply “getting their child done”, they are immersing their daughter or son in a relationship and a reality that will have an impact more profound than anything else that they will ever do for their child.

Archdiocesan Pilgrimage

The annual pilgrimage at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in Girouxville was very well attended this past August 15th. I have decided to strengthen this shrine as an archdiocesan shrine, and the pilgrimage on the feast of the Assumption of Mary as a diocesan-wide event. With this in view, I am assembling a pilgrimage committee with representatives from across our vast diocese. This committee will be responsible for the overall planning of the pilgrimage, as well as the publicity to make the day’s activities known to one and all. If you feel you would like to be part of this committee but I have not called you, please don’t hesitate to call me to offer your service.

I’d like to point out that we also have two other pilgrimages each summer in our archdiocese: one is in early July at Eleske (Child Lake Beaver Nation), at the Marian shrine built by Father Cesaire Mariman, OMI. The other one is held in early August at the Little Red River shrine, near Fox Lake.

I also see many of our people during the pilgrimage to Saint Anne at the Lac Ste. Anne shrine in mid-July. Saint Anne is the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and thus the grandmother of Jesus Christ.



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