



1 December 2020

Dear Fathers, Pastoral Associates and Parishioners,

It's hard to believe that it is Advent, and a new Church year begins. Each new beginning is an invitation to enter again into the feasts and mysteries of our faith. This is Year B in the 3-year cycle of the new lectionary, which I find to be one of the many blessings to come from the renewal of the liturgy that followed the Second Vatican Council.

Episcopal Vicar for Indigenous Peoples. On October 21st I named Father Bernard Akum as my Episcopal Vicar for Indigenous Peoples. An episcopal vicar is a priest that is named by the bishop to represent him personally in any sector of the diocese. The only sector of our diocese that I have ever named an episcopal vicar for is Indigenous Peoples. There are 19 First Nations and four Métis Settlements in the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan. Father Bill Bernard filled this position before his transfer out of our archdiocese. I am grateful for Father Bernard's willingness to take on this added responsibility. He already serves as parish priest for the communities of Grouard, Atikameg, Gift Lake and Peavine.

Archbishop's Levee. In response to provincial restrictions due to COVID19, I have cancelled my levee, which customarily takes place on New Year's Day. I hope to resume this practice on January 1st, 2022.

COVID19. We will all be relieved when the pandemic is overcome, which appears now on the horizon with many vaccines being developed and awaiting approval. Even so, it seems that final victory on this front will not be declared until well into 2021. In the meantime, we must continue to observe the protocols promulgated by our government on the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer. Like every war, maintaining morale among the troops and the citizens is a challenge, the longer the war wages on. Regulations are put forth for everyone in society; Church communities are one segment that receives particular attention because services and other activities bring together large numbers of citizens for long periods of time.

I am gratified to see that our parish communities comply with the governments' directives. I know that this is not always easy. I hear of the pain that some of these measures cause our parishioners. Like a parent who will take his/her children to the dentist or the doctor against the pleading of the children, I continue to call for our accepting these measures and restrictions for the sake of the common good. I join you in praying for a swift end to this plague.

Youth Ministry and the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis. Father Emmanuel Ekanem has been busy during the past several months in developing the two significant offices that he directs: youth ministry and evangelization & catechesis. An important element in these two offices are archdiocesan-wide committees, one for youth ministry and the other for faith formation. Over the past month, Father Emmanuel has gathered together members from across the archdiocese to serve on these committees. His first meeting of the Faith Formation Committee was held on Saturday 7 November. The Youth Ministry Committee met for the first time on Saturday 14 November. I was delighted to attend these meetings and to experience first-hand the dedication of the members of these committees. This, of course, was just the beginning.

Father Emmanuel is also taking an on-line course for a Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies offered by the Redemptorists in Toronto. This program is headed by Father Santo Arrigo, C.Ss.R., who served in our archdiocese several years ago at St. Joseph's in Grande Prairie.

Workshop on Diocese/Parish Relations. Over the past several months, I have been offering a workshop on diocese-parish relations. This was prompted by a survey that asked parishioners what they would like to learn more about. I began by offering this workshop in deaneries. After offering it in person in Peace River, Girouxville and St-Isidore, the pandemic struck and I have been offering it via Zoom for the past few months. In this workshop, we examine the role of the bishop in a diocese, the role of parish priests, and the relationship of the diocese to its many parishes.

I continue to offer these workshops via Zoom. If you are interested in joining me for one of these, please contact Lauri Friesen, my executive assistant at (780) 532-9766 or exec.agm@live.ca.

Christmas 2020. We already know that Christmas is going to be different this year because of COVID. Our gatherings will be smaller; how we take part in a Christmas Mass will be unlike other years. Nonetheless, it is still Christmas! We still celebrate the wonder of the Incarnation—the almighty God and Creator who comes to us as a small child, so that He can love us and be loved by us, as we would embrace a small child, without fear or distance. This is the basic meaning of Christmas.

I wish all of you the best of this holy Season of Advent and Christmas. May Jesus be close to you and your loved ones. “Though Christ be born ten thousand times anew, despair, O man, if he not be born in you.”



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