



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In the first chapters of the Gospel of St. Luke, we find the account of the calling of St. Peter. He had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Jesus enters Peter's boat and tells him to "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets" (Luke 5:4). We are told that when he had done this he caught so many fish that the net was beginning to break. For Peter, this experience was so profound that he decided to leave everything and follow the Lord.

On November 9, 1958, the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome, Pope St. John XXIII promulgated the decree erecting the Diocese of St. Catharines. A little later that month, on November 25, the Feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, the Most Reverend Thomas J. McCarthy was installed as the first bishop of the newly created diocese.

The Diocese of St. Catharines was created from territory that had been part of the Archdiocese of Toronto and the Diocese of Hamilton. For fifty-nine years our diocese has been growing in Christ and continues to be a sign of faith and hope for our local community. This year we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of our diocese. To mark this anniversary I wish to begin by looking at the command of Jesus to St. Peter, "Put out into the deep."

At the end of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, Pope St. John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter entitled, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In the first paragraph he states, "At the beginning of the new millennium and at the close of the Great Jubilee during which we celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus and a new stage of the Church's journey begins, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, he invited the Apostles to 'put out into the deep' for a catch: '*Duc in altum*' (Luke 5:4). Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets. 'When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish' (Luke 5:6). *Duc in altum*! These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever'" (Heb. 13:8).

As we commemorate our sixtieth anniversary, it is my hope and prayer that, as a diocesan family, we will be able to "remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence."

After fifty-nine years our diocese has changed in many ways and this reality is most evident in the life of our forty-four parishes. Although the context may have changed, the mission remains the same. That mission was given to the Church by Christ prior to his Ascension to the Father. He stated, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 16:19).

With these parting words Jesus reveals that the true nature of the Church is to be missionary. Through baptism we are given the great commission to go forth and make disciples by witnessing to Christ and His gospel. This is the meaning of evangelization.

Pope St. John Paul II was the first to use the phrase, ‘New Evangelization’. He stated that, “There is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his gospel. In this case what is needed is a new evangelization or a re-evangelization” (Redemptoris Missio 33).

For centuries the Church’s evangelization efforts primarily focused on those who did not know Christ; the “new evangelization” focuses on those who already know him. It is a call for all baptized members of the Church to deepen their faith and encourage others to encounter Christ. It requires re-proposing the gospel to people in countries and cultures heavily influenced by secularization. Where there is spiritual indifference, the new evangelization tries to rekindle the flame of faith. The place where this can most effectively be done is in the parish. The parish has always been the centre of worship and evangelization where we come together in worship, are strengthened by God’s Word and His Body and Blood, and then we are told to go forth and announce the gospel of the Lord.

For the past two years our diocese has been involved with a process of discernment. We have been asking parishes to consider their current situation with an emphasis on both the challenges and opportunities. The goal of this exercise is to help parishes move from maintenance to mission. A significant part of this is to rediscover Christ and the joy of believing.

This process will be coming to a conclusion this year with the parishes of the Haldimand Deanery. At that time, in recognition of our sixtieth anniversary, I am proposing that we have a diocesan synod. A synod is a gathering convoked by the bishop at which clergy and laity gather to discuss an issue(s) of pastoral care within the diocese. We will take what we have learned from the discernment process and build upon that in order to help the diocese develop a pastoral plan for the coming years.

More specific details will be available during the next year with the goal of having the synod in 2019. During this gathering we will “put out into the deep” and trust that the Lord will provide.

Unlike our Golden Jubilee in 2008, our sixtieth anniversary celebration will be quite simple. With the theme, “Put Out Into the Deep” (Luke 5:4) we will focus on Christ in light of the ‘new evangelization’. He will be the one to help us grow in faith by our openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is my hope that during 2018 we will put a particular emphasis on meeting Christ in the Eucharist. This would not only involve drawing more people to Mass, but also, providing opportunities for people to encounter the Lord in Eucharistic Adoration.

We will also meet Christ in the poor. Pope Francis states, "We are called, then, to draw near to the poor, to encounter them, to meet their gaze, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude" (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis, First World Day of the Poor, November 19, 2017, paragraph 3). Hopefully there will be many opportunities throughout the year to reach out to those in need.

The principal diocesan celebration of our sixtieth anniversary will take place on Monday November 26, 2018, at the Cathedral. This will also be our patronal feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria. Beginning the first Sunday of Lent an Anniversary Prayer will be available and it will be said throughout the diocese at all Sunday Masses for the remainder of the year. In this way we will prayerfully acknowledge our anniversary as a diocesan family.

For the past seven years I have visited parishes and schools and celebrated many diocesan gatherings. I have been able to meet many wonderful people. I have also had the joy of working with many dedicated clergy and religious. I am most grateful for the privilege of shepherding such a wonderful diocese and I want to build on the faith that I see. Let us do so during our sixtieth anniversary by remembering the past with gratitude, living the present with enthusiasm and by looking to the future with hope.

Following the command of our Lord, let us "Put out into the deep" with confidence. "Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:10).

Entrusting this year to the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Catherine of Alexandria, we pray for God's abundant graces and blessings as we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of our diocese.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gerard Bergie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a stylized "B".

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