



December 2016

Dear brother priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful of the Archdiocese of Vancouver:

Our hearts are filled with the tenderness of God's love when we see little children kneeling in front of a Nativity scene, especially a church display where the figures are large enough to pick up and play with. The little ones are fascinated, even awestruck, as the small statues, though motionless, act out the story of Christmas before their eyes.

A simple stable, animals, angels, a doting Mary and Joseph, and a newborn Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger – who can resist this beautiful scene? To their parents' consternation, many a child reaches out to touch the figures, especially the Child Jesus. At such moments, we call to mind the words of Jesus: "Let the little children come to me."

The Nativity scene continues to attract us even as we grow older. Christmas retains an excitement that surpasses the glitter and the gifts, the decorations and the festivities. Most people, even those for whom Christmas may be a trying time, intuitively sense the approach of this "most wonderful time of the year."

For some, though, the wonder of Christ's Birth disappears as soon as the Christmas season ends. The decorations are put away, and so is the fascination with the Holy Family. The peace, joy and love of our Christmas greetings are abandoned as quickly as our New Year's resolutions. I propose that now is the time to make an extra effort to keep Christmas throughout the year by getting closer to Jesus, and by inviting someone else to get closer to him.

The Priorities and Goals recently announced in the Archdiocese's Pastoral Plan contain one goal that points particularly to this challenge: fostering an intimate encounter with Jesus. We want to do everything possible to enable the faithful to begin or deepen their personal relationship with God as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

We prepared our goals with the awareness that we could all be more passionate about the Church's evangelizing mission. It is not enough to be content that our Catholic population continues to grow, buoyed by the blessings of immigration to such a desired part of the world.

We are building churches, our schools are full, our programs and activities are keeping us busy, and our faithful are devoted and generous. However, we cannot close our eyes to the challenges that face us. Too many of our students leave the practise of their faith after they finish school. Too many of our married couples experience breakdowns in their marriages. And too many of the more than 400,000 Catholics in our Archdiocese are no longer regularly nourished by the Sacraments in a parish community.

Evidence suggests that most people weaken or lapse in their practise of the faith because, for many different reasons, they were never truly evangelized down to the core of their being.

Our local Church is committed to giving pride of place in its upcoming activities to fostering personal relationships with Jesus in the family of the Church. God revealed himself as our



merciful Father in the face of Christ. The spellbound children in front of the Nativity scene can sense that. As we grow older, our task is to ensure that we keep that excitement of letting Jesus captivate us, by welcoming him into our hearts and by then sharing him with others.

The New Evangelization calls us to be committed to responding to the deep yearning of many people to deepen their faith and relationship with the Lord. That's why our parishes, schools, programs, and ministries will be focussing on helping Catholics grow in this ultimate relationship. The Alpha course and the Catholic Christian Outreach Discovery Series are examples of programs that will assist us in this task.

Christmas is the ideal time to jumpstart this new evangelizing thrust in our families and parishes. The arrival of the Christ Child represents the coming of Jesus to all of God's people. Our mission is to shine as lights which lead others to experience the Lord's tender embrace as he reaches out to us from the manger.

Let's take a page from the children and see the Birth of Jesus through their eyes: wonder, awe and a sense of being infinitely loved.

Wishing you the blessings of this holy season and my best wishes for the coming new year,

+ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver