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September 16, 2018, Feast of St. Ninian

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are approaching the fifth anniversary of our Diocesan Renewal Congress. You will recall that the Renewal Congress took place from October 6-9, 2013, when almost three hundred delegates from all organizations, parishes and areas of the Diocese, came together to develop a pastoral plan for the Diocese for a five year period. That pastoral plan has provided guidance for the Diocese and our parishes for the past five years.

Before I continue with this reflection on the Congress, I first want to acknowledge the pain, anger and frustration that many are feeling concerning the recent events in the United States. The Pennsylvania Report of the Grand Jury and the resignation of leaders of our Church remind us that we need to continue to be alert about the horrific issue of child sexual abuse. As well, we need to seek and ensure that our leaders follow the example of the Good Shepherd. These are difficult times for all of us. These experiences have triggered memories of our own Diocesan experience with child sexual abuse. As we know, our Diocese made a commitment to victims and their families in an attempt to acknowledge the abuse by some of our clergy. Moreover we have tightened our policies on misconduct so that any complaints are immediately referred to the local police for investigation. Our emphasis on Responsible Ministry contributes to an environment of care for all in our parishes.

Our Renewal Congress has not only led to the updating of our polices on misconduct, but we have seen the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council which considers pastoral issues connected with ministry in the Diocese. The Office of Social Justice has been revitalized and the Diocesan Liturgical Commission has provided several initiatives to support the liturgical life of parishes, especially through annual video conferences on the four parts of the Eucharist. Youth Ministry has developed extensively with full time employees and three part time ministers for the coming year. A new Diaconate Formation Program is offering formation for eight candidates for the Permanent Diaconate and a new Faith Formation Program is offering formation to six lay people. The Ministry of Communications has developed extensively under the guidance of our Communications Coordinator and our Diocesan Webmaster. The Ministry of Catechesis continues through the work of the Emmaus Centre with our catechetical consultant as well as through our new catechetical program, *Finding God*.

For the past several months many people and organizations have been reflecting on whether we should organize another Congress. We shared the sense of being deeply touched by the awareness of the fidelity of God to this Diocese and we felt the need to continue to discern how God is being faithful to us today. While there is much uncertainty in our family, society, parish and church, God continues to be faithful to us. We need to affirm and celebrate this fidelity. In the midst of this reflection, we realized that we will be celebrating the 175th anniversary of the establishment of our Diocese in September 2019. We remembered the many events that were organized for the 150th anniversary and were inspired by those celebrations. As a result, we decided to spend the coming year preparing for

the 175th anniversary by organizing events at the regional, parish and diocesan levels. These would contribute to our renewal as a people of faith. These events will help us hear the story of God's faithfulness to us. As well, we need to allow God to continue this same faithfulness in us.

For this year of renewal, the first events will be organized as three regional events. The first gathering will be at St. Ninian Cathedral (for all mainland parishes) on Saturday, October 13th; the second on October 20th at St. Joseph, Port Hawkesbury (for all parishes in Inverness and Richmond Deaneries) and the third on November 3rd at Our Lady of Fatima, Sydney (for all parishes of the Northside, Sydney and Glace Bay Deaneries). At each gathering, we will gather for hospitality at 8:30 am and for prayer at 9:30 am, enjoy video presentations of our Diocesan history since 1844, and share our stories. The videos promise to bring back memories of years gone by and should be enjoyable for all. Each day will end at 2 pm. There is no cost for these days.

These regional gatherings will be wonderful opportunities to reflect on who we are as people of faith, living in various rural and urban areas, facing the challenges of our days, and living in the hope that sustained our ancestors. The Diocesan community of faith, to which we all belong, is strengthened by our stories of faith, of God's faithfulness and by how the story continues in us today.

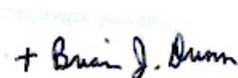
People might choose to come to one gathering; others may wish to come to all the gatherings. The format for each day will be the same, but the people involved will bring their own richness and gifts to the discussions. These days are designed to assist parishioners to feel the strength and witness of the community to which we are called, nourished, and sent forth to serve in love, hope and charity. **For purposes of providing lunch, you are asked to register with your parish priest one week before these celebrations so we can have a headcount for meal preparation.**

During the Lenten Season, each parish will be invited to organize a parish mission with resources that will be available to everyone. As well, we will provide resources for a day camp during the March break. Furthermore, our Youth Ministry is planning to offer a pilgrimage to St. Anne de Beaupré or to Montreal during March break 2019 as well as offering faith formation gatherings in the different deaneries. We will close this year of renewal with a Diocesan Gathering on September 15, 2019, with a special speaker, a diocesan Mass and intercession to our diocesan patron, St. Ninian.

As I look toward this year of renewal, I am deeply inspired by the fidelity of parishioners who remain committed to their journey of faith. I continue to pray for our Diocesan renewal and realize that each one of us must take personal responsibility for our own individual renewal. Every person must consider what he or she might do for the renewal of the parish and the church. As well, each parish must take corporate responsibility for the renewal of its community of faith and so I urge all parishes to consider how they need to be renewed during the coming year, especially as missionary disciples.

I thank you for your prayers and kind support as we continue to face both challenges and opportunities within our Diocese. May this year of renewal prepare us to celebrate with deep faith the 175th anniversary of the establishment of this Diocese. May we be inspired to be renewed in God's love and fidelity as we respond as missionary disciples in our daily lives.

Sincerely in Christ,



† Brian Joseph Dunn
Bishop of Antigonish