



January 28, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we begin 2021 it is important to build on the good work done in our pastoral plan *Equip the Saints* and set some goals and priorities for our work this year. In my letter to the clergy on November 27, 2020, I outlined some of the areas of pastoral concern that I see within our archdiocese. In addition to these, I have also heard the concerns of people and pastors in our many meetings and visits over the course of this pandemic. With these reflections in mind, I would like to highlight the following pastoral priorities for the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth for 2021:

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Evangelization  | 2. Homelessness |
| 3. Parish Identity | 4. Catechesis   |

These priorities are specific reflections of our diocesan values of Mission, Community, and Formation. Each Parish is asked to consider these priorities and to develop appropriate plans for a response at a local level. Recalling that our Parish Pastoral Councils are mandated with the task of planning, I hope these topics will inform their study and discernment for the coming year. Meanwhile Parish Finance Councils need to prioritize these items in budgeting and planning. To assist us in these deliberations I offer a few short reflections on each priority.

### **Evangelization**

*“Since its inception, the Parish is envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments”* (Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction, *The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*, June 29, 2020, n. 37).

Evangelization – proclaiming the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is the primary activity of the Church. Each new Parish must have a plan for evangelization with a commitment to a particular program of evangelization. Significant time, energy, and resources should be invested in reaching the various audiences of the new evangelization: those who have never heard the Word of God, those who have heard the Word of God but fallen away, and those who have heard the Word of God yet require ever deepening conversion. No one program is perfect; however, the quality of people and commitment of leadership can overcome these imperfections. The staff at the diocesan centre are ready to help your discernment with training, facilitation, and recommendations. Each new Parish is asked to have a plan for evangelization with a commitment to a particular program of evangelization by the beginning of September 2021.

## **Homelessness**

*“A ‘sanctuary’ open to all, the Parish, called to reach out to everyone, without exception, should remember that the poor and excluded must always have a privileged place in the heart of the Church” (The pastoral conversion of the Parish community, n. 32).*

While many are without homes in Nova Scotia, many more are presented with the impossible choice of whether they spend what little they have on shelter or food. I realize that many of our Parishes have ministries dedicated to these and other social issues, e.g., food banks, various kinds of outreach, etc. This can provide a variety of opportunities where we can collaborate with our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations. Our new Parishes have many properties, some of them surplus, and I ask Parish leadership to consider whether some existing resources can be diverted for the service of the homeless in some way. I intend to bring these same questions for study to my diocesan staff, Diocesan Property Committee, Diocesan Building Committee, and Diocesan Finance Council to find areas where the diocese can also contribute more to this area of concern. I am asking each Parish to review your communities, to see what more can be done to build partnerships in our areas, to attack root causes, and to help as many people as possible. Each Parish is asked to submit by June 30<sup>th</sup> an inventory of efforts that are being made to assist the needy and homeless.

## **Parish Identity**

*“Naturally, a Parish must be a place that brings people together and fosters long-term personal relationships, thereby giving people a sense of belonging and being wanted”; “it is necessary to find new forms of accompaniment and closeness” (The pastoral conversion of the Parish community, nn. 25 and 14).*

In many ways the global pandemic compounded the issues related to creating new Parishes. While we had names and decrees, the sudden onset of lockdowns and restricted gatherings made bringing people together in our new Parishes impossible. Parishes were unable to gather and struggled to find new ways to connect. The experience of the disorientation and disconnection of merger was a difficult experience for the whole parish: pastors as they were trying to lead, staff coming together, and parishioners trying to come to grips with a new parochial reality. Bringing communities together is not an easy task, and the circumstances of this past year compounded a very difficult endeavour. Over the past number of months, relationships within parishes often were strained and various areas of the parish tried to obtain a certain autonomy or to regain control of certain elements of parish life.

Every one of our new Parishes needs to commit to developing a new Parish identity that is positive and united, regardless of the number of people or number of buildings. The focus must be on the whole community of the faithful that makes up the parish, rather than particular groups that gather at individual churches. Doing so will require fostering healthy relationships and new understandings of Parish life and roles. As bishop, I am ready to come to meet with people in every Parish to help facilitate this process of growth in identity. Perhaps the Pastoral Council could survey parishioners to see what is contributing to unity and what is challenging the movement toward being a united parish with one identity and create an action plan to address these needs by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## Catechesis

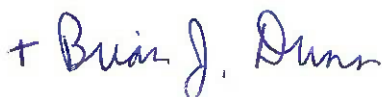
*“The renewal of evangelisation requires a new approach with diverse pastoral proposals, so that the Word of God and the sacramental life can reach everyone in a way that is coherent with their state in life” (The pastoral conversion of the Parish community, n. 18).*

I am deeply troubled by the disruption in faith formation during this pandemic. I am grateful to catechists and leaders in all Parishes who have made fantastic adjustments to online and home-based activities during the pandemic. While there is still much work to be done, we can celebrate and build on these successes. In addition to a program of evangelization, each Parish must have a process of ongoing formation in faith for children and adults. Growth in our closeness to the Lord and friendship with Him comes not only from study but also from encounter. All of our methods should be holistic in their approach to formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. To aid in realizing this goal I am working with catechists and diocesan staff to produce a local directory for catechesis that will give Parishes the framework to develop and evaluate their catechetical efforts. In addition to a program of evangelization, each Parish is asked to have a process of ongoing formation in faith for children and adults in place for the coming pastoral year beginning in September 2021.

Unfortunately, 2020 saw us isolated and apart. However, we also learned to come together in new ways and challenge old methods. I pray that, this year, we build on this spirit of newness to breathe new life into our shared missionary vision. The Word of God is ever new and, in times such as these where people are anxious, afraid, and alone, the message of the Gospel is an encouragement to new life and new hope.

May our working together be guided by the Holy Spirit to bring this new life and new hope to as many people as possible this year.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Brian J. Dunn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

†Brian Joseph Dunn  
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth