**MESSAGE FROM MSGR NOËL SIMARD FOR LENT 2019**

**TAKE THE TIME...**

Each year, Lent offers us an opportunity to open ourselves up more to God and to others, by applying the means proposed to us by the Church, such as: prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Some may say that these methods are now outdated and that we should instead speak of spirituality, voluntary simplicity accompanied by respect for creation and sharing. In any case, these means are always relevant and challenge us to seek the truth in our lives and discern the dangers that threaten us and that risk hardening our hearts and extinguishing love, such as greed of money, lies, rejecting God and others—especially the poor, the sick, the elderly, foreigners or those who appear different from us. These means proposed by the Church also allow us to revitalize our journey with Christ and to live as risen ones.

**Take time to pray:** Pray to get to the essential and go even deeper. Pray to listen and let the Word of God unmask what is false and superficial in our lives and in our world. Pray to rekindle the flame in a heart-to-heart conversation with God and in communion with the local community that invites us to celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday.

**Take time to fast:** Fasting will deepen our desire for God. It will help us experience what it’s like for so many of our brothers and sisters who lack basic necessities. Fasting will help us hear the cry of our soul—hungry for goodness and thirsting for the Living God. As Pope Francis stated so aptly in his Lenten message (2018): "Fasting wakes us up and makes us more attentive to God and neighbour".

**Take time for almsgiving:** Let us givealms to fight against the relentless search for profit and accumulation of material goods. We are called to giving alms or sharing; it will help us realize that we are all brothers and sisters, and what I have is never really mine alone. Pope Francis stated: "How I would like almsgiving to become a genuine style of life for each of us.”

From February 2nd to the 13th, I had the pleasure of witnessing an unforgettable and enriching experience in the Philippines. I accompanied a delegation from Development and Peace to actually "see" the extraordinary achievements brought about by this organization. We were there especially to participate in the inauguration of the ‘Pope Francis Village’ in Tacloban, a city severely affected by Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, which caused much death and destruction. Thanks to the determination and courage of the survivors, and the moral and financial support of several partners, including Development and Peace, the Pope Francis Village now offers new and decent housing to 563 families. What a good example of mutual aid and solidarity that touches the heart—too often unfeeling—and gives hope wings!

Take the time to let your heart speak for itself and contribute generously to the Development and Peace Share Lent Campaign, whose theme is 'Share the Journey' with the subtitle: "No one should be forced to flee their home." And the photo chosen is that of a young Rohingya refugee living in the Kutupalong Camp in Bangladesh. In this liturgical season of Lent 2019, **I will find the time to take one more step** in prayer, fasting and almsgiving, to be ready for the arrival of Easter—with a heart full of life, burning with faith, charity, and hope!

Noël Simard

Bishop of Valleyfield