

**Pastoral letter**

**from Most Reverend Noël Simard**

**Bishop of Valleyfield**

**ON THE JUBILEE OF MERCY**

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**BISHOP OF VALLEYFIELD**

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**To all of you, dear diocesans,**

**Greetings and blessing in the Lord.**

1. It is December 8th 2015, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, that the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy begins. This date chosen by Pope Francis highlights the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which marked a very important step in the revival of the Church.
2. In a world stained by violence, hatred, wars, Injustice and terrorism –the horror of the events that occurred in Paris on November 13 demonstrates it—Pope Francis wants Catholics and anyone of good will to testify the divine mercy of God and reflect the compassion of God through their words and their actions. He also wishes Catholics to rediscover the value and the necessity of the sacrament of forgiveness and reconciliation.
3. Pope Francis wants to enable everyone to experience the Father’s divine mercy through the active mission of the Church. In fact, the theme “Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful” which is taken from the gospel of Luke (6 : 36) invites us to experience mercy as the Father who demands not to judge nor condemn but to forgive and express the love of the Christ without measure, that Good Shepherd Christ who carries the lost human being on his shoulders.
4. As Pope Francis says so well in n° 10 of the document announcing and explaining the Jubilee called “The face of mercy”: “The credibility of the Church goes through the road of mercy and compassion (…). The time has come for the Church to find the joyous announcement of forgiveness again. It is time to go back to the basics to take load of the weaknesses and the difficulties of our brothers. Forgiveness is a strength that resurrects in a new life and gives the courage to look upon the future with hope.” The pope expects of this ‘extraordinary’ holy year that it will renew life and the testimony of Christians throughout the world.
5. In response to the pressing call of the pope and following a reflection led by the members of the bishop’s bureau and the regional coordinators, I want, in this pastoral letter, invite all the diocesans to enter this grand movement of mercy and compassion so that their testimony becomes an efficient sign of the divine mercy of God for all human beings.

More than ever we are urged to reflect the joy of the Gospel and to put mercy at the heart of our Christian lives. The Word of God resonates with strength and conviction like a word and a gesture of forgiveness, support, help and love!

1. To live this jubilee year as a pilgrimage that will go on all year with more significant moments, we’re given several steps and means. With my close collaborators, I suggest a program of activities that will punctuate this road of the Jubilee in the diocese and that you will find on the website of the diocese. But I must insist on three particular items.
	1. **The way of pilgrimage and the Holy Door.**

Pope Francis wanted that the doors of Mercy open in each diocese. These doors, similar to the Holy Doors of the pontifical basilicas of Rome, will allow those who cannot travel to Rome to perform the pilgrimage of the Jubilee.

In our diocesan Church a Door of Mercy will be opened in the Ste. Cecilia cathedral-basilica during the Eucharistic celebration of the third Sunday of Advent, that is to say Sunday December 13th 2015, at 10: 30 am.

The believers of all parishes are invited to perform, at any time of the year, their own pilgrimage at the Ste. Cecilia cathedral-basilica to obtain the special favors of the Jubilee. An accompanying leaflet will be available for them to go through this process.

* 1. **The sacrament of forgiveness.**

Since Lent is an opportune time for conversion and the expression of the divine mercy of God, let’s take advantage of this liturgical season to propose more often that sacrament, explain its significance and its role in the development of faith by the appropriate and adapted catechetical studies, and celebrate this sacrament of Reconciliation with more fervor. It is in this perspective that I will publish before Lent a pastoral letter on the sacrament of forgiveness.

* 1. **Works of mercy**

The Church suggests that, during this Jubilee, we accomplish corporal and spiritual works of mercy. We have to keep lending a hand to those who, here in Quebec, have much difficulty to make ends meet: single mothers and fathers, family living on a low salary, people who are unemployed or living miserably on welfare, homeless folks, unemployed youths, etc.

Our charity and our fight for peace and justice must also reach our brothers and sisters of the world. Presently, the welcome of the Syrian refugees gives us a unique occasion to contribute and support these brothers and sisters in humanity who fled their homeland because of violence and war.

We must also support our Christian brothers and sisters from the Middle-East who are persecuted for their faith and who decided to testify their faith in an environment of dangers and threats.

1. Let us make the most of this Jubilee and see the world with the eyes of the divine mercy of God. Let us engage ourselves in our Christian communities, in our families and our society, to experience this Jubilee as a unique occasion of conversion, progression, support and transformation. Let’s look with God into others’ miseries and respond to their thirst of consolation and mercy.

We must make of our living environments “islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference” (as said Pope Francis)! To the breath of the Holy Ghost, let us be modeled by the Savior Christ to be disciples “merciful as the Father”.

Given in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, on December the eight two thousand fifteen, the Feast of Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.

 ✠ Noël Simard

Bishop of Valleyfield