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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

*Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and fill the hearts of your people  
with an ardent desire to follow Jesus, to be his missionary disciples (Year of Prayer)*

On Pentecost Sunday 2019, we began a Year of Prayer for our entire diocese which will conclude at our celebration of Pentecost on 31 May 2020. I asked that together we take this year to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we might have “an ardent desire to follow Jesus, to be his missionary disciples”.

Over the past few months, it has been gratifying for me, as your bishop, to see many signs of new life and hope, as our parishes take to heart this call for renewal. I met a woman who completed Alpha in her parish. She spoke to me of the excitement she now has about her faith. A man, who is going to be a sponsor of one of the candidates for confirmation, told me about the program his parish just introduced. He is eager to participate in the program because it has renewed him in the faith he has practised since childhood. Bishop Dabrowski and I had a meal with the facilitators of the “Moments of Encounter” which were offered in many of our Families of Parishes. They spoke to us of the positive response to these retreat days. People wanted to gather to pray and reflect on their faith. They witnessed a real hunger among our people to grow in their faith.

I am very encouraged by these testimonies. They are, I believe, fruits of our Year of Prayer.

As we move through this Year of Prayer, I want to draw your attention to the seasons of Lent and Easter and the special opportunities they offer us.

During the Season of Lent, our parishes have missions and special devotions, such as Stations of the Cross and Eucharistic Adoration. Our ethnic communities have brought us rich traditions for the 40 days of Lent. These practices help us hear Jesus’ call to a conversion of heart: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Make a special effort to link these practices to our Year of Prayer and the prayer of our diocese that we may have “an ardent desire to follow Jesus”.

During the Easter Season, we celebrate with great joy Jesus’ resurrection and the new life he bestows on us in Baptism. The Scripture readings for the Sunday and weekday Masses highlight the presence of the Holy Spirit working powerfully in the early disciples and are an inspiration for us as we seek to be disciples of Jesus in our everyday lives.

The Easter Season ends in May, the month we have traditionally called Mary’s month. Our parishes, schools and families make use of many Marian devotions. The Rosary, for example, helps us reflect with Mary on the great mysteries of our faith. Mary is the *first* disciple, our model of the true disciple of Jesus. In her Magnificat, Mary rejoices and proclaims the greatness of the Lord. Through Mary’s intercession, may we be missionary disciples who boldly proclaim the Gospel by our words and deeds, by speaking to others about our faith in Jesus, by inviting them to encounter Jesus in their lives, and by reaching out to the poor and marginalized in our communities.

Mary was perplexed by the words spoken to her by the angel, but she believed and gave her “yes” to God. As a diocese, we have embarked on a journey to answer Jesus’ call to us to be his missionary disciples. We do not know exactly what this call will mean and what it will demand of us. In this Year of Prayer, I believe we are being called to place our trust in God. May we be inspired by Mary’s example, and may the Holy Spirit fill us with joy and guide us on our journey.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.*

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.  
Bishop of London