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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we acknowledge the second anniversary of our Diocesan Renewal Congress, I want to provide you with an update on some of the initiatives that have continued to flourish during the past year. As you are aware, 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 the next five years. This three-day event was an important occasion of grace for many delegates and parishioners throughout the diocese continue to regard this congress as a significant event.

The Implementation Committee, consisting of two representatives from each deanery, has continued to meet on a monthly basis to ensure that the 75 strategies identified at the Congress are being implemented. I want to thank them for their generous commitment to this process.

The Office of Social Justice has been revitalized and the new Social Justice Committee has been meeting to discuss issues connected with social justice. During this Fall, it has organized workshops in Antigonish and Sydney on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*, on our common home.

The Diocesan Liturgical Commission has provided several initiatives to support the liturgical life of parishes. While the commission focused on hospitality in 2014, with a Newsletter and a video conference on the Ministry of Hospitality, the commission presented a video conference on "The Word of God in Our Sunday Celebrations" in May. The Commission continues to reflect on the use of music other than CBW III; it is certainly possible and permissible to use music other than that which is found in CBW III, keeping the guidelines for liturgical music in mind when selections are chosen. With the publication of the Canadian version of the Book of Gospels, all parishes have been encouraged to obtain this new book for the parish; workshops and ongoing formation and education will be provided. The Commission is also doing some study on the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy and will assist parishes to promote, prepare and celebrate particular devotional practices.

The Vocations Committee sponsored a "Come and See" Day for young men interested in the priesthood in October 2014 and another one will be held this October. As well, the Vocations Awareness and Appreciation Committee has published a brochure highlighting the various religious communities serving in the diocese. As well, to celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life, diocesan and parish celebrations have been held to acknowledge the significant role of religious within our diocese for the past 150 years.

During the year, the Youth Committee of the implementation Committee sponsored a day for youth and adults interested in youth ministry and a youth rally was held at Sydney Mines on World Youth Day (Palm Sunday) with 85 youth and some adults. Suggestions from this rally included a need for more youth ministry activities in parishes, more follow-up to Challenge, NET, and Steubenville Atlantic, the need to affirm youth for their worth and the need for a safe place for youth to gather where they can praise and worship God without ridicule. Moreover a full-time Youth Coordinator (Nolan Conrad) was hired by the diocese in August and he will continue to develop comprehensive youth ministry throughout the diocese.

The Professional Standards Advisory Committee has been updating its protocols for professional standards and will provide in-servicing for diocesan and parish personnel regarding personal boundaries.

The Diocesan Finance Committee continues to develop annual reporting by providing the annual audited financial statements to the priests of the Diocese, a two-to-three-page summary provided to the Priests of the Diocese to support understanding of the audited financial statements and a one-page review of the Diocesan operations for parishioners focusing on the financial operations and financial position of the Diocese. As well, revisions were made to the annual report forms to assist in more consistent reports from parishes. In the Fall of 2014, regional workshops were held on

parish financing, and issues connected with insurance. Regarding the financial position of the Diocese, we still have a debt of almost four and one half million dollars and this is being addressed through the sale of assets in the diocese. In spite of this debt, due to generous donations of many including deceased priests, we have some money to support further pastoral programs and activities within the diocese.

A new Diaconate Formation has begun with 13 new candidates beginning a four year program of formation. Fr. Bedford Doucette, assisted by a Deacon Formation Team, will continue to accompany these men and their wives during this formation. A Policy Manual has been developed and distributed to all deacons, their pastors, and other parish priests.

In terms of the Faith Development and Ministry Program for Laity, Cecile Miller has been appointed as the new director. Together with the Advisory Board, Cecile will focus on the development of a general lay ministry and ongoing formation of lay people within parishes, especially through parishes offering for ongoing faith development. As well, several deaneries have been involved in the formation of Pastoral Zones as we deal with the shortage of priests and the shortage of parishioners attending parishes. This formation is being offered over a five session period, coordinated by Debbie Aker of the Emmaus Centre at the Pastoral Centre.

The Ongoing Formation and Retreat Team for Priests had several events during the year, including the workshop with Dr. Cathy Clifford in August 2014, Day of Recollection in February with Fr. Ray Huntley and Jen Power and the Annual Priests' Retreat in May. Fr. Paul Turner will be coming in November to provide input on the topic of presiding at liturgy. This world-renowned liturgist will provide an evening for lay people.

The Renewal Congress called for the appointment of a Communications Coordinator. Over the past year, a Communications Committee discussed this and, in June, hired a part-time Communications Officer, Jennifer Hatt. Jennifer has launched a new e-newsletter, and working with our webmaster Deacon Art Riley, is involved in refreshing and updating our website and our Facebook page. She continues her work on developing a diocesan-wide communication strategy, with plans and resources for all levels of communication in the diocese.

Regarding the formation of catechists, the Emmaus Centre is coordinating the efforts of implementing the new catechetical program for the diocese, Finding God. This program will address the need for more consistency and active engagement of children, youth and their families in faith formation. Catechists and Coordinators for this new program had workshops in November 2014 and March 2015 as well as a Retreat in April 2015. Another workshop will be held in October to focus on the prayer dimension of this resource. Discussion have been held with our francophone parishes to explore how to support their programming, coordinators and catechists.

Regarding Church Outreach, a committee organized a Servant Day in June providing materials for each parish to be involved in suggested service projects, e.g., assisting local food banks, cleaning cemeteries, church halls, glebes and churches, reaching out to seniors and shut-ins, etc. The Committee has also provided information for the celebration of 'Welcome Back Catholics' in September to be implemented in each parish.

Regarding a Ministry of Family Life, a group of people has been meeting throughout the year to consider ways to revitalize this ministry within the diocese. The committee reviewed the book "Love is Our Mission," in preparation for the World Meeting of Families, attended by two couples from the committee. The committee has developed a Mission Statement: "Inspired by the example of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph: the Diocese of Antigonish Family Life Ministry strives to nurture all families to grow in faith, hope and love."

As I review some of the initiatives that continue from the spirit of the Diocesan Renewal Congress, I am deeply inspired by the number of parishioners who have been involved in these initiatives. I continue to pray for our diocesan renewal and realize that each one of us must take personal responsibility for our own individual renewal. 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 a group of missionary disciples.

I thank you for your prayers and kind support as we continue to face both challenges and opportunities within our diocese. May our Diocesan Renewal Congress continue to inspire us to be renewed in His love and to be His disciples in our daily lives.

Sincerely in Christ,



† Brian Joseph Dunn  
Bishop of Antigonish