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October 9, 2014

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I write this letter as we reach the first anniversary of our Diocesan Renewal Congress. Last year from October 6-9, almost three hundred delegates from all organizations, parishes and areas of the Diocese, came together to craft a pastoral plan that will carry us forward together as a diocese for the next five years. This three-day event was an occasion of grace and an opportunity to connect at a deep level with the people of this diocese. As we acknowledge this anniversary, I want to provide a summary on how this experience has given us new energy in many initiatives during the past year.

An Implementation Committee, consisting of two representatives from each deanery, was established in November and has been meeting each month since the Congress. Most of the 75 strategies identified at the Congress were distributed to different diocesan commissions or committees with a request that they provide semi-annual reports of their progress in developing the particular strategies. As well, the Office of Social Justice has been revitalized with a new Social Justice Committee, which had its day of orientation on October 4th, with Ms. Mary Boyd facilitating. This Committee will continue the Social Justice Ministry in the diocese.

Regarding Youth Ministry, an ad hoc committee of fourteen people was established to consider Youth Ministry in the Diocese. The Committee has done some research, reviewed different youth leadership formation programs and is organizing a session on November 22 for youth and those involved in leadership with youth. In the area of Communications, a committee is working with some people in communications to identify the best approach for the diocese and to consider a communications strategy. In connection with this, the Website is being rebuilt and a new site will be launched in the next few months.

In the area of Finances, the Diocesan Finance Council has created a one page summary of diocesan finances for parishes with intention to make financial information more accessible and understandable. The Business Office has revised and standardized the annual financial reporting format and has sponsored two diocesan meetings this past week for those involved in finances at the parish level.

The Liturgical Commission has provided guidelines for ministries and made them available on the website. It has produced and distributed semi-annual newsletters on Hospitality and on the Stations of the Cross, and organized a video-conference in May on the importance of Hospitality in our parishes. This was a theme that was emphasized by the Congress.

The Priest Vocation Committee has developed a new webpage, created a new vocation poster and sponsored a "Come and See" afternoon in early October. Five young men participated in this event with our two seminarians and members of the Committee. The Vocation Awareness Committee has been promoting a vocation culture with bulletin inserts once a month and has been preparing a brochure highlighting consecrated life in the Diocese for the Year of Consecrated Life (November 2014 - 2015). Special Masses will be celebrated in Antigonish and Sydney on the weekend prior to World Day for Consecrated Life (February 2, 2015).

The Office of Diocesan Ministry has sponsored two workshops in June on Collaborative Ministry, one for

laity and one for priests. Another workshop on Collaborative Ministry will be held in December on this year for those working as teams in parishes. Meanwhile the Diaconate Formation Program is preparing to restart, with a search of men who are interested in the Diaconate.

The topic of Reconciliation was emphasized through seven deanery sessions that were held to reach out to all those who were victims or anyone who was affected by the sexual abuse scandal in the diocese. These sessions were followed by study sessions held throughout the Diocese using Sr. Nuala Kenny's book. A Service of Repentance was celebrated in Port Hawkesbury in June and those who attended experienced a deep peace as we reflected on the wounds of the Lord in those who have been abused.

The Emmaus Centre (for catechesis in the diocese) sponsored a workshop on the Sacrament of Confirmation for priests, catechists and coordinators to assist those who prepare young people for Confirmation. As well, the Diocese has decided to use a new Catechetical Resource to assist young people to grow in faith. This new program, *Finding God*, will be introduced into all parishes next September and during this year, the Emmaus Centre will be offering ongoing formation for priests, catechists and coordinators on this new program.

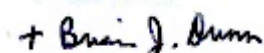
Regarding the initiative of Welcome Back Catholics, a committee has been formed and are considering the issues connected with this issue. "Back to Church Sunday" (Sept. 20 & 21) was an initiative that encouraged all to reach out to those who have been disconnected with the Church.

As I review some of these initiatives that have flowed out of the Renewal Congress, I am filled with profound gratitude for the hundreds of parishioners who have been involved in these initiatives. I continue to reflect on the issue of renewal and am drawn to one of the books in the Bible that dealt specifically with renewal and restoration. The Book of *Nehemiah* describes the work of purifying the Jewish community and rebuilding Jerusalem and its walls. The governor Nehemiah led the people of Israel in this task of restoration after they had returned from exile. Small groups took responsibility for their own parts of the wall. If we think of renewal and restoration in our diocese, we need to remind ourselves that this work of renewal and restoration will take place only when each of us takes personal responsibility for our own renewal. At the Renewal Congress, we were inspired by the experience that the Lord was calling us to be renewed, reconciled and restored. Our gathering helped us to look to Jesus as our source of strength, depending on the Holy Spirit to inspire us to use the gifts of our Diocesan community so that we can continue to heal and grow as a faith community.

In order to use our gifts well and intentionally grow in faith, I am asking all Pastoral Councils, all parish committees and other organizations in the Diocese to include the following item on every meeting agenda: **"How is our time together helping to restore our faith community?"** I am asking all of us to ensure our focus is on the people of God, and the renewal of our faith community. How are we expressing ourselves as a mission community, reaching out to others, especially those on the margins? While we have a responsibility to maintain our finances and our buildings, we are being challenged to take greater responsibility for our faith community and to see the face of God in our daily relationships and activities.

I thank you for your prayers and kind support as we continue to face both challenges and opportunities in the days ahead. Please know that I join you as we move together and I am available for further conversation on this call to renewal. May our Diocesan Renewal Congress continue to bring forth a rich harvest of renewal within our parishes, Diocese and each one of us.

Sincerely in Christ,

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

† Brian Joseph Dunn
Bishop of Antigonish