

Bishop Fabbro's 2021 Christmas Message

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We welcome with great joy the Christmas season. Despite the challenges of today, including the COVID-19 pandemic, we the faithful of our diocese will join in celebrating the birth of our Saviour and his message of God's boundless love for all people. The beautiful liturgies on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day fill us with awe and reverence as we listen once again to the gospel stories of Jesus' birth in very humble circumstances. Together, we remember that God came to walk among us as a humble man. United in our faith and with a sense of humility and confidence that, in Jesus, any obstacle can be overcome, we pledge to support and walk with each other.



The journey in faith is a common theme in the gospel passages that we read during Advent and Christmas. Mary and Joseph journey to Bethlehem to be registered (Lk 2:1). Having heard the Angel's surprising announcement, the shepherds journey with haste to the city of David and see the child lying in a manger (Lk 2:8). Mary and Joseph journey to Egypt to escape King Herod's decree (Mt 2:13).

This coming year will be one of several important journeys for our Church.

The recent discovery of unmarked graves at former residential schools was deeply shocking. These latest revelations brought to light the shared responsibility of our Church for the harm caused by the residential schools and their disastrous consequences for Indigenous people. With them, and listening to their stories, we will continue to journey on the path of healing and reconciliation as the Indigenous people of this land struggle to find healing of decades' old wounds and to break the cycle of trauma passed down through generations.

This journey began in earnest when Indigenous people, along with Canada's bishops and other Catholics, gathered in Listening Circles after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. These sessions opened dialogue with the survivors and led to the development of a plan for a delegation of Indigenous people to meet with Pope Francis in Rome. This meeting has been postponed because of the pandemic but the intention is that it will happen as soon as possible in 2022. The delegation of survivors, elders and knowledge keepers will be able to speak directly

with the pope of their suffering and of how important it will be for them that he come to Canada to issue an apology. As hope was born anew with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, I ask you to pray that this meeting with Pope Francis create a path to healing and reconciliation.

Another journey we will take in 2022 is the Synod. The word 'synod' comes from the Greek words that mean 'walking together'. This Synod will be different from those in the past. Pope Francis has declared that he wants to engage lay people – those in the pew, young and old, and those not coming to our churches. In January, our diocese will provide information about how you can participate in the Synod. There will be opportunities for you to offer your thoughts and to share your stories and your dreams for our Church. Prayerfully guided by the Holy Spirit, we will listen to each other and join with Catholics worldwide to discern how we will journey together as God's pilgrim Church on earth.

We started this year with our churches closed because of the pandemic. I am very grateful they have remained open for the last six months, even at reduced capacity. As hard as they were, the lockdowns made us appreciate all the more being able to gather in our churches to worship God, celebrate the Eucharist and other sacraments and hear the gospel proclaimed. In the coming year, with God's protection and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mother, may our world at last journey out of the COVID-19 pandemic and return to a more normal life.

This Christmas, Bishop Dabrowski and I will remember you and your family in a special way in our prayers. The gospel tells us that there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night, when the Angel of the Lord and the heavenly host appeared bringing "good news of great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:8). May the glory of the Lord shine on you as it did on the shepherds. We wish you peace, joy and good health in the New Year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Ronald Fabbro, CSB*

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB
Bishop of London

The Diocese of London: being a mission-oriented Church that forms disciples of Jesus