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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

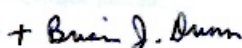
Happy New Year! I want to announce to you news regarding a diocesan gathering in October 2013 of pastors and parish delegates who will be involved with me in determining the pastoral direction for the Diocese of Antigonish for the coming five years. For the past few years we have been moving through some difficult times in the diocese. Many have had questions and concerns about how the Church is moving; others desire a clear focus for the pastoral care of all in the diocese. This diocesan gathering will be entirely different from the Pastoral Planning meetings that parishes have had in relation to clustering and reconfiguring of parishes. In fact, this diocesan gathering will give us a new impetus and new direction as we live out our faith.

This diocesan gathering process will begin during the Season of Lent in 2012, when parishioners will be asked to share their experiences of their parish/diocese/church. Parishioners will be invited to state what has been life-giving for them as well as what has not been life-giving for them. They will also be given an opportunity to make recommendations toward a Diocesan Vision. The process of consultation will take place at three different levels: each parish will respond during the Season of Lent. These responses will be gathered and discussed at the deanery or regional level in seven areas of the diocese in the Fall of 2012. The recommendations from these deanery gatherings will be submitted to pastors and parish delegates at a Diocesan Congress in October 6-9 of 2013. Through this gathering, we will formulate together a Diocesan Vision to give us some direction for the next five years.

The recent events that have touched every person in our diocese have led to a great deal of reflection upon the Church's need to bring justice, compassion, healing, hope and new life to the people of God. I consider this diocesan project to be a very significant one to ensure that we all have a voice to achieve collaboration, co-responsibility, healing and direction for our Diocesan Church. This project will be coordinated by a Planning Team, made up of parishioners from every area of the Diocese. I plan to work closely with the Team and its executive consisting of Fr. Bedford Doucette, David Nearing (Reserve Mines), Mary Samson (Louisdale) and Marilyn Milner (Antigonish). Throughout this process, we hope to hear the voice of all parishioners, including our young people, our First Nations and those who do not join us at Sunday Eucharist. Further information will be sent to each parish.

I am asking that everyone support this important endeavor as we make this pilgrimage together. This will be particularly important as the whole Catholic Church throughout the world celebrates the "Year of Faith" from October 2012 to November 2013. The name of our process, "Rebuilding My People-The Church: Diocesan Renewal 2013," reminds us that the Lord is inviting us to a new level of response. We will listen to the Word who brings us new life, to our Tradition which gives us our foundation, and to each other as we respond to the current challenges of our time. May God's Holy Spirit bless and lead us as we seek "the plans that will give a future with hope" (*Jeremiah 29:11*).

Sincerely in Christ,



† Brian Joseph Dunn, Bishop of Antigonish