

**2014/2015 PASTORAL LETTER OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF  
CANADA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD**

To the Reverend Clergy, Religious Women and Men, Monastics, Seminarians and Laity

**Christ is Born! Let us Glorify Him!**

*Jesus is born in a family with challenges*

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," MT 1:18-23*

It is interesting to reflect on the challenges faced by Joseph and Mary regarding their betrothal and marriage. We are perhaps more familiar with the crisis the Holy Family faced regarding accommodations the night when Jesus was born. It is important to keep these circumstances in mind when we look at the challenges families face today. This is precisely where Christ is born. God is with us, in the midst of the challenges every family faces.

The recent Papal Synod focused on this. The Holy Father gathered bishops and laity in October 2014 to prayerfully reflect on the challenges families face today as they evangelize one another. The details may differ somewhat, but the stress on relationships, expectations and the struggle to uphold the dignity of every human person remains paramount for every family. Patience in mixed marriages, healing addictive lifestyles, caring for elderly, finding meaningful employment for immigrants, providing pastoral care for the divorce, separated and abused are just some of these challenges. However, the joy of experiencing gospel values is found in the family where members address these needs with compassion, making visible Christ who is among us through one another. These expressions of compassion are in fact encounters with Christ for Christ is among us!

*Jesus is born in a parish with challenges*

This is true for the families that are the basis for our parishes today. This is true for our parish families that have reflected on being vibrant. Patriarch Sviatoslav, in his pastoral letter entitled *The Vibrant Parish – A place to encounter the living Christ*, calls all of us to make this a reality in our Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. We will bring the fruit of our reflection and best practices in order to share them with others at the Patriarchal Sobor planned in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine this coming August in 2015. In particular, we prayerfully keep in mind the challenges families and parishes face with the ongoing war in Ukraine. Efforts to defend human dignity have had devastating consequences, yet in sharp contrast, people continue to discover the deeper joy of doing God's will. **In some cases ecclesiastical property has been taken over by pro-Russian forces.** However, prayerful expressions of hope abound. Providing basic needs of water, food and shelter become concrete actions of

evangelization and parishes have never been more vibrant. Faithful from around the globe give material, financial and spiritual support to those in Ukraine who are at the center of our people defending human dignity.

Pope Francis says this clearly in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* “*The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration*”.

So then, who are today’s shepherds and kings that come to encounter Christ at your parish? Let us look to the Mother of God, the Theotokos, for inspiration and guidance since every parishioner and each parish is called to give birth to Christ. May our parishes be mangers that provide a place for all people to encounter the living Christ.

This Christmas, Pope Francis, together with all your bishops and pastors, pray for you, your families and your parishes, that they be places to encounter the living Christ, for the wise, the poor and all those who face challenges in life.

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him! The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

Sincerely in Christ,

- +Lawrence Huculak, OSBM Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg
- +Michael Wiwchar, CSsR Eparch Emeritus of Saskatoon
- +Severian Yakymyshyn, OSBM Eparch Emeritus of New Westminster
- +David Motiuk, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton
- +Stephen Chmilar, Eparchial Bishop of Toronto
- +Ken Nowakowski, Eparchial Bishop of New Westminster
- +Bryan Bayda, CSsR Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon