

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025 “Pilgrims of Hope”



To the Very Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Religious Sisters and Brothers, Seminarians and Laity of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada

Glory to Jesus Christ!

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (*Romans 5:5*)

Dear Beloved in Christ!

Pope Francis has declared 2025 to be a **Jubilee Year** with the uplifting theme of “**Pilgrims of Hope**”. This is surely a providential declaration as we see that the whole world certainly needs and hungers for a reason for hope and a new beginning which is at the very heart of a ‘jubilee’ year. This is truly a very exciting time for us and the world in which we live!

The concept of a jubilee year is found in the Holy Scriptures from ancient times as a year of freedom and homecoming. On the fiftieth year the trumpet was to be sounded throughout the land, thus ushering in a time of renewal and forgiveness, (cf. Leviticus 25:9 ff) a time of reconciliation and honesty. It was a time to show due glory and gratitude to the Lord God Who grants us every blessing and grace. It was not just a special year, but a new beginning between rich and poor, weak and strong, as well as a reason for moving past fears and grudges held far too long.

Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ directly alluded to the new beginning that a jubilee initiated when He shocked and inspired the people in His crowded hometown synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21). There He read the ancient Scriptures of the Prophet Isaiah Who foreshadowed an even more profound Jubilee at the coming of the Christ Who will free Israel from all oppression (Isaiah 58:6; 61:1 ff). When Jesus came, He proclaimed the Good News of faith and freedom that went far beyond the freeing of slaves and captives and physical healing, and the alleviating of the material burden of the poor. He offered Himself as the only suitable sacrifice that released all from the slavery of sin and granted life eternal.

In this spirit of offering a fresh new beginning for all peoples of the earth, the Church revived the concept of a Jubilee year of favour back in the year 1300. Jubilee years were called for by the Popes of Rome to be held every 100 years, then 50 and even **every 25 years**. Circumstances sometimes disrupted the scheduling of a jubilee year. However, Jubilee years of grace and celebration were also declared for special occasions or anniversaries. Besides the 25-year

intervals, Jubilee Years were also declared to commemorate the anniversary of Christ's saving passion, death and resurrection – for example in 1933 and 1983. Our present Pope Francis declared a Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2016 to mark the 50th Anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council. This coming year we have the joy of the first quarterly Jubilee of the 21st Century. We want to fully understand the opportunities that this year brings to have maximum benefit of the grace that it offers.

In the past, who were those most thrilled and relieved by the declaration of a Jubilee Year? Why, those who had fallen into bad times: those who had lost land or were about to lose it; those sold into slavery, and those who were surrounded by hopelessness.

It is much the same for a Jubilee Year declared by the Holy Father. He announces a new Jubilee Year, and we rejoice at a renewed chance for true conversion and great changes!

We begin with Confession and Holy Communion

Among the greatest treasures with which the Lord empowered the Church and thus gave the mandate to “go and teach all peoples” (Matthew 28:19-20) and bring them into the fold of Christ – are the Mysteries... i.e. the Sacraments. The “Sacraments of Initiation” and that of “Penance” are surely essential to our salvation and our ongoing strength and happiness throughout this life and onto life eternal. The Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation, we receive when we enter into the Church. By these mysteries we “put on Christ. Alleluia!” The most awesome Mystery, that of the Holy Eucharist – the living body, blood and divinity of Christ – completes these Sacraments of initiation¹. The Eucharist we may, and are encouraged to receive often as we make this earthly pilgrimage through life – even daily². Through the Holy Eucharist we are nourished and strengthened to live our own life in Christ, and fulfil our calling to Evangelize those around us. To receive the Holy Eucharist worthily and to simply maintain ourselves in the favour of the Lord, we also turn to the Mystery of Penance by which we are reconciled to our Lord through what we commonly call “Confession”.

These two Mysteries/Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion have a central role in the Jubilee Year. Perhaps as an encouragement, making a *good* Confession and receiving Holy Communion *worthily* are tied to receiving the Jubilee “plenary indulgence”.

A Sacrifice, An Offering, An Act of Faith

Becoming an authentic follower of Christ and then living the life of a follower, requires making a **sacrifice** (often an ongoing sacrifice) and actively **witnessing** to our faith. Jesus very clearly spoke of the need to “deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). It also sometimes means showing your faith, even when that seemingly poses a risk. The blind men shouting at the side of the road (Matthew 20:29-33), the woman touching the hem of His cloak (Mark 5:25-28), the many people who travelled far to Jesus in hope (Mark 3:7-10): all made the effort to come to Jesus, but also risked not receiving what they had hoped for. The Lord wants us to understand that we stand to receive much more than what we may hope for as did the paralytic whose friends wanted him to receive physical healing. Jesus granted him the much greater and eternal grace of forgiveness of his sins (Mark 2:5). When we make the effort to make our way to the Lord by a physical pilgrimage/journey and ultimately by an act of our hearts and souls, we will never go away empty handed. Again, an **offering** of time and

¹ *Christ – Our Pascha*, 432-436

² *CCEO*, cc. 378, 473, 881.

prayer and a “**pilgrimage**” of one kind or another are also linked to receiving a “plenary indulgence” for ourselves or for another.

The Jubilee Indulgence

One of the special graces of this Year of Hope involves what is known as a “**Plenary** (*i.e. full or total*) **Indulgence**”. This is certainly a longtime western tradition, but Eastern Catholics have also undertaken the practice as a unique impetus for prayer and personal renewal. The basic definition of this is, “a grace granted by the Church through the merits of Jesus Christ to make reparation in the event of temporal punishment for sin”. This is how we understand it.

When we sin, we want to seek forgiveness as soon as possible. When we are forgiven, we are truly forgiven. However, there are always consequences for our sin. Damage, especially spiritual, has been done. We seek forgiveness for our sin through Confession – the Mystery of Penance. The Lord through His Church forgives us. However, the consequences remain and must be addressed. We will atone for those consequences in this life or in the next (cf. Purgatory) so that we may enter purified into the presence of God. The Church, by the authority given by Christ, calls for reparation for sin, encouraging all the faithful to observe some **very important**, but quite **easily achievable** conditions, to receive the Holy Sacraments of Penance and the Most Holy Eucharist. Also, crucial elements here are a **Pilgrimage** of Hope and **prayer** for the successor of the Holy Apostle Peter, who is called by Christ to be among the brothers a sign of Unity, because the Lord willed it so!

Praying for the Deceased

For the Lord, all his children are alive, and for the wandering Church it is important not only to maintain unity with the Church Triumphant but also with the Church suffering, where in prayer we maintain the bond of love between us³ through the Holy Spirit. In his Jubilee declaration, Pope Francis more than once asks that we remember to pray for the souls who have departed from this earthly life⁴.

Jubilee Pilgrimages

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, will officially open the Jubilee Year in Rome on the Eve of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord – 24 December 2024. After that Christmas celebration of Hope, eparchies and dioceses and shrines around the world will open the Jubilee Year locally on **Sunday 29 December 2024**. The Ukrainian Catholic Eparchies across Canada will join in this latter initiative with a Special Divine Liturgy at their respective Cathedrals.

Each of our Eparchies has a special Jubilee plan to allow and encourage all the faithful of each eparchy to fully enjoy the benefits of the Jubilee Year and to share the message of hope in many ways. These plans will continue to be developed over the year, so please check the **eparchial websites**.

The Archeparchy of Winnipeg

- June 27: Blessed **Vasyl Velychkovsky Shrine** at St. Joseph church, Annual Pilgrimage
- July 12: **Cathedral** of Sts. Volodymyr and Olga – Praznyk

³ *Christ – Our Pascha*, 250.

⁴ *Spes non confundit* (9 May 2024).

- August 15-17: Immaculate Conception Church and Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes (Cooks Creek) – **71st Annual pilgrimage**

Eparchy of Edmonton

- June 22: **Eparchial Pilgrimage** to Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Mundare, Annual Vidpust
- **Travelling Miraculous Pilgrimage Icon** – Our Lady of Hoshiv, Basilian Monastery, Mundare; parish to parish in 2025.
- “**Always Our Parishioners**” Pastoral Initiative; weekly visits by local pastor and lay extraordinary Eucharistic ministers to sick and shut-ins.
- **Pilgrimage** to Blessed Vasyl Shrine and other holy sites in Winnipeg

Eparchy of Toronto

- **Every Deanery** will have a designated Pilgrimage Church so that the Faithful may easily travel to a nearby Jubilee site.

Eparchy of Saskatoon

- June 14-15: **Cudworth Pilgrimage**, Our Lady Sorrows
- September 13-14: Millenium Pro-Life Cross **Pilgrimage**
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Eparchy of New Westminster

- June 28-29: **Eparchial Pilgrimage** to Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Grindrod
- Main Jubilee Year Pilgrimage Destination: Holy Eucharist Cathedral, New Westminster
‘All-Church’ and International Events

There will certainly be more Jubilee Year events in each of the Eparchies, as well as Ukrainian Catholic events in Rome for the year. Throughout the year, our faithful will be participating in local, national and international events. There are already plans for members of our Church to travel to Rome for various special gatherings, including:

- The Jubilee for **Eastern Churches** (May 12-14);
- the Jubilee for **Bishops** (June 25),
- Jubilee for the **Ukrainian Catholic Church** (June 28);
- the Jubilee for **Youth** (July 28-August 3);
- Jubilee for **Catechists** (September 26-27), etc.

The **Jubilee Year Committee** for our **Ukrainian Catholic Church** has posted information about several exciting events organized! Among them:

- **Online Encounter of Youth** from around the World! (December 31);
- The **Word of God Day** (January 12);
- Catechism **for Families** (February 15);
- World Jubilee Day for the **Elderly** (October 7);
- Jubilee **Week for Families** (May 11-17); etc.

Those interested in participating in international events may contact their respective eparchial Chancery office and monitor the eparchial website for information.

The Jubilee is for Everyone

It must be clearly stated, that those whose health or other circumstances will not permit them to travel far to the major churches and shrines or even to nearby designated Jubilee sites should not be dismayed. Those individuals or families who cannot afford the travel or afford the time, should know that the Church wants them to experience the Lord's mercy and obtain the grace of the Jubilee Year no less than anyone else. The Vatican Jubilee Year website (www.iubilaeum2025.va) and our **Church's** excellent website (<https://ugcc.ua/iubilaeum2025>) address this matter very succinctly: – “Those who cannot make the Jubilee pilgrimage due to illness or other circumstances are nonetheless invited to **take part in the spiritual movement** that accompanies the Jubilee year, **offering up the sufferings** of their daily lives, and **participating in the Eucharistic** celebration.” Even if making a pilgrimage is not possible, the other conditions for the Plenary Indulgence and a prayerful journey deeper into a life of faith with Jesus are doable. Speak with your parish priest. We believe that he will be happy to arrange something with you so that no one is left out of reach the gift of the Jubilee!

The Jubilee Year calls upon us to take full advantage of the opportunities provided for our own spiritual renewal. We are also called to become true **Pilgrims of Hope** for the world – especially others around us who too are daily seeking a stronger and more vibrant faith. The Jubilee Year calls us out to do something for ourselves and for others by acts of mercy, indulgences, and joyfully sharing our hope and faith. This Jubilee can be a **new, refreshing beginning** for each of us and for our Church as a whole!

May we all have an amazing and fulfilling Jubilee Year!

Together with you as **Pilgrims of Hope** in Christ,

+ **Lawrence** Huculak, OSBM

Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg

+ **David** Motiuk

Bishop of Edmonton

+ **Bryan** Bayda, C.Ss.R.

Bishop of Toronto

+ **Michael** Kwiatkowski

Bishop of New Westminster

+ **Michael** Smolinski, C.Ss.R.

Bishop of Saskatoon

+ **Andriy** Rabi

Auxiliary Bishop of Winnipeg

+ **Michael** Wiwchar, C.Ss.R.

Bishop Emeritus of Saskatoon

+ **Stephen** Chmilar

Bishop Emeritus of Toronto

*Given on December 15, 2024
On Sunday of the Holy Forefathers*