



BISHOP OF HAMILTON

Christmas 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

We have begun the Advent Season, a time of active and spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas. The four weeks of Advent pass quickly and, almost before we know it, Christmas is upon us: the birth of Jesus Christ in a manger in Bethlehem.

During Advent, we meet, in Sacred Scripture, figures who help us understand the importance of the Christmas event and point out the way for us to prepare well. The Angel Gabriel assures us that “with God all things are possible”! The Virgin Mary sets the high standard of openness and obedience to God’s will in our lives. St. Joseph acts on revelations in his dreams. John the Baptist calls us to prepare spiritually and practically for the coming of Christ into our lives. The shepherds listen to the revelation of angels and hurry to meet the Lord. The Magi follow a star to find Him. For each, the experience is different. For all, it leads to an important encounter with Jesus.

For the past number of years, the *Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops* has prepared an on-line series called *Journey Through Advent*. The weekly reflections in English and French open our hearts and minds. This year, Cardinal Francis Leo, Archbishop of Toronto, is the presenter in English. His profound spiritual reflections are gifts to us, available on the CCCB website. They nourish our faith and help us prepare well.

In our Diocese, Parish Priests, Lay Pastoral Ministers, choirs and musicians, sacristans and decorators and cleaners – a bevy of gifted and generous people – help assure that all is ready for the Christmas celebrations. We are blessed that dedicated Priests, Deacons and lay-faithful care enough to do the necessary work of planning and preparing so that we might *Come Home for Christmas* and celebrate well. I am grateful to all who serve and I pray that, as our cloistered Carmelite Nuns so often say, “*God reward you*”!

Advent is a good time to celebrate the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*. We get ready “outwardly”. It is wise to prepare ourselves “interiorly” as well. A good Confession does wonders for the soul and for our hearts. It frees us and lifts us up. Pastors make time to welcome you and are happy to celebrate this liberating Sacrament.

I like to send and receive Christmas cards at Christmas. The Canada Post strike has precluded that pleasure this year. It means prayers for my family and friends must be evermore intentional. As I pray for them, I pray also for you, brothers and sisters, co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord, and parishioners throughout this vast Diocese. As we open the *Jubilee Year of Hope* on December 29, and live the experience of being *Pilgrims of Hope*, let us give thanks for the gift of faith that provides meaning and purpose to our lives – and hope for a future in union with the One Who Comes!

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

+Douglas Crosby, OMI
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Bishop of Hamilton

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