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Headline: The unending way of mercy

On Nov. 20, the Solemnity of Christ the King, we will come to the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, which began last Dec. 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

For this past year, at the urging of Pope Francis, we have been reflecting on the gift of God's mercy, and striving to live that mercy more fully in our daily lives. Our Holy Father's impetus for declaring the Jubilee of Mercy was to draw attention to and invite the faithful to a deeper experience of the fathomless mercy of God, a divine compassion that has no limits. He notably said to all of us that "the name of God is Mercy."

Over these past months, we have made pilgrimages through the Holy Doors of Mercy around our diocese, to recall that we are always on a spiritual journey, and Jesus is our ultimate destination. A special focus of this Jubilee has certainly been the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We are all sinners in need of God's mercy and forgiveness, but that mercy is available in great abundance through sacramental confession. I dearly hope that all of us have come to the Lord in Reconciliation during this special time of grace, and I hope even more that we have grown into a habit of confession, in other words, a habit of regularly confessing our sinfulness and receiving the mercy of God's forgiveness. The blessings of such a spiritual habit are incalculable.

The Jubilee has also called us to a renewed emphasis on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. As recipients of God's boundless mercy, we are challenged to offer mercy to others in whatever way we can. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, comforting the afflicted, counseling the doubtful, praying for the living and the dead: these and many other works of mercy are always before us, real works of compassion that allow us to touch Christ in the brothers and sisters that we meet every day. By practicing the works of mercy, we extend to others the love that we have received so beautifully from God.

On Sept. 4, Pope Francis canonized a true icon of mercy, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. With beautiful timing, our Holy Father presented Mother Teresa to the Church as the saint we have always known her to be. He called her a "tireless worker of mercy," and he said that Mother Teresa, "in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her defense of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, often called "the saint of the gutters," is for all of us a model of selfless love and mercy to the poorest of the poor. She recognized that people are not only hungry for bread, but they are also hungry for love; "they are hungry for God." This Jubilee of Mercy teaches us that God is the answer to all our hungers, and that we too must become dispensers of mercy to our brothers and sisters.

Last spring Pope Francis also encouraged every diocese to adopt a "mercy project." He asked the local churches during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to take on an area of special need, a project that the faithful could unite to support.

I've given considerable thought to this challenge from our Holy Father, and I have also asked for input from my brother priests. And now I would like to invite all of you to join me in supporting our diocesan "Year of Mercy Project," St. Ann's Mission School at Belcourt.

St. Ann's School is part of the larger St. Ann's Mission Parish, and it is located on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. This is an area of great faith, but it is also scarred by poverty and unemployment. Many families struggle to make ends meet, and some children do not have the kind of care and support that most of us take for granted.

Father Jeff Eppler, the pastor of St. Ann's, told me that St. Ann's School fulfills a great need at Belcourt, and without this school many children would simply fall through the cracks. Most importantly, though, St. Ann's School offers a Christ-centered education for these youngsters who love our Lord and love to learn.

St. Ann's School was closed in the 1970s but was reopened in 1999, and has been in operation ever since. But keeping the school open is a constant challenge. Just last year it seemed likely that the school would have to close again for lack of funds. But the pastor, principal, staff, and parishioners stepped into the breach and have managed to keep the school going.

It seems to me that we as a diocesan family can help to make their job a little easier, and we can do something together for the children of St. Ann's. So I'm asking you to make a contribution to St. Ann's School during this Jubilee of Mercy, so the kids of Belcourt will have the blessing of a Catholic education and the love that we all long for. You will soon receive a letter from me in the mail, and I ask you to make an act of mercy for these little ones.

When he canonized Mother Teresa, Pope Francis said: "God is pleased by every act of mercy, because in the brother or sister that we assist, we recognize the face of God which no one can see... In a word, we touch the flesh of Christ."

The Jubilee of Mercy will soon end and the Holy Doors will be closed, but the way of mercy continues. God's mercy will be just as abundant, and we should spare no effort to receive this great gift. And, as we know so well, the need for mercy will be just around the corner in a person who is sad, hungry, lonely, elderly, ill, discouraged or estranged from God.

Our neighbors are hungry for love and for mercy, and Jesus asks us to offer it to them. May the fruit of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy be visible in our families, our parishes, and our diocese for many years to come.