



*Pastoral Letter for the Year of Faith*  
– *Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon*

To celebrate the election of Pope Francis as the Successor of Peter and Pastor of the Universal Church, the Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon Dioceses are publishing this Pastoral Letter for the Year of Faith

Vancouver, April 7, 2013  
Feast of Divine Mercy

On October 11, 2012, the Church embarked upon a Year of Faith which is to last until November 24, 2013, the Solemnity of Christ the King. The date of its beginning is significant, since it marked the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, as well as the twentieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This special Year is an occasion to keep these two great ecclesial events in mind and to undertake initiatives to communicate the beauty of the Catholic faith so that it can be received with enthusiasm and joy.

To encourage all the faithful to benefit from this time of grace, we, the Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon, are asking you this question: what is the gift of faith and what is at the heart of this treasure?

#### Our tradition of faith

The gift of faith present today among our people builds upon the faith of those who have come before us, whose lives were changed when God's searching love found them in the "garden" of human history. Often we look for heroic expressions of faith in faraway places and distant eras, but our faith is being nourished in our own time and place.

Faith – our deep personal encounter with Jesus Christ – gives birth to mission. Why else would Charles John Seghers, Bishop of Vancouver Island (1873-1886) leave the comforts of Victoria and venture into the wilderness of the interior of the Yukon and Alaska on July 13, 1886? His parting words to the priests and faithful in Victoria tell of his faith: "Adieu, I leave for Alaska, and God knows when or whether I shall return. Pray for me!" He did not return to Victoria but returned to the Father's House, having been assassinated on the banks of the Yukon River near Nulato, Alaska, on November 28, 1886.

Why else would Sister Mary Damascene, along with five other Sisters of Saint Ann, venture into the wilds of the Klondike in 1898 to staff the first hospital in Dawson built by the Jesuit Father William Judge?

Why else would the members of so many other Religious congregations venture from the comforts of home and family to heal and teach in such difficult conditions?



Why else would so many men become Oblates of Mary Immaculate and find themselves freezing through the harsh Canadian winters with parish communities sometimes smaller than their families back home?

Why else would hundreds of young people, the “Frontier Apostles” of Bishop O’Grady, work for little or no pay to provide Catholic education in the Diocese of Prince George? Why else would generations of parents work extra jobs and volunteer their time to build and operate Catholic schools for their children?

Why else would Blessed Nykyta Budka, first Ukrainian Catholic Bishop of Canada leave all that was familiar to him in Ukraine and set out in 1912 to Canada to unite the many newly established Ukrainian Catholic parishes scattered throughout our country?

Why else would thousands of people march for life to the steps of our Parliament buildings in Victoria? Why would some of our fellow Catholics even be willing to be put in jail for witnessing to the Gospel of life?

There is only one answer: because of their Catholic faith. They staked their lives on the truth that God loves the world so much that He gave us His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:16). In a mysterious and powerful way, they all heard God’s call and encountered Him personally and in others “on the periphery,” as Pope Francis is now encouraging us to do.

These heroic men and women are models for us. For them, as for us, faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Wherever the seed of faith sprouts, there is God’s searching love, moving believers to concrete acts of charity.

What is faith?

Faith certainly includes affirming all the truths we have received from the Apostles through the Church and in communion with the whole community of believers through the ages. In the Rite of Baptism, after the Creed is professed, the celebrant says: “This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Giving intellectual assent to what God has revealed is, however, only the first step. As well, faith entails freely entrusting oneself – heart as well as mind – to the God who loves us.

At one and the same time, faith is God’s gift and my response. It begins with divine grace but is completed with a human commitment. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms, “believing is possible only by grace and the interior help of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act . . . contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason” (n. 154).

Faith is saying “yes” to God and His truth with our entire life. To have faith is to abandon ourselves without reserve into the arms of the God whose faithfulness is certain. To be without faith is to live without recognizing God’s presence and action in human life, in the world and in our own life.



Without faith, we anchor ourselves to the wind (cf. Ps 78:39); and the prophet Isaiah says, “If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all” (cf. Is 7:9).

Where do you stand? This is God’s searching call first made through the choice he presented Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God walked in the garden during the cool of the day desiring to be with the man and woman whom He had created in His own image and likeness (cf. Gen 3:8).

Central and fundamental to faith is a trusting surrender to the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This confident abandonment to God changes the way we live. It is this trust that we express in our Profession of Faith – the Creed – week by week, year after year. We need to rediscover the connection between these truths we profess and our daily life. The Creed should be, as Benedict XVI once said, a “light for our steps through life, water that irrigates the parched stretches of our path.”

## Saint Kateri: Model of Faith

Two powerful arguments for the truth of the Catholic faith are the beauty of art and the lives of the Saints. With this in mind, we look to our recently canonized Saint Kateri Tekakwitha as one who embodies a convincing “argument” for the truth of the Catholic faith.

She was born in a time of religious and political turmoil much like our own. At the age of four, her parents and baby brother died of smallpox. The disease permanently disfigured her own face and weakened her vision. As a teenager, despite her impaired eyesight, her inner vision grew clearer. Deep within her, she received the gift of seeing clearly the truth of Christ and His Church. True vision comes from the gift of faith, which carries with it the capacity to see clearly the beauty of God and His plan for us.

Even with the objections and lack of support from her own clan, Kateri came to know the love of Jesus for her, and she wanted to love Him in return. She was raised by relatives who planned her marriage, which she refused because she hoped to become a Religious Sister. Her desire to start a new community of Sisters for young women like herself – aboriginal and disfigured – was never realized.

Kateri’s plan for her life, like many other of her hopes, was dashed. But faithfully and joyfully, she lived a committed single life – understood even less in her day than in ours. In this unusual path, she found a way to love and serve the Lord.

Like so many young people today, Kateri was of two nations, with a Mohawk father and an Algonquin mother. Born in what is now upstate New York, she fled to Quebec after her Baptism in order to avoid persecution. Kateri was a marginal person trying to negotiate different cultures and languages (Algonquin, Mohawk and French), while following the Spirit of the Living God in her heart.

People in the United States and Canada, especially the aboriginal people, love her as their special Saint.



Kateri is a guide for us as we walk together in this Year of Faith. She is a light to help us find in the faces of the poor – which, like Kateri's, are not always attractive because of the effects of suffering – a reflection of God's beauty and goodness. It is in these faces that Christ meets us in a fresh encounter, without which all our words, programs and initiatives are fruitless.

Kateri is a Saint for the pontificate of Francis, our Pope. She inspires us to be a poor Church – a Church of the poor and for the poor – where justice and love are lived in truth.

Living our faith with renewed enthusiasm

The Year of Faith is an invitation to live more deeply the Covenant God has made with us. Through His Son, He has chosen to live among us. In this Year of Faith, we, the Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon, invite you to take a stand with those who planted the seeds of faith before us. In this splendid land of ours, they belong to the great cloud of witnesses who spent their lives upheld by their faith, staking their claim to the truth at the core of the Christian life: the very life of God is poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5) – enlightening, enlivening, guiding and healing us on our pilgrim way. In and through the Spirit, it is Jesus Christ who lives in us to the glory of God the Father.

This Year of Faith is an opportunity for us to rediscover, with our hearts fired by the Holy Spirit, the beauty of the faith lived and handed down to us in British Columbia and Yukon. May the journey we are making this Year enable all of us to grow in faith! To that end, we invoke the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose obedient “yes” to God was an assent of mind, heart and action, asking that she open to us the Sacred Heart of her divine Son.

Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archdiocese of Vancouver

Bishop David Monroe  
Diocese of Kamloops

Bishop John Corriveau, OFM Cap  
Diocese of Nelson

Eparch Ken Nowakowski  
New Westminster Eparchy

Bishop Stephen Jensen  
Diocese of Prince George

Bishop Richard Gagnon  
Diocese of Victoria

Bishop Gary Gordon  
Diocese of Whitehorse

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