

Greetings Message to the People of God in the Archdiocese of Toronto
from Archbishop-designate Most Rev. Francis Leo
11 February 2023, Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Praised be Jesus Christ.

I am reaching out to you all to convey my heartfelt greetings on the occasion of my appointment by the Holy Father to serve this beloved archdiocese as its archbishop and servant leader. I am deeply humbled by Pope Francis' confidence and am profoundly grateful to him. I am very eager to get to know you all personally. Relying on the Lord's unwavering assistance to fulfill the mission with which I am being entrusted, I place my hope in our Heavenly Father's bountiful mercies as He journeys with all of us along the path of the Kingdom. I am also following in the footsteps of Thomas Cardinal Collins and in continuity with the committed, strong and selfless episcopal ministry he has provided for many years and for which we owe a huge debt of gratitude.

Strikingly, it was the Annunciation scene that came to my mind and heart when the Apostolic Nuncio notified me of the appointment. I thought of the Blessed Mother, her amazement and questioning, her trust and her availability to join forces with the Holy Spirit in bringing about the Incarnation; in accepting to play her unique role in the Lord's loving and saving plan; to be a humble instrument in the hands of our loving and saving God. Upon learning of the Holy Father's decision to appoint me, I too was asked to utter my own personal and ecclesial *Fiat* – and I have done so with all my heart.

My ministry among you as a Shepherd in Christ will no doubt provide copious occasions to share our faith, to walk together in holiness, to foster ecclesial communion, and to bring Christ to others in new ways. Together with Mary, each is invited to bring the presence of Jesus to life within our manifold communities. Our profound attachment to the Lord, remaining firmly rooted in His teachings and those of His Bride the Church, will enable us to sow seeds of enduring hope and be builders of bridges for that unity the Lord desires of us.

I will open my heart and mind to listen to you, to hear from you, and I will do my best to be for you an example of Christ the Good Shepherd. I trust that the Lord Jesus will open up new horizons before us, will accompany us with his grace, and allow us to experience abundant life. To my brother bishops, to the priests and deacons, seminarians, women and men in consecrated life and lay faithful engaged in ministry in the archdiocese, I look forward to engaging in close collaboration with you as we build up the Body of Christ, working out of our diverse vocations and charisms. As we abide in His love and walk with hope and authenticity, let us be reminded that it is Christ who is our Chief Shepherd and guides us all to the fullness of truth and life.

In embracing this new “calling within the calling” and so taking up the senior leadership role in the Archdiocese of Toronto, I truly believe that I stand to learn much from you: the very People I will strive to love and to serve, to empower and to inspire, to guide and to lead. As you know, I hail from the great city of Montreal and am the son of immigrant parents. My varied experiences in parish ministry and school chaplaincy, as a seminary formator and university lecturer, my years in the Holy See's diplomatic service, my service at the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and most recently as auxiliary bishop, vicar general and moderator of Montreal's curia –

these have been for me incredible graces beyond all telling and helped prepare me, through Divine Providence, for this new office of leadership and service in the midst of the ecclesial community. I will bring to this ministry all that I am and all that I have.

To those who are near and actively engaged in the life of our Church, as well as to those who are more distant or struggle to choose her as their “spiritual home” - know that you are in my prayers daily and I will endeavour to be a loving pastor, a devoted father, a dedicated brother and an encouraging witness for you. In the immense and beautiful diversity of this archdiocesan family made up of parish communities and religious houses, educational institutions, health care and social services, ecclesial movements and associations, women, men and children, the elderly and the young, persons living on the margins, those with means and the needy, families of all walks of life, cultures, languages and traditions, and those persons in search for meaning, hope, healing and love, whatever your situation may be – know this: the door of my heart and that of our archdiocese are open to you.

As a committed community of faith in the Risen Lord Jesus, we know, nonetheless, that we will inevitably face difficulties and trials. The key, however, is to remember that we are never alone. If we accept to come together in order to encourage and support, challenge and lift each other up, not only will we know the joy of belonging to the Lord and be pleasing to Him, we will likewise be blessed with new dynamism, heartfelt fellowship, and a sense of family in the Eucharistic faith community. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is our most treasured gift; the Kingdom we seek is one of justice and peace; the path is that of holiness and fidelity. I delight in the Spirit with you, as with one heart and one soul we will endeavour to share this gift, to seek this Kingdom and its righteousness, and to walk humbly along this path.

Please remember me in your prayers so that I may faithfully serve the Lord in and through serving you. We are God’s beloved children and with Him all things are indeed possible.

May Saint Michael the Archangel, our patron saint, defend us always and protect us everywhere.

Yours sincerely in Jesus with Mary,

+Francis Leo
Archbishop-designate of Toronto