



CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA

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CIRCULAR FOR THE HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016

To,

All the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious, Catechists and lay faithful of Latin Catholic Church in India.

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Your Excellency,

Greetings of Peace and Joy in the Lord Jesus Christ, the living face of the Father's Mercy.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has announced an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which will begin on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and conclude on November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe. The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy was declared with the Bull of Indiction, '*Misericordiae Vultus*' (MV) of April 11, 2015.

The motto of the Holy Year of Mercy, "Merciful like the Father," (Lk. 6:36) serves as an invitation to follow the example of the compassionate Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and give love and forgiveness without measure. We wish to live this Jubilee Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The Holy Year of Mercy is a call to the Church to refashion herself as a body not for judgment or condemnation but for pardon and merciful love. It is an occasion and an opportunity for us to deepen our faith and transform our Church into a more compassionate and merciful instrument.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis has suggested numerous ways of experiencing and practicing Mercy in *Misericordiae Vultus*. Keeping in mind those practical ways the Executive Committee of the CCBI requested that we give some guidelines, which the Indian Church could consider in all the pastoral initiatives at different levels: regional, diocesan and parish in the year of Mercy.

1. *Organising Committee*: "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life" (MV10). Thus, under the guidance of the Bishop all the Commissions of the diocese, could come together to form an Organising Committee that would initiate, lead and co-ordinate the initiatives of the Year of Mercy, both, at the Diocesan and Parish levels.
2. *Opening of the Holy Door of Mercy*: "On the same Sunday, (the third Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2015) I (Pope Francis) will announce that in every

local Church at the Cathedral – the Mother Church of the faithful in any particular area or alternatively at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance, a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year” (MV 3). At the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop a similar door may be opened at any Shrine. It would be particularly appropriate if the National Shrines and Basilicas are chosen for this.

3. *Closing of the Holy Door of Mercy*: On November 20, 2016, the day of the closing of the Holy Year of Mercy, all the doors designated as Holy Doors of Mercy will be solemnly closed (MV 5).
4. *Corporal Works of Mercy*: “Jesus introduces us to these works of Mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of Mercy: i) to feed the hungry, ii) give drink to the thirsty, iii) clothe the naked, iv) welcome the stranger, v) heal the sick, vi) visit the imprisoned and vii) bury the dead.” (MV15). If we can motivate every baptized person to do “One Small Act of Mercy Daily” it will bring about a mercy revolution in India.
5. *Spiritual Works of Mercy*: “And let us not forget the spiritual works of Mercy: i) to counsel the doubtful, ii) instruct the ignorant, iii) admonish sinners, iv) comfort the afflicted, v) forgive offences, vi) bear patiently those who do us ill and vii) pray for the living and the dead” (MV 15). We are recommended to form Missionary Disciples (MD) (*Evangelii Gaudium*120) who can exercise the above spiritual works and motivate others to do the same.”
6. *Pilgrimage*: “The Practice of Pilgrimage has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life” (MV 14). “May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion, by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God’s Mercy” (MV14).

We are invited to announce some Pilgrimages where people can have the opportunity to enter the Holy Door and encounter God’s Mercy and obtain an Indulgence. These Pilgrim Centres for this Holy Year ought to have teams to help the pilgrims experience Mercy and conversion through faith.

7. *Lent 2016*: “The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s Mercy” (MV 16). Lent 2016 should be considered with new fervour and more reading and meditation of the Sacred Scriptures should be promoted.

“In order to be capable of Mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God” (MV13). All the baptized could be recommended to have a ‘Personal Bible’ and ‘Personal Prayerful Bible Reading Time’ especially in the forthcoming season of Lent. “How many pages of Sacred Scriptures are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful Face of the Father!” (MV 17).

8. *Regular Confession Initiatives*: “Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God’s Mercy with their own hand”(MV 17). We need trained confessors who would be available to lead the penitents to experience Divine Mercy. Special motivational recollections for priests on the theme of ‘God’s Mercy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation’ could be conducted. We can invite also Confessors from outside the diocese especially during the season of Lent.
9. *Missionaries of Mercy*: “During this Holy Year I (Pope Francis) intend to send out Missionaries of Mercy” (MV 18).They will be persuasive preachers of Mercy. “I ask my brother Bishops to invite and welcome these Missionaries of Mercy” (MV 18). From every Diocese some priests can be recommended by the Local Ordinaries to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization and can be registered as Missionaries of Mercy for this Holy Year. Some dioceses have already done so.
10. *24 Hours for the Lord*: “The initiative of 24 Hours for the Lord to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the Fourth week of Lent, should be implemented in every diocese” (MV 17) March 4 and 5, 2016 can be marked as the days of intense prayer in every Diocese, Parish, Religious House, Institution and Mission Station in India. There can be an organized 24 Hours of chain prayer involving different groups which could be nominated, motivated and trained.
11. *Mercy Outreaches*: “May we reach out to them (wounded and hurt) and support them so that they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship and our fraternity” (MV 15). As members of the Body of Christ, we are called upon to respond with deep compassion and mercy to all our brothers and sisters who have feel hurt in some way by any member of the Church or by any minister of the Church.

There is an urgent need to identify ‘Agents of Reconciliation’ who will take the initiative to reach out to those who feel wounded by the ministers and the members of our own community. There can be a ‘Team of Agents of Reconciliation’ well trained for peace making, out-reach, and special Healing Services.

12. *Divine Mercy Devotion*: “Our Prayer also extends to the Saints and blessed ones who made Divine Mercy their mission in life. I am especially thinking of the great apostle of Divine Mercy, Saint Faustina Kowalska” (MV 24). During this year of Divine Mercy we can concentrate and promote the devotion to Divine Mercy through the recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet and litany. We can also make our people aware of the Messages on Divine Mercy revealed to Saint Faustina Kowalska. Moreover we can celebrate the Divine Mercy

Sunday, which follows the Sunday after Easter, April 3, 2016, with greater solemnity.

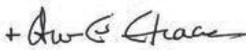
13. *Catechesis on Jubilee Year of Mercy*: An in-depth awareness of the Jubilee year of Mercy is essential to celebrate the year meaningfully and fruitfully. Special conferences on Mercy can be organized systematically by having selected resource persons reaching out to different places and groups throughout the year. These selected personnel would need to explain the meaning of the Year of Mercy, Door of Mercy, Indulgence, Sacrament of Reconciliation, and other works of Mercy recommended by the Church in *Misericordiae Vultus*. They can be also encouraged to write articles and books on Mercy of God and the Jubilee year of Mercy. The Special programmes in this Year of Mercy, conducted at Suvarta Kendra, Panchmari, National Centre for New Evangelization could be utilized.
14. *Dissemination of the Message of Mercy*: The diocesan and regional task force for the Year of Mercy can create and manage a website wherein the events, resources, information, links, samples, short films, documentaries and support programmes can be uploaded for a speedy awareness and co-ordination, use of social media is also very effective.

The main focus and aim of this Jubilee Year is to live out in our daily lives the Mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us and to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's Mercy. (MV 25).

15. *Prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy*: In order to have a fruitful experience of the programmes of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, we urge everyone to pray regularly the prayer for the Year of Mercy prepared by the Holy Father, Pope Francis. We encourage all of you to take initiatives based on these guidelines to celebrate the Year of Mercy meaningfully in our country.

Our Mother Mary, Mother of Mercy, was the first herald of Mercy in the house of Elizabeth, at the Marriage at Cana, under the Cross at Calvary and in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost. May our Mother of Mercy intercede for each one of us especially during this year. We wish you all a fruitful Holy Year of Mercy.

Given from the Secretariat of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India on October 7 on the Feast of Our Lady of Rosary, in the Year of Our Lord 2015.



✠ Oswald Cardinal Gracias

*President, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India and
Archbishop of Bombay*