

Pastoral Letter



Pastoral Priorities of the Archdiocese of Edmonton

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Pastoral Priorities of the Archdiocese of Edmonton

Introduction

Nothing More Beautiful: *in service to the new evangelization in the Archdiocese of Edmonton*

"O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" [1]

In the Archdiocese of Edmonton we have much for which to be thankful. Without cease, God blesses us richly from the infinite depths of his "steadfast love." His greatest gift is life in communion with his Son Jesus Christ by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who draws us together in the community of the Church.

Our *Nothing More Beautiful* initiative is immersing us in the beauty of our Christian life. The encounters at St. Joseph's Basilica, whether our participation has been live or via television, webcast or DVD, have been, and continue to be, a "moment" of wonderful grace for the Archdiocese. They have been inspired by the words of our Holy Father, who joyfully announced at the outset of his pontificate: "There is nothing more beautiful than to know Jesus Christ; there is nothing more beautiful than to tell others of our friendship with him."[2]

[1] *Psalm* 107:1.

[2] Homily at the *Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate,* April 24, 2005.

We have opened our eyes and hearts to this beauty through the series of catechetical presentations and witness testimonies. By prayerful meditation on the great and fundamental Christian truths, we have journeyed through the mystery of the human being as created in the image and likeness of God, the splendour and wonder of the person of Christ, and the beauty of life in the communion of the Church. In the two years that remain we shall immerse ourselves in the fundamental aspects of discipleship and reflect deeply on the social mission of the people of God.

When *Nothing More Beautiful* was first announced, I expressed my hope that our experience of the love of Christ, and of the joy that comes from knowing and following him in the communion of the Church, would inspire us to find new ways to announce the Gospel to the men and women of our day as we continue to deepen our own lives of faith.[3] As the end of our *Nothing More Beautiful* series in 2013 begins to appear on the horizon, it is time to look ahead to what must inevitably follow from this initiative. We must begin now to look to the future, asking how the graces we have received might be translated into pastoral directions and priorities for the future. I have been pondering this for quite some time now, and have consulted with the Council of Priests, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and the leadership of our Pastoral and Administration Offices. The purpose of this letter is to share with you the general orientations and priorities that I believe must guide the Archdiocese of Edmonton in the years that lie before us.

[3] cf. Pastoral Letter, *Solemnity of Pentecost,* 2008.

Foundations

Pastoral planning needs to be established on a secure foundation. The underpinning of our work in the Archdiocese will take as its inspiration the basic structure of the *Nothing More Beautiful* presentations. The catechetical instructions unfolded the beauty of knowing Jesus Christ; the witness presentations were examples of sharing the joy of friendship with him.. This experience has demonstrated that communion with Christ and authentic witnessing to him before others is the very heart of the Christian life. Therefore, the ground of our pastoral activity will be helping one another to know and love Christ more deeply, and to be ever more authentic witnesses to him in the world.

Communion with Christ

"There is nothing more beautiful than to know Jesus Christ."

Prior to the establishment of any pastoral initiatives it is necessary to affirm the need for each and every one of us to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. All that we are and do must begin in and from him. Indeed, apart from the Lord we can do nothing,[4] and all activities are certain to fail. In his first encyclical letter, Pope Benedict XVI stated clearly that the Christian life begins from an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ.[5] Notably, he wrote of this as an encounter with an "event." When we

[4] cf. *John* 15:5.
[5] cf. *Deus Caritas Est,* 1.

truly encounter Jesus Christ, we meet the Incarnate Son of God, and life is changed in consequence.

From the beginning of *Nothing More Beautiful* we have said that its ultimate goal has been to promote and foster for all of us this encounter with our Lord. This must now deepen. I am reminded of the experience of Saint Augustine. His encounter with the beauty of God in Christ left him hungering for ever deeper union with our Lord. His memorable words are recorded for us in his *Confessions*: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! ... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace."[6] The nucleus and energy of all pastoral work in the Church is the abiding union of every believer with the heart of Jesus Christ. Only through such union, ever-deepening, can each disciple embrace and grow in our common baptismal call to holiness.

Authentic Witness

"There is nothing more beautiful than to tell others of our friendship with him."

Christian witness comprises more than words. It embraces the entire way of life of believers. In fact, we are known far more by what we do than by what we say.

[6] X, 27.

Many years ago the Servant of God, Pope Paul VI, put it well when he said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." [7]

We are convinced of the vital importance of the Gospel for our world, and are called to communicate it effectively. There is no more convincing proof of the beauty and might of the Gospel than believers who demonstrate its transformative power by their lives of peace, hope and joy. We are authentic in our witness when the belief that we profess and the comportment of our lives enlighten and verify each another.

The demand to be authentic embraces the entire Church – clergy, religious and lay faithful alike. As individuals we must discern carefully, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, any elements of our lives that are inconsistent with the Gospel so that we may grow in fidelity. Families, too, are called to give authentic witness to the truth and beauty of marriage and make their homes a lived experience of "the domestic Church."[8] Likewise must our various institutions demonstrate authenticity in their witness. Our parishes must be places of welcome and communion. Catholic schools must be characterized by a Gospel culture wherein Christ is known, loved and celebrated. Hospitals that bear the name Catholic must manifest to all, especially to society's vulnerable and marginalized, the unconditional mercy and compassion of God. It should be clear to all who are served by Catholic social agencies

[7] *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* 41.
[8] cf. *Lumen Gentium,* 11.

that our outreach stems from the command of our Lord to love one another as he has loved us.

Growth in Holiness

By living in communion with Christ and striving with God's help to give authentic testimony to him, we embrace the call to holiness. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Baptism we are united to Christ the Head of the Church and thus are sanctified by sharing in the life of the One who alone is holy. This gift is also a vocation. We are called to conform our lives to Christ and to live as befits our dignity as the children of God. Blessed Pope John Paul II reminded the Church that holiness must be the goal of all pastoral planning and action.[9] I am pleased to reiterate this here. The gifts each of us brings to the mission of the Church are many and varied, but we share in common the universal call to holiness, to become saints.[10] Therefore, in all that we undertake, whether through our parishes, institutions or movements of renewal, may we be conscious of our ultimate responsibility to support one another along "the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity" [11] so as to grow in holiness.

These foundations will be the ground and wellspring necessary for any pastoral initiatives to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. Only by remaining deeply rooted in Christ, and open to his mercy which forms us as authentic disciples, can we follow the Lord with fidelity and participate fruitfully in his saving mission.

[9] cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte,* 30-31.
[10] cf. *1Peter* 1:13-21.
[11] *Lumen Gentium,* 5.

Pastoral Priorities for the Archdiocese of Edmonton

As we take care to establish and deepen the necessary foundations, our minds must also turn to pastoral planning. If we are to profit from the graces we have been given through *Nothing More Beautiful*, they must be translated into priorities and strategies. Of course, this is not the first endeavour of the Archdiocese to do so. For many years a great deal of consultation has taken place, issuing in a number of priorities that have been followed to great effect. The establishment of new priorities at this time represents in no way a rupture with the past. Rather, it is a matter of bringing the good work and its fruits forward into a new context with a more concentrated focus.

The priorities I am establishing for the Archdiocese are three: evangelization, faith formation and vocations promotion. These flow from the grace given us in and through *Nothing More Beautiful*. We have been living together the joy of being a Christian, and the renewed hope that comes to anyone who encounters Jesus Christ. How can we not want to share with others the joy and hope that are ours through renewed efforts of evangelization? Second, we have sampled the beauty and richness of our Catholic faith. Naturally, our catechetical presentations only scratched the surface of this immense treasury, and thus left us hungering for more. We must find ways to respond to the often expressed and deeply felt desire of our people to be formed in the faith. In addition, we have instinctively realized that this faith cannot be proclaimed or taught unless the Lord

raises up and sends people to do so. Our need for leaders in the faith has been underscored by our recent construction of St. Joseph Seminary and Newman Theological College. New ways need to be found to work together to form a culture of vocations in the Archdiocese.

Woven throughout these priorities, and uniting them, is the important concept of stewardship. This has long been a principal concern of the Archdiocese and remains so. Stewardship is our response to the proclamation of the Gospel. Its essence is captured in the two questions people first asked as they witnessed God's marvels and heard the apostolic preaching. After the Holy Spirit had descended upon and transformed the apostles, those who witnessed it asked, "What does this mean?" [12]

In response St. Peter preached to them about God's saving plan, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and the listeners then asked, "What must we do?"[13] He then told them that they must repent of their sins and be baptized. These two questions – What does this mean? What must we do? – capture the essential meaning of stewardship and unite our priorities. Whenever the Gospel is preached (evangelization), we must strive for ever greater understanding (faith formation), in order to embrace the many ways in which we are called to change and live in fidelity to the demands of our Baptism (vocation).

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[12] cf. *Acts* 2:1-12.
[13] cf. *Acts* 2: 13-37.

I. Evangelization

The Church exists to evangelize. Our *raison d'etre* as a communion of disciples is to announce Jesus Christ to the world. Of course, the Church has done this from her very beginning. In recent decades, however, Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have been calling us insistently to a "new evangelization." In fact, in October of 2012 the Holy Father will convoke a special Synod of Bishops to give close attention to the theme, "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith." What is more, he has recently created a new Pontifical Council of the Holy See dedicated to the new evangelization. How are we to understand this call?

The word "evangelization" comes to us from the Greek verb *euangelizō*, which means to announce good news. Clearly, there is no better news than the wondrous truth that God has come to us in His Son Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to save the world! Christians have made this known from the time of Pentecost, often at the cost of martyrdom. The need for an evangelization that is "new" is twofold.

First, we have traditionally thought of evangelization as missionary outreach to those who have not yet heard the Gospel. This is called the Church's mission *ad gentes* and is perennially valid. In our day, in addition to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ are many baptized Christians who have grown lukewarm in their faith, have left the Church,

or who, although they participate in the life of the Church, do not know her teachings or follow them only selectively. The new evangelization is directed at all of these audiences. It seeks to re-evangelize the baptized and welcome home to the Christian community those who have strayed, so that, having been renewed in the love of Christ, we may together share the good news *ad gentes*, i.e., with those who, even in our own cities and country, do not yet know the joy of life in and with our Lord.

Second, to borrow from Blessed John Paul II, evangelization today must be "new in its ardour, methods, and expression."[14] Zeal for the evangelical task must be enkindled in the hearts of believers, who are charged with finding new ways to express the timeless message of Jesus Christ. Traditional Christian terminology is no longer understood or even accessible to the majority of people today. Hence the need for new expressions communicated with new methodologies in order to reach our contemporaries with the Gospel. This is why, for example, we have used modern means of communication for *Nothing More Beautiful*, in which we have taken inspiration from Pope Benedict's use of the concept of beauty to convey the Christian message.

The new evangelization will continue to unfold in the Archdiocese of Edmonton in three stages.

[14] Blessed John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of Latin America,* 1983.

Nothing More Beautiful

This series of catechetical reflections and witness presentations has been aimed at believers who are engaged in the life of the Church. Its aim has been a renewed encounter with the Lord in his Church so as to foster within our hearts a "new ardour" for the proclamation of the Gospel. It has been a "launching pad," if you will, for the outreach that we must undertake together toward those who have left the Church and those who do not yet know the liberating power of the Gospel. Even though this first stage will come to a formal end in 2013, we must continue to find ways to help one another grow in the love of Christ and his Church. Conversion to the Lord is a life-long process, and *Nothing More Beautiful* has reminded all of us of our never-ending need to be attentive to His Word and open to his grace.

Welcoming Catholics Home

I say without hesitation that our attention outward must be directed first towards those who have left the practice of the faith. By baptism they are our brothers and sisters. They are our family members, our friends and our co-workers. They are our fellow parishioners near whom we sat in our churches for many years and who suddenly are no longer with us. The Church is their home, as it is ours, and it is time to reach out and invite them to "come home."

Over the next two years the Archdiocese will be making the necessary preparations for this outreach. The motives for departures from the Church are many and varied.

We need to understand those reasons and help people to address them and, where necessary, to heal. Parishes must be very attentive to being welcoming communities, and will need to create the spaces and opportunities for people to "come home" and find the support they need as they rediscover the joy of life in the communion of Christ's Church. Many formal programs are available to assist dioceses in responding to this widespread need. The appropriate choices for our situation will need to be discerned carefully and employed consistently throughout the Archdiocese.

The Mission Ad Gentes

We do not need to travel far to find evidence of the urgent need for the light of the Gospel. There is great suffering among many people in our towns and cities, province and country. Multiple dimensions of our society are unfolding without any clear reference to the Gospel. The mission *ad gentes* engages us in our own locales, and it is incumbent upon us to announce in every circumstance the mystery of the Cross of Jesus Christ as the true "measure of the world."[15]

A few years before his death, Blessed John Paul II wrote an extraordinary letter to guide the Church across the threshold of the new millennium.[16] Echoing the words of the Lord spoken to Saint Peter in their encounter recorded in chapter five of the Gospel of Saint Luke, the Pope's cry to the Church was "*Duc in Altum*!" Put out into the deep!

[15] Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons,* Volume VI, Sermon 7; cf. 1Cor. 1: 18-25; 2: 1-5.
[16] cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte.*

As Jesus commanded Peter to let down his nets into the depths of the Sea of Galilee, so, too, does the Lord call us to set out into the deep waters of our society. Threats against the dignity of human life, the modern challenges to the integrity of the family, the perplexing world of bioethics, the multidimensional culture of our youth, and grinding poverty among so many at home and abroad, are just a few examples of the "deep waters" into which we must set out as Christians in response to the urgent need for a new evangelization. All of these issues and more need the light of the Gospel.



As Jesus commanded Peter to let down his nets into the depths of the Sea of Galilee, so, too, does the Lord call us to set out into the deep waters of our society.

To discern the most urgent need in the mission *ad gentes*, I have been consulting with the Council of Priests and the lay faithful who form our Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. I have also spoken with officials of Catholic Social Services. All unite in their conviction that we must address first the issue of family. I concur. Many of our social ills stem from unhealthy, often violent, family situations. Into this deep water we are called to set out with the light and hope of the Gospel, in order to share

its message of the beauty and dignity of marriage, the inexpressibly wondrous gift of children, and the home as the place of love, nurture, safety, and identity. Over the next year the Archdiocese, through its Office of Family and Life, will prepare a pastoral plan to celebrate and support the family and the gift of life. We shall also engage in further discernment as to how we shall, as a Christian community, set out into the other deep waters of our day.

II. Faith Formation

Related to the first priority of evangelization, and flowing from it, is the Church's mission to build upon and deepen the initial conversion to Jesus Christ by forming disciples, both individually and collectively, in the faith of the Church. The very broad review in *Nothing More Beautiful* of the principal and foundational truths of Christianity has left us thirsting for deeper knowledge and assimilation of our faith.



Promoting knowledge of the faith - introducing and deepening knowledge of Scripture and Tradition in order to grasp the whole truth concerning God's saving plan in Jesus Christ.

This is a complex task. To be faithful to the mind of the Church, it is essential that our formation in faith be integral and authentic catechesis. By this I mean, first of all, that we must distinguish carefully between religious education and catechesis. The former deals with imparting knowledge of the faith, a task which is, obviously, of great importance. The latter embraces this handing on of knowledge, but involves more. The goal of catechesis is "to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity."[17] All that we do in the catechetical ministry must be so planned as to lead toward the fulfilment of this aim. Second, integral faith formation means immersing the catechized, in a systematic fashion, in all of the many facets of our identity in Christ. This will involve[18]:

- **Promoting knowledge of the faith:** introducing and deepening knowledge of Scripture and Tradition in order to grasp the whole truth concerning God's saving plan in Jesus Christ;

- **Liturgical education:** aimed at the "full, conscious and active participation"[19] of the baptized in the Church's liturgical celebration of our life in Christ;

- **Moral formation:** instructing people how to walk in the footsteps of Christ through a life of conversion in accordance with the teaching of the Beatitudes;

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[17] *Catechesi Tradendae,* 5.
[18] cf. *General Directory for Catechesis,* 85-86.
[19] *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 14

- **Formation in prayer:** a life of contemplation and prayer, imbued with Christ's own sentiments of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, confidence, supplication, and awe, flows from communion with our Lord;

- **Education for community life:** the love of Christ leads us to engagement with our society by modelling simplicity, humility, preferential option for the poor, fraternal correction, common prayer, mutual forgiveness, communal love, and ecumenical openness;

- **Missionary initiation:** forming Christian witnesses to bring the Gospel to their professional, cultural and social lives, encourage vocations, "seek out the lost sheep," and dialogue with people of other faiths.

Many different individuals, organizations, agencies, parishes and other institutions of the Church already carry out these tasks in various ways in our Archdiocese. However, greater coordination is needed so that our efforts all support one another in the context of a comprehensive plan.

To this end the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, through the Episcopal Commission for Catechesis, has published a guide to assist dioceses in the formulation of a pastoral plan for adult faith formation. The Archdiocese of Edmonton will adopt this document, entitled *On Good Soil*, as its template. Our Office of Evangelization and Catechesis is charged with the responsibility of bringing together the many partners in adult catechesis to formulate and propose to me a pastoral plan that will address the many faith formation needs of our people in an integrated fashion.

III. Forming a Culture of Vocations

Knowing Christ opens us to hear his call sounding in the depths of our hearts: "Come follow me." The baptized share in common the universal call to holiness and mission.



The baptized share in common the universal call to holiness and mission.

Communion in the love of Christ leads us to ever deeper conversion. It also impels us towards our brothers and sisters in lives of service. This is embraced and lived out in a multiplicity of ways among the people of God. Most are called by Christ to the lay apostolate (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*). To all dimensions of life our lay people are sent with the good news of the Gospel, convinced that it has the power to transform humanity from within and make it new (cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18). From among the people of God, Christ also calls certain individuals to particular roles of leadership in the sacrament of Holy Orders or of witness in the consecrated life. The Church needs

holy and faithful priests to teach, sanctify and govern the People of God. Also essential is the witness of complete self-gift offered by women and men religious who embrace in a radical way the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Traditionally, dioceses have entrusted vocations ministry almost exclusively to a Vocations Director. This can no longer be our model. Certainly, every diocese needs such a director as a point of contact and guide for people as they discern their call. At the same time, it is necessary that every priest and every parent also be cognizant of their responsibility to be a "vocation director." Indeed, in virtue of our communion in Christ, we all bear a certain responsibility for each other, which includes a readiness to support one another in our response to the summons of Christ. How might we help one another carefully discern and be faithfully obedient to the call of Jesus Christ?

In answer to this need I am asking that we work together to form a "culture of vocations" in our Archdiocese. This term is taken from the *Third Continental Congress on Vocations to Ordained Ministry and Consecrated Life in North America*, which was held in Montreal in 2002. It designates a culture in which everyone is helped to know and embrace their call from Christ to serve the Church and the world as a member of his Body. Our Office of Vocations has already initiated planning. The basic building blocks of such a culture are the following[20] :

[20] cf. *Conversion, Discernment, Mission: Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America*

- **Prayer:** Jesus called us to pray for vocations: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."[21] Accordingly, this must be our first priority as regards the vocational ministry. In our homes, parishes and schools I ask that prayer be constantly offered for this intention. At Mass, in moments of prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, during the times set aside by families for prayer together, in the course of prayer times in our schools, and so on, let us with faith and gratitude implore the Lord of the harvest to help those he is calling to hear with clarity and respond with faith to his invitation.

- **Evangelization:** I would like to see particular attention be paid in the Archdiocese to the evangelization of our young people. We have already held, in May of 2011, a special summit on youth evangelization that has generated some wonderful insights and proposals for outreach. As our young people face the future, we want to help them to know the Lord and to hear his call. Therefore, we need to find ways to help them encounter Christ and form them in the faith of his Church so that they will know the call the Lord is addressing to each of them personally. It is necessary to understand and embrace ministry among our youth as a normal and basic means of creating a "vocations culture."

- **Experience:** Immersion in the reality of the Church is essential for discernment. Young people in particular have a special need to be together with their peers and to experience together the joy of life in Christ and of service in his name. Such experience embraces: the liturgy celebrated reverently and well; time shared in the company

[21] *Matthew* 9:38; *Luke* 10:2.

of other believers; outreach to those in need; and hearing the personal faith testimonies of others.

- **Mentoring.** We cannot discern alone. We need the support, encouragement and guidance of others, especially from our clergy and properly trained spiritual directors. Parents, teachers, and fellow parishioners also need to be ready to lend an attentive ear to each other in those moments when we are seeking to know and follow the will of Christ.

- **Invitation.** Practically every priest or consecrated person will say that they received at a point in their lives a personal invitation from someone they trusted to consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life. This is certainly true in my own life. Since we believe in the love of God for every person, and are convinced that he calls each of us to follow him, we ought not to be shy about personally inviting our young people, particularly those who are demonstrating signs of a possible call to priesthood and religious life, to discern carefully and trustingly the will of the Lord.

The vocational dimension of the Christian life needs to be revitalized: people must be called to service, helped to discern their Spirit-given gifts and talents, and guided to align these with the needs of the Church and the world. All Christians are called to put their gifts at the service of the community and thereby to contribute to building up the Body of Christ.



Conclusion

The Three Pastoral Priorities Comprise a Single Vision

The more we evangelize, the more the community is formed, the more we will see the fruit in vocations. In other words, the more that people are drawn into the new life in Christ – the more that they hear of him and genuinely encounter him alive in the community of believers – the more they will want to know him and in turn share with others the joy of their friendship with him. This is our pastoral vision as we move forward into the future.

Clearly, these priorities do not exhaust the Church's activity. They must, however, inform and shape everything we do. Concretely, this means asking, in relation to any ministerial activity, the following:

1. Do people have an opportunity to encounter the risen Lord Jesus?

2. What opportunity is there to learn about the faith?

3. How does it call people to a greater service of God and neighbour?

Let us entrust our life of discipleship to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title as Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the new evangelization in the Americas. By her maternal prayers, may we grow in our communion of love, knowledge, and mission with her son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of all America, help us to be faithful stewards of the great mysteries of God. Help us to teach the truth your Son proclaimed and to spread love, which is the first commandment and first fruit of the Holy Spirit. Help us to confirm our brothers and sisters in the faith. Help us to spread hope in eternal life. Help us to guard the great spiritual treasures of the members of God's people who are entrusted to us.

Queen of the Apostles! Accept our willingness to serve unreservedly the cause of your Son, the cause of the Gospel and of peace, based on justice and love among individuals and between peoples.

Queen of Peace! Save the nations and peoples of the whole continent who trust in you; save them from war, hatred and subversion. May all, governors and the governed, learn to live in peace; may they be educated for peace, and undertake everything required by justice and respect for the rights of each person, so that peace may be strengthened.

Listen to us, "morenita" Virgin, Mother of Hope, Mother of Guadalupe! [22]

September 14, 2011
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

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[22] From the homily of Pope John Paul II at the *Mass to Close the Special Assembly of Bishops for America,* December 12th, 1997.



The Catholic
Archdiocese
of Edmonton