



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

December 1, 2024

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy New Year! No, the calendar has not flipped to January yet, but today we embrace a new year of grace - a new year in the liturgical life of the Church.

As the Advent Season unfolds in this darkest time of the year, we are reminded to call upon Christ who is our light in the darkness. Like those first believers in Bethlehem, we can find that light in the most humble and unlikely of places, even a manger filled with hay.

In the last several years, it has been a challenge in our diocese to embrace light, joy and hope. While many of us have so much to be thankful for—especially in our prayers to God—I recognize the pain that many are feeling.

The “everyday grief” of losing loved ones and friends, missed opportunities and regrets of all kinds will always be a part of life. Jesus reminds us in the Gospel that we will always have the poor with us—those who suffer from lack of material needs, the poor in spirit and the physically or mentally sick.

However, our local Church community has been suffering in other extraordinary ways—the loss of life due to unprecedented storms, a violent racially-targeted mass shooting of innocents at a grocery store and the darkest cloud that hangs over the Church every day—the scourge of abuse suffered at the hands of clergy and laity who instead of caring for God’s people inflicted the deepest of wounds.

To compound all that has happened, we find ourselves in a time and place in the Church when there are fewer vocations, fewer Mass attendees, and a greater need to close many of our beloved parishes and worship sites, which though merely buildings, carry with them a great deal of history, tradition and sentiment for those who have built up the Church within their walls.

I recognize that there are never easy solutions to any of these realities and so many others that we face on a daily basis. Sometimes, even discussing a potential step forward can be an arduous task.

And so brothers and sisters, I invite you to turn in earnest to God who is our strength, as we enter into a diocesan “Year of Healing.” Beginning today, the First Sunday of Advent, and continuing through December 28, 2025, in conjunction with the Holy See’s Jubilee Year, we as a local Church will come together in prayer and in action to ask God to heal the wounds of sin and division in our midst. Jubilee 2025 has been described as an “event of great spiritual,

ecclesial, and social significance in the life of the Church.” As the Jubilee and the very life of our discipleship in Christ calls us to be “Pilgrims of Hope” we here in the Diocese of Buffalo will look forward to opportunities to dialogue and pray, to gather and to go out in the Lord’s name as never before.

While there will be no “holy doors” opened as in Rome, the Cathedral, along with a few of our most significant parishes and shrines, will be designated as pilgrimage points, to foster hope and healing.

The Eucharist—already central to our faith as Catholics—and the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick will of course play key roles on our pilgrim journey.

It is providential that the Sunday Lectionary cycle for this new year will follow the Gospel of Luke — an evangelist, doctor and missionary. As patron of physicians and artists, Luke’s Gospel communicates the concern of Jesus for those who are sick, those experiencing impoverishment and anyone in need of help, mercy, forgiveness and healing.

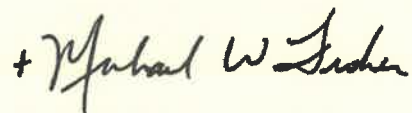
Above all, Luke depicts the compassionate care of Jesus in his ministry and highlights this in some of the most beloved parables of the Scriptures, including the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). As we continue on the *Road to Renewal* we are reminded of Luke 24, and the encounter on the road to Emmaus.

The symbol of Luke’s Gospel is an ox — an animal often used for sacrifice as an offering to God in ancient times. Luke reminds us of Jesus’ great sacrifice on the Cross to save all people through his Passion, Death and Resurrection and the Cross will become a focal point of this year.

Our past has been fraught with many challenges — individually, communally and certainly as a Church. All of us in some way find ourselves in need of healing and the power of God’s grace.

My constant prayer is that we may accept the daily invitation to carry the Cross in solidarity with those around us. May we open more fully to all that Lord has in store for us as we embark on this new journey of hope and healing.

Through the intercession of Saint Luke, may God bless you and protect you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Michael W. Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Michael W. Fisher  
Bishop of Buffalo