



Friday May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Dear Clergy and Faithful of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan

As most of you know, the past several months have been unique for me. Medically, I was diagnosed last year with prostate cancer. I have received treatments for this, and my oncologist has assured me that there is very little evidence of cancer in recent tests. However, I have had to deal with some of the after-effects of the radiation treatments. My urologist is scheduling some exploratory surgery with a view to offering me a confirmed diagnosis, as well as propose a course of treatments most appropriate to deal with my present condition. I am cautiously optimistic as I hear the doctors speak of procedures and possible outcomes. Any of you who have seen me will know first-hand the degree of my confidence, joy and humour as I face each day.

All the while, I have experienced through these events a depth of peace, relationship, harmony and life-to-the-fullest that has been unique. Having heard of the prayers and kind wishes of countless people, I have been humbled by their constant intercession on my behalf. I have heard from some people that I have not heard from in years. I have found myself recalling and pondering deeply the events and persons that have touched and fashioned my life. I have had many hours and days of solitude, spaces in my days and nights when I could just be with Jesus and feel his love. To those who asked if I wanted visitors or not, I assured them that those who did stop by were neither too many nor too few. There has been a balance to my days.

At the same time, I have had to admit my limitations due to age and illness. I am only a year and a half away from my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday – this is the age of retirement for bishops and pastors, in canon law. Recognizing these realities and realizing that the appointment of a new archbishop for this archdiocese will bring about great changes, I have asked the apostolic nuncio (the Pope's representative in Canada) if the Holy See could appoint for me a coadjutor archbishop in the coming months. The nuncio has assured me that this process has begun. I have as yet no idea who this will be, or when he will be named. When he is named, he would be an assistant bishop for me to handle tasks I find myself increasingly difficult to accomplish. At

the same time, I will prepare him to take over guiding and shepherding the archdiocese when I do retire.

Many ask me what I plan to do in my retirement. There are few restrictions on what a bishop can do in retirement, so different bishops have done different things. My plan is to return to the Redemptorist community which was my first love and commitment as a young man and priest. I see myself returning to the Redemptorist Province of Canada (which has changed a great deal since I became a bishop 17+ years ago). I will accept an assignment to a local community where I will gladly contribute to the community life, as well as exercise whatever pastoral ministry I can.

I think of my Redemptorist community as my first love, as indeed it is. But I have also come to know and love the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan. I have never looked upon my being your bishop as a “charge” or a “duty”. At the time I was made bishop, I was the pastor at St. Joseph’s Parish in Grande Prairie. This parish was large and growing, and occupied all my time and energy. I knew very little about the rest of the archdiocese. In becoming the archbishop, I ventured to the far reaches and corners of our territory. I got to experience farming towns and Indigenous communities. I came to learn the realities that shaped the lives and livelihoods of the people in the Peace country. I got to learn and appreciate the history that has given character to our people. I got to meet and love the families and individuals that I came to call “my flock”. I was welcomed warmly into your homes and hearts; a person doesn’t just walk away and forget. There is a large part of my heart that will bear the marks of the people of this diocese until the day I die. I hope to return “*de temps en temps*”, if not in real time, then at least in my memories.

I’ve always believed that our life only makes sense when we give it away. You can’t keep your life for yourself ... you have to give it away! To a spouse or your children, to a cause, to a community of people who care. Your life is the only thing you really have. So don’t waste it; give it. Make an offering of your life and all that you have. Offer your life, consecrate it, give it to God – in your beginning, God gave it to you.

I thank you all deeply for your prayers and kind gestures. Either I or my chancery office staff will keep you posted in the coming months on my health and other developments in the archdiocese.

Yours sincerely in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan