



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Christmas, 2015

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish to express to each of you my sincere and warmest greetings for a merry and blessed Christmas. I pray that you and your loved ones will experience the Father's mercy and love, gifts which are ours unconditionally through Jesus, the Christ.

The celebration of Christmas carries special meaning within the Catholic Church in this Jubilee Year of Mercy. In his letter announcing the Year of Mercy, Our Holy Father Pope Francis - speaking of that first Christmas Day - reminds us that: *"...in the fullness of time, when everything had been arranged according to His plan of salvation, (God the Father) sent His Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal His love for us in a definitive way (so that whoever sees Jesus sees the Father.)"*

All too often, it appears that our world is quickly losing sight of Jesus and the love of the Father reflected through Him. We become blind to God's presence, blind to His love, mercy, and compassionate care. It is not enough for us to commemorate Christmas as though it were simply an historical event. We must live Christmas daily, bringing to light in our own lives the power and grace of the Lord Jesus. As our Holy Father proclaimed, this Year of Mercy must be: *"a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective... Mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who His true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us."*

In this Christmas season, I invite you to open your hearts to the mercy and love of Jesus Christ and, in doing so, extend to others that same mercy and love which you, yourself, have received. May Mary, the Mother of Mercy, watch over you always.

Merry Christmas!

+ *Bishop Cistone*

Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone
Bishop of Saginaw