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To the Clergy, the Religious and the Faithful
Shillong Archdiocese.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to you all in the name of our Merciful Lord, Jesus Christ.

It is with great joy that I invite you all to join the celebration of the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which our Holy Father, will inaugurate with the opening of the Holy Door on 8th December, 2015 at the Basilica of St. Peter's in the Vatican. As wished by him, we shall be opening this Jubilee Year with the opening of the Holy Door at the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians, Laitumkhrach, Shillong at 4.30 p.m. on 13th December, 2015. The Parishes are invited to dedicate this Sunday to helping the people enter consciously into this time of grace.

During this Jubilee Year, there will be opportunities for everyone to participate in pilgrimages to the Cathedral or to Churches that have been designated in each of the zones of our Archdiocese. Entering through the Holy Door should be the climax of the pilgrimage which calls everyone to move from the old way of life to the fullness of life offered to us in Christ who called Himself the Door through which we are to enter. I invite everyone to join in the pilgrimages in order to make reparation for sin and to renew the process of conversion of one's life.

A very important symbolic act performed by each pilgrim will be to pass through the Holy Door, remembering that Christ identified Himself as "the door." (cf Jn 10,7) This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter' (Psalm 118:20). "No one can come to the Father This passage evokes the passage from sin to grace. '

We shall pass through the Holy Door from the outside into the Cathedral, the holy place, in order to pass from the world into the presence of God, to cross the threshold of the Church is to resolve to leave behind the kingdom of this world in order to enter the new life of grace. The Holy Door stands open as if to symbolize that obstacles that block our passage to Christ are removed by the power of God's Holy Spirit. We also remember that the Lord stands at our own doors, knocking and waiting for us to open our lives to Him.

As indicated in the Bull of Indiction of this Jubilee, *Misericordiae Vultus*, of Pope Francis, this Jubilee calls us to contemplate and experience the loving mercy of God towards us and towards the whole of humanity. This mercy has been made visible and incarnate in Jesus who, by his words, deeds and his whole person has manifested God's mercy to us. At the same time, this is the time for us to intensify the way we carry out corporal and spiritual works of mercy. In this way we live out the theme of this Jubilee Year, "Be merciful like the Father".

We shall be sharing with you reflections on various parts of the Bull of Indiction in order to help everyone to become true witnesses of God's mercy in our world. Each one of us will be able not only to become richer in mercy, but will also be able to draw others from around us to experience the power of the mercy of God in our lives.

A special gift of God that is closely connected with the Jubilee Year is **the "indulgence"**. Pope Francis has summed up the correct understanding of the indulgences: "God's forgiveness knows no bounds. In the

death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes even more evident his love and its power to destroy all human sin. Reconciliation with God is made possible through the paschal mystery and the mediation of the Church. Thus God is always ready to forgive, and he never tires of forgiving in ways that are continually new and surprising. Nevertheless, all of us know well the experience of sin. We know that we are called to perfection (cf. *Mt* 5:48), yet we feel the heavy burden of sin. Though we feel the transforming power of grace, we also feel the effects of sin typical of our fallen state. Despite being forgiven, the conflicting consequences of our sins remain. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives our sins, which he truly blots out; and yet sin leaves a negative effect on the way we think and act. **But the mercy of God is stronger even than this. It becomes *indulgence* on the part of the Father who, through the Bride of Christ, his Church, reaches the pardoned sinner and frees him from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling him to act with charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin.....** Hence, to live the indulgence of the Holy Year means to **approach the Father's mercy with the certainty that his forgiveness extends to the entire life of the believer.** To gain an indulgence is to **experience the holiness of the Church**, who bestows upon all the fruits of Christ's redemption, so that God's love and forgiveness may extend everywhere. Let us live this Jubilee intensely, begging the Father to forgive our sins and to bathe us in his merciful "indulgence."

An indispensable act of our participation in the Jubilee year is to reach out to the poor, the suffering, to those who are forgotten or rejected. Pope Francis has invited us especially to carry out **the corporal and the spiritual works of mercy.** We listen to his words:

"It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the *corporal and spiritual works of mercy*. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's 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*: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the *spiritual works of mercy*: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead."

Through the Social Service Center of our Archdiocese, we shall be carrying out various programmes of outreach to the poor and the suffering. The collaboration of every faithful will enable us to make a difference in the lives of these our brothers and sisters.

I have appointed Rev. Fr. Teibor Lyngdoh, as the main coordinator for all the programmes of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Those who arrange pilgrimages to the Cathedral will inform him of the date and time they wish to come and arrangements will be made to enable our people to celebrate the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We thank our Holy Father, Pope Francis for offering us this opportunity to experience God's tender mercy and for calling us to reach out to the world in ways that will make the light of Christ shine more brightly.

With Pope Francis let us place this year under the protection of our heavenly Mother, the Mother of Mercy. Our Archdiocese is dedicated to Her, the Help of Christians. May she help each of us to live out our Christian calling in a fuller manner.

Yours in Christ,

Archbishop Dominic Jala, SDB