

**RESOURCES FOR THE  
YEAR OF MERCY**



**PART II: THE HOLY DOOR**  
**FEDERATION OF DIOCESAN**  
**LITURGICAL COMMISSIONS**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cover image – The Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Theology of a Holy Door	4
The History of a Holy Door	6
The Holy Door in the “The Face of Mercy”	10
Words from the Predecessors of Pope Francis	13
Mercy: The Role of the Church	14
Frequently-Asked Questions	15
Sample Ritual for the Creation and Sealing of the Holy Door	18
Rituals for the Opening and Closing of a Holy Door	21
Scripture Suggestions	22
Music Suggestions	23
About the FDLC	25

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## A THEOLOGY OF A HOLY DOOR

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A holy door or *porta sancta* has been used since the fifteenth century as a ritual expression of conversion. Pilgrims and penitents pass through it as a gesture of leaving the past behind and crossing the threshold from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, and from darkness to light. Often these rituals are associated with prayer, pilgrimage, sacrifice, confession, and indulgences.

But the door finds meaning only when the believer associates the door with Christ. Jesus is the Door! In the words of Pope Francis, “There is only one way that opens wide the entrance into the life of communion with God: this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation. To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth: ‘This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter’ (Ps 118:20).”

Saint John Paul II offers a similar exhortation: “To focus on the door is to recall the responsibility of every believer to cross its threshold. To pass through that door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us. It is a decision which presumes freedom to choose and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life [cf. Mt 13:44-46]” (Saint John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 8, in the year 2000).

John’s gospel clearly depicts this relationship between Jesus and us. “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:7-10).

It is fitting that a Holy Door be situated within a church building. The door of the Church is the *ianua ecclesia* – “the silent witness to all the moments of our lives” (USCCB, *About the Jubilee Door*, 1999). Often sacramental rituals begin at the door – here, the priest or deacon welcomes the parents as they bring their child for baptism; here, he greets the bride and groom as they begin the wedding liturgy; here, he greets the catechumens at the Rite of Acceptance; and, finally, the priest greets the casket at the beginning of the funeral liturgy.

Therefore, let us create Holy Doors in our cathedrals or other significant churches which can be worthy symbols of Christ and a welcome invitation to seek Him within our communities of faith.

I AM THE DOOR OF LIFE.  
I ENTREAT ALL "ENTER!"  
WHOEVER SEEKS THE JOYS OF HEAVEN  
WILL CROSS THROUGH ME.  
HE WHO WAS BORN OF THE VIRGIN  
BUT NOT CREATED BY THE FATHER —  
HE HIMSELF WILL SAVE THOSE WHO ENTER  
AND GUIDE THOSE WHO GO OUT.

THE CHURCH OF SAINT GEORGE IN MILAN, 1505

O God, by means of Moses,  
you instituted for your people a jubilee year and year of forgiveness,  
grant that your Church may live with joy  
this opportune time during which you open up for us, your faithful,  
the holy door,  
that they may enter and lift up to you their prayers  
and thus receiving forgiveness and indulgence  
and the full remission of their sins,  
they may walk speedily into a new life  
in accordance with the Gospel of your Son  
and may reach the heavenly glory of your house."

Blessed Paul VI,  
Prayer for the Opening of the Holy Door  
Vatican City, 1975

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# THE HISTORY OF A HOLY DOOR

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BY ARCHBISHOP PIERO MARINI

Excerpts from “The Opening of the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000,” an article by Archbishop Piero Marini, Titular Bishop of Martirano and former Papal Master of Liturgical Celebrations. Vatican City, December 1, 1999

## THE RITE OF THE OPENING OF THE DOOR IN TRADITION

...According to the description given in 1450 by Giovanni Ruccellai of Viterbo, it was Pope Martin V who in 1423, at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, opened the Holy Door for the first time in the history of the Jubilee. In those days, Holy Years were celebrated every 33 years. In the Vatican Basilica the opening of the Holy Door is first mentioned at Christmas 1499. On that occasion Pope Alexander VI desired the Holy Door to be opened not only at Saint John Lateran but in the other Roman Basilicas as well: Saint Peter’s, Saint Mary Major and Saint Paul’s Outside the Walls.

A small door, probably a service door in the left part of the facade of Saint Peter’s Basilica, was then enlarged and turned into a Holy Door, in the same location where it is found today. This involved the destruction of a chapel decorated with mosaics located inside the Basilica and which had been dedicated by Pope John VII to the Mother of God.

The Pope also desired the norms of the *Ceremoniale* of the Holy Year, left vague by his predecessors, to be more clearly defined, particularly the rite of the opening and closing of the Holy Door. The drawing up of the rites was entrusted by the Pope to the famous John Burckard, Master of Papal Ceremonies, a native of Strasbourg and Bishop of the combined Dioceses of Civita Castellana and Orte. The Holy Door of the Jubilee of 1500 was opened on Christmas Eve 1499 and was closed on the Solemnity of Epiphany in 1501. The Ritual prepared by Burckard and approved by the Pope, apart from a few slight changes introduced in 1525 by the Master of Ceremonies Biagio da Cesena, has been substantially followed in all subsequent Jubilees.

## RITUAL SEQUENCES IN THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CEREMONIES

### a) Opening

- The Pope vests in a room of the Apostolic Palace and then, together with the Cardinals, proceeds to the Sistine Chapel. There the sending of the Cardinal Legates for the opening of the other Doors and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place.
- The procession makes its way to the Holy Door accompanied by the chanting of the *Iubilate Deo* or the *Veni Creator Spiritus*.
- The Pope says the prayer *Deus qui per Moysen*.
- He then takes the hammer, recites the verses *Aperite mihi portas iustitiae* and strikes the wall covering the Holy Door three times.
- The Pope returns to his seat and says the prayer *Actiones nostras*.
- The masons continue the work of opening the Door to the chanting of the Psalm *Iubilate Deo omnis terra*.
- The Pope genuflects at the threshold of the door.
- The Pope is the first to pass through the Holy Door as the choir chants the *Te Deum laudamus*.
- The procession moves towards the altar for the celebration of Vespers.

## b) Closing

- The Pope processes into the Basilica through the Holy Door and presides at Vespers in the Basilica.
- He then sends the Cardinal Legates charged with closing the Doors of the other Basilicas.
- A procession follows, first to the relics and then to the Holy Door, accompanied by the singing of appropriate hymns.
- The relics of the Veronica and the Lance are publicly shown and venerated.
- The Pope is the last to leave by the Holy Door.
- He then blesses the stones and the bricks.
- With the trowel he applies cement to the threshold of the Holy Door and sets in place three bricks and a few gold and silver coins.
- Other bricks are added and then the masons, outside and inside the Basilica, finish the work of closing the Door while the choir chants the hymn *Caelestis Urbs Ierusalem*.
- The Pope says the prayer *Deus qui in omni loco* and ascends to the Loggia of the Basilica where he solemnly imparts the Apostolic Blessing.

## CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENTS OF THE TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES (1500-1950)

In the Jubilees from 1500 to 1950 the rites involving the Holy Door remained practically identical. These rites had certain characteristic elements:

### *The wall*

From 1500 to 1975 the Holy Door of the four Roman Basilicas was closed on the outside by a wall, not by a door. Consequently, at the moment of the opening, rather than a door being opened, a wall was taken down: the Pope took down a part of the wall and masons then completed the work demolishing it. There are still vivid memories of the sense of anxiety felt when cement fragments fell just a few inches from Pope Paul VI during the opening of the Holy Door on Christmas Eve 1974.

### *The hammer*

At Christmas 1499 the Pope used a hammer to strike three times the wall covering the Holy Door. Initially the hammer of the masons was used and the strikes were not entirely symbolic. Almost immediately however the hammer became a precious work of art. In 1525 it was made of gold and in 1575 it was of gilded silver with an ivory handle.

### *The trowel*

The trowel was used by the Pope for the rite of closing the Door. The first evidence of its use dates from Christmas 1525. The last Pope to use the trowel was Pius XII, during the closing rite of the 1950 Holy Year (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26-27 December 1950).

### *Bricks*

The use of bricks in the rite of the closing of the Holy Door is first mentioned in the Jubilee of 1500. The chronicler of the Jubilee of 1423 writes that "people show such devotion to the bricks and cement fragments that as soon as the door is uncovered they are carried away by a general frenzy; the northerners take them home as holy relics" (L. Bargellini, *L'Anno santo*, 66). The rite of the closing the Door composed by Burckard for Epiphany 1501 calls for two Cardinals to set two small bricks, one of gold and the other of silver, into the wall.

### *Coins*

The custom of placing some coins into the wall of the Holy Door is also recorded from the time of the Jubilee of 1500. Initially the coins were simply set into the cement. From 1575 on they were placed in a small metal box. This custom is still observed.

### *Holy water*

The use of holy water was already mentioned in the 1525 Ritual for blessing the rubble and bricks used in the closing of the Holy Door. Later, holy water was also used for the opening of the Door: the Penitentiaries of the Basilica, once the wall was removed, cleaned both the door-jambs and the threshold with cloths soaked in holy water. This rite was observed until the last Holy Year.

### *The wooden door*

Outside the Basilica the Holy Door was covered by a wall, while inside the wall was covered by a simple wooden door. The door was taken away prior to the removal of the wall and replaced immediately afterwards, since it served as a barrier at night, when visits by pilgrims were not permitted. The simple and unadorned wooden doors, still seen today on the outside of the Holy Doors of Saint John Lateran, Saint Mary Major and Saint Paul's, were the older doors which until the Jubilee of 1975 were placed in front of the Holy Door inside the Basilica. In Saint Peter's Basilica on the other hand, the last wooden door, installed by Pope Benedict XIV in 1748, was replaced on 24 December 1949 by a bronze door blessed by Pope Pius XII immediately after the opening of the Holy Door.

## **THE CHANGES OF 1975**

At Christmas 1975 modifications were made to the rite of closing of the Holy Door. The Pope no longer used the trowel and the bricks to begin the rebuilding of the wall, but simply closed the two sides of the 1950 bronze door. The door, which until that time had been inside the Basilica, thus faced outside, as we still see it today. The wall which once covered the door outside was later built inside the Basilica and on 27 February 1975 the traditional box with coins and the parchment document attesting the closing of the Holy Door was sealed inside it....

...The changes introduced in the closing rite of the 1975 Holy Year have drawn attention away from the wall and towards the door. The Holy Door has thus been enriched by the profound biblical, theological, liturgical and pastoral significance attached to the door in salvation history and in the history of the Church; it thus becomes one of the most powerful signs of the Jubilee... [cf. Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 33]. The ritual aspect has also needed to be modified. In 1975, for example, the trowel was no longer used, since there was no longer a wall to be built; in 2000 the hammer will not be used, since there is no longer a wall to be removed but only a door to be opened.

The elements of the old ritual which have become obsolete will be replaced by others which better express the biblical and liturgical significance of the Holy Door. These ritual elements are also meant to highlight some of the special aspects which, following the indications of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, have typified these last years of the universal Church's preparation for the Jubilee. These will be evoked and in some way made present at the crossing of the threshold of the Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Second Millennium of the Birth of Christ.

The following are the most expressive ritual elements planned for the rite of the opening of the Holy Door of the Vatican Basilica at the beginning of the Jubilee [1999-2000]:

## THE 1999 ORDER OF OPENING THE DOOR

- The procession and the "statio" in front of the door, with the proclamation of the Gospel of Luke, vv. 4:14-25. Jesus' proclamation in the synagogue of Nazareth: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has sent me ... to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord" ...
- The acclamation sung before the open Door: *Christus heri et hodie, Finis et Principium; Christus Alpha et Omega, Ipsi gloria in saecula!* These are the words which the Pope has proposed as a synthesis of the Jubilee. They point to the open door as a sign of Christ, Lord of history, present in his Church until the end of time (cf. Heb 13:8).
- The presence of a special group of the faithful from various continents and of cultural expressions belonging to different peoples are meant to emphasize the universality of salvation and the mission of the Church
- The decoration of the Door with flowers and the use of fragrances is meant not only to honour the symbol of Christ, the universal door of salvation, but also to be a sign of the joy which is so much a part of the Jubilee Year (cf. TMA 16; IM 6).
- The showing of the Gospel Book by the Holy Father at the center of the Holy Door emphasizes once more the centrality of Christ, the Word of the living God, the Gospel of the Father. Proclaiming the Good News will continue to be the task of the new evangelization in the coming Millennium.
- The sounding of horns, using native African instruments, evokes the convocation of the biblical Jubilee, but it also marks the joyful beginning of the Jubilee year for the whole Christian people.... The sound of the horns not only expresses joy at the opening of the door but also invites all Christians to cross the threshold of hope during the Jubilee year.
- A group of lay people from America and Europe will also accompany the procession with the Gospel Book towards the papal altar of the Basilica.
- A deacon chants the text of the *Proclamation of the Great Jubilee*

## CONCLUSION

... The sign of the *Holy Door*, so outstanding a sign of the Jubilee of 2000, "evokes the passage from sin to grace which every Christian is called to accomplish. Jesus said: 'I am the door' (Jn 10:7), in order to make it clear that no one can come to the Father except through him. This designation which Jesus applies to himself testifies to the fact that he alone is the Saviour sent by the Father. There is only one way that opens wide the entrance into the life of communion with God: this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation. To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth: 'This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter' (Ps 118:20)....

... All are waiting to see the Pope who began his papacy with the cry, "Open wide the doors to Christ", personally open the Holy Door. All are waiting to see the author of *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* himself cross the threshold of the Great Jubilee. He will be the first to cross this threshold as a means of encouraging great crowds of the faithful to enter more profoundly into the mystery of the salvation present in the Church as she joyfully celebrates the two-thousandth anniversary of the Birth of her Spouse and Lord, Jesus Christ.

■ *Archbishop Marini, December 1, 1999*

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## THE HOLY DOOR IN “THE FACE OF MERCY”

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*Excerpts from Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*

BULL OF INDICTION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

FRANCIS  
BISHOP OF ROME  
SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD  
TO ALL WHO READ THIS LETTER  
GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE

1. Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (*Eph 2:4*), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (*Ex34:6*), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (*Gal 4:4*), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. *Jn 14:9*). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person[1] reveals the mercy of God.
2. We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.
3. At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.

The Holy Year will open on 8 December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This liturgical feast day recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. And so he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4), choosing her to be the Mother of man's Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, the Holy Door will become a Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope (emphasis added).

On the following Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Holy Door of the Cathedral of Rome – that is, the Basilica of Saint John Lateran – will be opened. In the following weeks, the Holy Doors of the other Papal Basilicas will be opened. On the same Sunday, I will announce that in every local church, at the cathedral- the mother church of the faithful in any particular area – or, alternatively, at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance, a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year (emphasis added). At the discretion of the local ordinary, a similar door may be opened at any shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion. Every Particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal. Thus the Jubilee will be celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches as a visible sign of the Church's universal communion.

4. I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father's love in the world.

With these sentiments of gratitude for everything the Church has received, and with a sense of responsibility for the task that lies ahead, we shall cross the threshold of the Holy Door fully confident that the strength of the Risen Lord, who constantly supports us on our pilgrim way, will sustain us (emphasis added). May the Holy Spirit, who guides the steps of believers in cooperating with the work of salvation wrought by Christ, lead the way and support the People of God so that they may contemplate the face of mercy.

5. The Jubilee year will close with the liturgical Solemnity of Christ the King on 20 November 2016. On that day, as we seal the Holy Door, we shall be filled, above all, with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for having granted us an extraordinary time of grace. We will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to

build a brighter future. How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!

14. The practice of *pilgrimage* has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a *viator*, a pilgrim travelling along the road, making his way to the desired destination. Similarly, to reach the Holy Door in Rome or in any other place in the world, everyone, each according to his or her ability, will have to make a pilgrimage. This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us (emphasis added)....

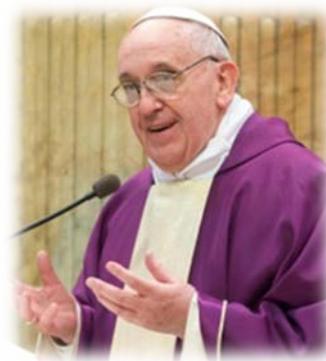
25. I present, therefore, this Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us. In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of casting open the doors of his heart and of repeating that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ. The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ (emphasis added). From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness which springs up from it.

In this Jubilee Year, may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: "Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old" (*Ps* 25:6).

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 11 April, the Vigil of the Second Sunday of Easter, or the Sunday of Divine Mercy, in the year of our Lord 2015, the third of my Pontificate.*

**FRANCISCUS**

Photo © ANSA



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## WORDS FROM THE PREDECESSORS OF POPE FRANCIS

(as quoted in *Misericordiae Vultus*)

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### SAINT JOHN XXIII

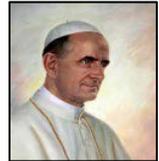
at the opening of the Council, October 11, 1962: *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, nos. 2-3



“Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity... The Catholic Church, as she holds high the torch of Catholic truth at this Ecumenical Council, wants to show herself a loving mother to all; patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness toward her separated children.”

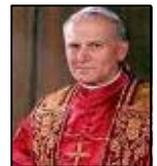
### BLESSED PAUL VI

At the closing of the Council, December 8, 1965; *Speech at the Final Public Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, delivered December 7, 1965.*



“We prefer to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature of this Council... the old story of the Good Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the Council... a wave of affection and admiration flowed from the Council over the modern world of humanity. Errors were condemned, indeed, because charity demanded this no less than did truth, but for individuals themselves there was only admonition, respect and love. Instead of depressing diagnoses, encouraging remedies; instead of direful predictions, messages of trust issued from the Council to the present-day world. The modern world’s values were not only respected but honored, its efforts approved, its aspirations purified and blessed... Another point we must stress is this: all this rich teaching is channeled in one direction, the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need.”

**SAINT JOHN PAUL II** *Dives in Misericordia, November 30, 1980*



“The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. The word and the concept of ‘mercy’ seem to cause uneasiness in man, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it (cf. *Gen 1:28*). This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to have no room for mercy... And this is why, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God.”

“... The mystery of Christ... obliges me to proclaim mercy as God’s merciful love, revealed in that same mystery of Christ. It likewise obliges me to have recourse to that mercy and to beg for it at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and of the world.” ...“The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer – and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior’s mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser.”

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church "has an endless desire to show mercy." Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behavior after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.

The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.

Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 10, 12

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## FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS

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**Q. *Misericordiae Vultus* has been called a “papal bull of indiction.” What is a “papal bull”?**

According to the Vatican press office, "The term bull -- from the Latin 'bullā' meaning 'bubble' or, more generally, a rounded object -- originally indicated the metal capsule used to protect the wax seal attached with a cord to a document of particular importance to attest to its authenticity and, as a consequence, its authority.

"Over time, the term began to be used first to indicate the seal, then the document itself, so that nowadays it is used for all papal documents of special importance that bear, or at least traditionally would have borne, the pontiff's seal," the statement said.

The papal bull for a holy year indicates its opening and closing dates, the main ways in which it will be implemented, and “the intentions and the outcomes hoped for by the pontiff.”

**Q. When will Pope Francis open the Holy Door? Why did he choose this day?**

He will open the Holy Door at St. Peter’s on Tuesday, December 8, 2015. “I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, the Holy Door will become a *Door of Mercy* through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope” (MV 3).

The day also has other significance. “I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world” (MV 4).

**Q. Will the Pope open any other Holy Doors?**

On the following Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Holy Door of the Cathedral of Rome – that is, the Basilica of Saint John Lateran – will be opened. In the following weeks, the Holy Doors of the other Papal Basilicas will be opened (MV 3).

## Q. How do we create a Holy Door?



*Holy Door -- National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC*

Each cathedral should designate a door as a Holy Door. It should be accessible to pilgrims, including those with disabilities. Preferably, use an interior door if the church has a vestibule. Most cathedrals have multiple doors for egress and exit. Choose a door that is one of several, that is, other doors may be used for crowds to go through, especially in case of emergency. Check with your local fire department for any local codes.

It may be “sealed” by locking it, by putting a velvet rope of either side of the door, or by stretching a ribbon across it (perhaps with the Year of Mercy logo). The door itself should be beautiful and in good repair. The door may be decorated with a cross. The Pope’s coat of arms may be placed above it to show solidarity with the Holy Father’s worldwide celebration of this Year of Mercy.

## Q. When do we seal the Holy Door?

The door may be sealed between now and December 13. Some cathedrals and basilicas have already sealed their door, others are selecting September 8 (The Nativity of Mary), still others are sealing the Door forty days before December 13 (November 3). Choose a day of special significance to the diocese or the cathedral parish.

## Q. How should we explain to the people the significance of the Holy Door?

Catechesis is always an important precedent to ritual. Consider posting a framed explanation on a wall near the door so that all visitors can read about it. You may wish to print brochures in multiple languages. In addition, draft a brief article which can be distributed to all the parish bulletin editors in the diocese. Encourage pilgrimages to the cathedral, December 13, 2015 to November 13, 2016.

## Q. When should our diocese open a holy door at our cathedral?

Each diocese should open a “Door of Mercy” on December 13, the Third Sunday of Advent – the day the Pope opens the holy door at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. “On the same Sunday, I will announce that in every local Church, at the cathedral – the mother church of the faithful in any

particular area – or, alternatively, at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance, a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year” (MV 3) .

**Q. May our diocese open more than one Holy Door?**

“At the discretion of the local ordinary, a similar door may be opened at any shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion. Every Particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal. Thus the Jubilee will be celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches as a visible sign of the Church’s universal communion” (MV 3).

**Q. When should we close the Holy Door at our cathedral?**

The doors should be closed on Sunday, November 13, 2016 – the same day that the holy doors will be closed in the basilicas in Rome. The holy door at St. Peter’s will be closed on the following Sunday, November 20, 2016.

**Q. When does the Year of Mercy conclude?**

The Year of Mercy concludes on November 20, 2016 -- the Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (cf. MV 5).

In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of casting open the doors of his heart and of repeating that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God’s mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy...

Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, The Face of Mercy, 25

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## SAMPLE RITUAL FOR THE CREATION AND SEALING OF THE HOLY DOOR

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**N.B.:** The following rite may be used to seal the Holy Door. No official text has been released. The following prayers may be adapted for use at your cathedral or parish. The door may be blessed before the beginning of Mass. The Bishop gathers with the assembly at the Holy Door.

### HYMN

*A Te Deum* or other suitable hymn may be sung.

### GREETING

Bishop: ✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Bishop: Peace be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

### INTRODUCTION

Bishop: A holy door or *porta sancta* has been used since the fifteenth century as a ritual expression of conversion. Pilgrims and penitents pass through it as a gesture of leaving the past behind and crossing the threshold from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, and from darkness to light. Often these rituals are associated with prayer, pilgrimage, sacrifice, confession, and indulgences.

But a holy door finds meaning  
only when the believer associates the door with Christ.

Jesus is the Door!

In the words of Pope Francis,

“There is only one way that opens wide the entrance  
into the life of communion with God:

this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation.

To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth:

‘This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter’ (Ps 118:20).”

So, today, we gather here to seal this Holy Door.

We will open it on December 13, along with all the cathedrals of the world.

Let it be a reminder to all who pass through it

that Jesus is the way to salvation.

Let it serve as a symbol of God’s everlasting mercy

and his constant invitation to us to return home to him.

May the doors of our hearts be wide open to his call.

And may the doors of all our parishes be open to all who seek the living God.

## BLESSING

Bishop: Let us pray.

*With hands outstretched*

Blessed are you, O Lord, God of Mercy.  
You showed great love to sinful Adam and Eve  
and promised them a New Adam who would redeem them from their sins.  
You led the Chosen People out of the bonds of slavery  
and forgave them even when they sinned against you.  
You repeatedly sent prophets to guide your people in the path of your truth.  
You sent your Only Begotten Son who  
    showed mercy to tax collectors and sinners,  
    converted the Samaritan woman,  
    and forgave the repentant thief.  
Christ is the Door to our salvation,  
the Sheep Gate to your wandering flock,  
the Key to the Kingdom,  
and the Portal to Eternal Peace.

Bless ✠ this door which we consecrate to this time of Jubilee.  
Here, may we enter your presence as humble worshipers.  
From here, may we go forth as instruments of reconciliation  
    to a troubled world.

Grant that through your sacraments, especially Reconciliation,  
we may be freed from our sins,  
and, like the Prodigal Son, come home to you, merciful Father,  
and to your loving embrace.  
We ask this through that same Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God forever and ever. Amen.

## JUBILEE SEAL

The celebrant (or other ministers) places the Jubilee logo or a cross on the door or door frame. It is suggested that the insignia of the Papal Tiara and Keys be placed above the door as a way to remember the connection between these doors and the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica.

Ribbons or roping may be placed across each side of the door until it is opened on December 13.

## HYMN

As the door is sprinkled with holy water, Psalm 24 is sung with the antiphon “Lift high the ancient portals! The King of Glory enters!”

The ministers and assembly process into the church and Mass begins in the usual way.



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**THE RITUAL FOR THE OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR**

**ON DECEMBER 13, 2015**

**AND**

**THE RITUAL FOR THE CLOSING OF THE HOLY DOOR**

**ON NOVEMBER 13, 2016**

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The Holy Door of each cathedral is to be opened on Sunday, December 13, the same day that Pope Francis opens the Holy Door at the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Hymnody may refer to God's mercy, but should also be in harmony with the anticipatory nature of the Advent season.

On November 13, 2016, each cathedral will close its Holy Door. But the Year of Mercy will officially end on November 20, the Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. On that day, the Holy Father will close the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica.

We have been advised by The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization that the official text for the Opening and Closing of the Holy Door at the world's cathedrals will be distributed exclusively through Our Sunday Visitor. They plan to distribute it on October 1, 2015.

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## SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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Psalm 24:7-10	Lift up your heads, O gates; rise up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may enter.
Psalm 118: 19-20	Open to me the gates of justice; I will enter them and give thanks to the LORD. This gate is the LORD's; the just shall enter it.
Psalm 122:2	I rejoiced when they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the Lord."
Proverbs 8:34	Wisdom cries out at the gates of the city
Isaiah 60:11	Your gates shall stand open constantly; day and night they shall not be closed.
Matt 7:7	Ask and you shall receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.
Matt 7:13-14	Enter through the narrow gate...
John 10:1-10	I am the gate for the sheep
John 10: 11-18	I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.
Luke 11:10	For everyone who asks, receives; and one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
Acts 7:55	St. Stephen, Martyr, gazes at the gates of heaven and sees "the glory of God and Jesus."
2 Cor 2:12	When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, the door of opportunity was opened wide for me by the Lord.
Eph 2:18	Jesus gives us access in one Spirit to the Father
Rev 4:1	A vision of an open door to heaven; a trumpet-like voice
Rev 21:22-25	Thee Lord, God the Almighty, is its temple –he and the Lamb. The city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of the God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb. The nations shall walk by its light...during the day its gates shall never be shut and there shall be no night.

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## MUSIC SUGGESTIONS

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All Who Labor, Come to Me	Psalm 33	Psallite
All You Nations	Deiss	WLP
All Your Sins Have Been Forgiven	Psalm 84	Psallite/Lit Press
Amazing Grace	Newton	various
Blest be the Lord (Ps 91)	Schutte	OCP
Clear the Voice	Hagan	OCP
Come, You Sinners, Poor and Needy	Mims	various
Comfort, Comfort, O My People	Winkworth (tr.)	OCP
Cry out with Joy and Gladness	Paul Tate	WLP, 007381
Cry out with Joy and Gladness	Rudy Borkowski	WLP, 006272
Deep Within	Jer 31:33/Haas	GIA
Eternal Lord of Love	Cain/Joncas	GIA
Faith and Truth and Life Bestowing	Jones/Dudley-Smith	GIA-HFG
Father, We Thank Thee Who has Planted	RENZEZ A DIEU	various
Forgive our Sins as We Forgive	Herklots	WLP
From Deepest Need We Cry	Delores Dufner	GIA
From the Fullness of Our Hearts	Psalm 86	Psallite
Gather us in Mercy, Lord	Alonso	GIA
God is Forgiveness	Taizé Community	GIA
God is Here! As We His People	ABBOTT'S LEIGH	GIA
God So Loved the World	Paul Tate	WLP
God Whose Giving Knows No Ending	Edwards/ RUSTINGTON	GIA
God's Tender Mercy	Psalm 92	Psallite
Grant to Us, O Lord (Ez 26;36)	Lucien Deiss	WLP
Great is Thy Faithfulness	Chisholm/Runyan	LMGM
He Healed the Darkness of My Mind	Green/Haas	GIA
Heal Me in Your Mercy	Psalm 103	Psallite
Healer of Our Every Ill	Haugen	GIA
His Love is Everlasting	Roberts	LMGM
Hold us in Your Mercy: Penitential Litany	Cooney/Daigle	GIA
How Great Thou Art (v. 3)	Stewart Hine	various
I Called In My Distress	Psalm 34	Psallite
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say	Bonar/KINGSFOLD	various
I Turn to You	Joe Mattingly	WLP, 003679
I Turn to You, Lord	Craig and Kristen Colson	OCP, 20267 Z2
I Turn to You, O Lord	Jeremy Young	GIA, G-2896
Jesus, Lord, Have Mercy	Palmer	WLP
<i>La Alegría en el Perdón</i>	Gabaráin	OCP
Lead Us to Your Light	Carol Browning	GIA
Let Us Sing to the Lord/ <i>Cantemos al Señor</i>	Alonso/Mahler	GIA, G-6129
Lord, Cleanse My Heart	Psalm 51	Psallite
Merciful and Tender	Psalm 103	Psallite

Mercy, O God	F. P. O'Brien	GIA
My Grace is Enough	Psalm 25	Psallite
My Soul in Stillness Waits	Marty Haugen	GIA
No Greater Love	Michael Joncas	GIA
O Christ the Great Healer	Green	GIA
O Christ, Bright Son of Justice	Freeman/ Lewis	OCP
Open Your Hand, Lord	Psalm 103	Psallite
Our Father We Have Wandered	Nichols/ Hassler	various
Our Shelter and Our Help	Luke 1	Psallite
Out of Darkness	Kendzia	OCP
<i>Parce Domine/Spare Your People, Lord</i>	Joel 2:17/Ps 51	various
Penitential Litany	Prendergast/Sullivan	OCP
<i>Perdón Señor</i>	Traditional Spanish	OCP
<i>Perdóname, Jesús</i>	Rodriguez	OCP
Remember Your Mercy, Lord	Inwood	GIA
Remember, Lord	Psalm 25	Psallite
Return to God	Haugen	GIA
Save Me, O Lord	Psalm 29	Psallite
Shine Your Face on Us, Lord	Psalm 4	Psallite
Sing, My Tongue, The Song of Triumph	PICARDY	GIA
Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling	Will Thompson	GIA
Thanks be to You	Haugen	GIA
The Call is Clear and Simple	Ruth Duck/PASSION CHORALE	GIA
The Love of God	Psalm 103; Eph 1	Psallite
The Master Came to Bring Good News	Finn/ Gesangbuch	GIA
The Mercy of God Is for All	Ps 130; Ps 103	Psallite
The Peace of God	Haas	GIA
The Reign of God	Delores Dufner	GIA
There is a Longing	Quigley	OCP
There is Mercy in the Lord	Ps 130	Psallite
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy	Faber	various
Those Who Seek Your Face	Christopher Walker	OCP, 7150
To You, O Lord, I Lift Up My Soul	Hurd	OCP
Turn My Heart, O God	Haugen	GIA
Turn to the Living God	Lori True	GIA
Turn to the Lord	Ps 32	Psallite
We Are Your People	Wren/Wilson	GIA
We Cannot Measure How You Heal	Bell	GIA
We Have Sinned, Lord	Ps 51	Psallite
We Look to You, O Lord	Ps 123	Psallite
We Will Follow You, Lord	Ps 31	Psallite
You Are Good and Forgiving	Ps 86	Psallite
You Are Rich in Mercy	Ps 130: Wis 11	Psallite
Your Mercy Is My Hope	Ps13	Psallite



The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions was initiated by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy (BCL) in October, 1969, after it hosted several informal meetings of the chairs and secretaries of diocesan liturgical commissions to prepare for the imminent arrival of the first English-language Roman Missal. The FDLC remains a national organization composed of members of diocesan liturgical commissions and directors of worship offices (or comparable diocesan structures) duly appointed or established by their local bishops. Its members may also include others who support the liturgical life of parishes, universities, or other Catholic institutions.

The FDLC embraces the vision of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) namely, that the Church "reveals itself most clearly" in the celebration of the liturgy... (SC 41). Hence, "zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightfully held to be a sign of the providential disposition of God in our time and as a movement of the Holy Spirit in his Church" (SC 5).

That same *Constitution* mandated that diocesan liturgical commissions were to be established as a means to assist and advise the local bishop in the areas of liturgy, music, and art (SC 44). Likewise, diocesan offices of worship (or comparable diocesan structures) serve and advise the local bishop. Through these commissions and offices, the FDLC remains grounded in its constitutive dioceses.

Having been established by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States in order to be a trusted and credible voice in the work of liturgical renewal, the FDLC serves the clergy and faithful of the dioceses of the United States by providing leadership, scholarship, and resources to aid in the authentic implementation and celebration of the liturgy.

The FDLC is an association recognized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and is listed in the *Official Catholic Directory* as a tax-exempt organization incorporated in the District of Columbia.

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