

# Bishop Gerard Bergie

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As the spiritual leader of Niagara's 153,565 Roman Catholics, Bishop Gerard Bergie bears a heavy weight of responsibility. In addition to his role as teacher and defender of his faith, Bergie must also oversee the operation of 46 parishes, the work of 93 priests, and the running of the chancery office. All this at a time when his church faces unprecedented pressures both from outside and within. Yet, just over a year into his move to Niagara, Bergie remains upbeat about his calling and positively effusive over the beauty of the region's natural environment—especially the trails that allow him to indulge his love of rollerblading.

The former auxiliary bishop of Hamilton for five years, Bergie took the appointment for the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Catharines, a commitment that encompasses the entirety of the Niagara Peninsula and Haldimand, in September 2010, five months after the abrupt departure of Bishop James Wingle.

After living his entire life in his hometown of Hamilton, the bishop is now taking full opportunity of Niagara's diverse sights and places. "The sheer beauty of nature here, the richness of the bounty with its orchards and vineyards, the great history, you've got everything you could possibly want here and I'm just so happy to be part of it."

Yet, as Bergie perceives, "It's one thing to be a part of a region, but another thing to contribute to it." To help facilitate this involvement, one of the bishop's objectives is moving ahead with enhanced technology for the diocese. "We are in the process of updating our website and we want to use the new media, including things like Twitter, to reach out and connect with people."

Bishop Bergie has been remarkably encouraged by everything he has seen. "As I've always said to people, what I want to do is take something that's good and make it even better."

## *How were you called to the priesthood?*

"It was in the context of high school, where I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life. I was originally thinking of being an architect and I had that in my mind, but I soon realized in drawing and math I didn't really have a gift. By the time

I got to Grade 12, I really wasn't sure what I should do. There happened to be a priest and chaplain of the school, who one day out of the blue said, 'Have you thought about being a priest?' I don't think I'd ever seriously considered it, but he said something important—that you go to the seminary not because you know you're going to be a priest, you go there because you think maybe you are being called to the priesthood. There you're given the tools of discernment, you're given a spiritual director and you are taught how to pray and learn more about the nature of the priesthood and Church. As you learn, you are better equipped to make an informed decision and choice. So, that's what I did and the rest is history."

## *The biggest threat to the faith as you see it?*

"I think it's the indifference of people toward getting closer to God or deepening their faith, but they just don't have the energy or time. I think that people are pulled in so many different ways and directions, sometimes the priorities become confused. I'd like to help build that commitment and understanding of the importance of being close to God."

## *The blessings and challenges of being a bishop in Niagara?*

"The blessings are certainly that I'm here in this wonderful community. I've found the people here to be very good, generous people. Also, there are so many that make this a great diocese, priests, religious sisters, brothers and laity, I see that as a blessing also. As good as everything is, there are challenges for people that are struggling and losing hope. In this economy there are many losing jobs, questions of illness, broken relationships, and poverty. The challenge is providing a sense of hope and bringing

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a vision for how to move forward and find solutions; to not just throw up our hands and give up. One of the images of being a bishop is that of a shepherd. When you think of a shepherd, you're not just way up in front or behind but walking with the sheep and leading them to what is good and positive and hope filled. I definitely see that as a blessing, but also a great challenge."

*Favourite book (or author) read this year and why?*

"I like history, so I like books that are fiction but also based on history. There's an author, Edward Rutherfurd, who has done a number of books on various cities. His latest is on New York. It's a history of the whole area based on people and families that go from one generation to the next."

*What would surprise people to learn about you?*

"I have a model railroad setup where I live. Ever since I was very little I've liked trains, so it's relaxing for me to do that. Although I'm not sure I understand why it is!"

*What four living people would you like to have dinner with?*

"First, Pope Benedict, because he's the pope that named me a bishop and I've not had the opportunity to have a personal conversation with him. Stephen Hawking, because I find him an incredible person with brilliance, and the fact that he's been able to overcome adversity in his illness and yet he's still contributing greatly with a keen mind. I'd find conversing with him very interesting. I like music and I like jazz, so I'd like to invite Diana Krall hoping that she might offer up a rendition or two. And lastly, Wayne Gretzky, since I like hockey and he seems like a pretty good guy."

*What important holiday message would you like to get out to the readership of Niagara Magazine?*

"I think I'd like to relate to people that with God all things are possible, so it is to offer a very hopeful message." NM



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