

*“GO, therefore,
and make disciples
of all nations...”*

A PASTORAL LETTER FROM

Bishop Donald J. Hying

to the faithful of the Diocese of Gary

February 25, 2016

The 59th anniversary of the Diocese of Gary



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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the Church, the People of God have held synods, a formal gathering of prayer, dialogue, reflection and discernment, whose purpose is to live the mission of Jesus with greater fervor and effectiveness. Some synods are universal,

such as the one held in Rome last year to discuss marriage and family, while others are diocesan, held to discuss local concerns. Coming from the ancient Greek, the word “synod” means “walking together.” We see in this etymology the vision of the whole Church gathered as one and moving forward to grasp Christ and his saving Gospel.

Our diocese has never had a synod; the Archdiocese of Chicago last held one over 100 years ago. Synods are a lot of work and are a significant moment in the life of the Church. Why are we having one now?

In my first year among you, I have come to learn and love the diocese, listening, praying and serving with all of you. I have come to know your dreams, ideals, goals, as well as your frustrations and struggles. As a Church, we face remarkable opportunities and enormous challenges in this historical moment. I sense the Holy Spirit calling all of us, starting with me, to a renewal of faith, a deepened prayer life and some strategic thinking about our future together.



My hope is that the synod process will animate our local Church to embrace the mission with a renewed vigor, an audacious hope and creative thinking regarding the major areas of ecclesial life and action. I want the synod to focus on what is possible, what we can change, what is both rooted in idealism but also practicality. The goal and fruit of this experience will be a long-range pastoral plan to guide our faith life together for at least the next 10-15 years, as we move forward in the redemptive power of the Gospel.

THE CHURCH: GIFT and MISSION FOR US

In this section, I would invite us to reflect on the identity and mission of the Church. The more we understand and know about the Church, the more clearly our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ becomes.

“Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36)



With these bold words, Peter proclaimed the kerygma - the astonishing news that the crucified Jesus had been raised from the dead and now reigns as Lord - to the crowds gathered on the morning of Pentecost. After living and traveling with Jesus for three years, listening to his authoritative preaching, witnessing his astounding miracles, and experiencing his merciful power, those first Christian apostles were shattered by Jesus' horrific death, only to be amazed by the unexpected gift of the Resurrection.

And then, just when they were growing accustomed to being with the risen Christ in this new way, he ascended to heaven, entrusting to them the Great Commission to preach the Gospel, baptize believers and make disciples of all nations. At Pentecost, Christ poured out the Holy Spirit, giving birth to the Church and completing his earthly mission.

How I would love to have been in the Upper Room on that unique and beautiful morning when the very Spirit of God anointed Mary and Jesus' first followers! What happened up there? What were they thinking and feeling? What did they see and hear?

We do not know exactly, but we do see the difference the Holy Spirit makes. If the apostles were silent about their experience of the risen Christ before, now they are courageously eloquent in proclaiming the kerygma. If those first followers were afraid and divided before, now they are united and bold. If they were not sure what to do next (Simon Peter goes back to fishing), now they dedicate the rest of their lives to living out the Great Commission of preaching, teaching and making disciples. If most of them ran from the cross before, now they will give their lives as martyrs for the truth of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

The Church is born from the side of the crucified Christ, is anointed and sent at Pentecost and is sustained through the working of the Holy





Spirit. Clearly, Jesus intended to form, anoint and send disciples to all of humanity, indeed to all of creation, to continue his saving work until the end of the world. It is not so much that the Church has a mission, as it is that the mission of Jesus has a Church to carry out the essential tasks of proclaiming the Word, celebrating the sacraments and doing works of charity and justice.

If Jesus Christ is the incarnation or “sacrament” of God the Father, enfleshed in our humanity and operative in history, then the Church is the “sacrament” of Jesus Christ, living, speaking and acting in his name and the authority of the Holy Spirit. The Church makes Christ present in the world and sees herself as the servant of the human person, now raised to a new dignity through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

In his letters to the Corinthians, Saint Paul eloquently lays out the theology of the Church as both the Body and the Bride of Christ:

“As a body is one though it is many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13)

Paul ingeniously uses the example of the human body, in its unity and diversity of members, in its complexity of function and dynamism of action, to articulate the spiritually rich relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church. If Christ is the Head and the community of the baptized is the Body, if he is the Groom and the Church is the Bride, we are intimately bound together, incapable of living or functioning without the other. Jesus Christ intentionally places himself in the position of utilizing the Church as the definitive extension of his love, mercy, healing, preaching and salvation in the world.

Can the Lord work beyond the boundaries of the Church? Yes, certainly, but

the Church remains the consecrated sign and sacrament of his loving presence in the world.

Many people of our time assert that they are spiritual but not religious. They may say “yes” to Jesus but “no” to the Church, feeling that institutionalized religion has too much baggage, too checkered a history. It is too clumsy and too slow or behind the times. Most people assert some sort of faith in God or at least a form of transcendence, that there is more to this life than meets the eye, but many have given up on the Church and do not practice the Catholic faith in any public or regular fashion.

When I listen to people who have essentially left the Church, I hear many reasons for such a choice. A priest or religious was unkind or insensitive. Their experience of the liturgy was insipid and uninspiring. Their parish was not interesting or welcoming. The terrible scourge of the clergy abuse scandal left them disillusioned. They do not agree with the “old-fashioned” teachings of Catholicism. Life just got too busy and Church was no longer a priority. Their little child died tragically from cancer and they are angry at God. We can certainly understand the pain and disillusionment that leads some to drop out of the life of the Church.

There is one compelling and absolute reason to remain as an active and practicing disciple in the communion of the Church. We are absolutely convinced that the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, the Bride of the Lamb, the sacrament of the Lord in this world. The Church is universal, embracing all of humanity, bigger than our parishes, diocese or country. We are spiritually reborn in the waters of baptism through her power; we are fed at the Eucharistic table which she spreads; we are anointed, healed and forgiven in the sacraments and we are saved through the faith that she unfailingly professes.

When people ask me why they need the Church, I reply with personal testimony. I would be lost and alone without the Church; I would not know God or myself without her; she feeds me with the Body







and Blood of Christ, nourishes my soul with the Word, proclaims the forgiveness of Christ, leads me to eternal life, binds me to a global and even celestial family of saints and sinners.

For us as Catholics, our faith assertions are always “both...and” propositions. Jesus Christ is both God and human. God speaks to us both through Scripture and Tradition. We liturgically celebrate both the Word and Sacrament. We embrace both the Head and the Body of the Church. The human person is both flesh and spirit.

Throughout the history of the Church, various theologians and believers have divided these articles of faith and practice into “either...or” propositions. Most of the heresies and schisms in Catholicism are the result of positing that Jesus was God but not human or that Scripture is the only source of divine revelation or that we need Jesus but not the Church. Our Catholic faith has always tenaciously clung to the conviction that God wants us to hold the entire deposit of faith together, as an organic unity.

WHY A SYNOD; WHY NOW?

In my first year here in the Diocese of Gary as your fourth bishop, I have come to know and love the richness and goodness of our beloved local Church. A year ago, Hobart, Hammond, Hebron and Hamlet were just names on a map to me. Our parishes, schools, hospitals, religious orders and charitable organizations seemed a vast and unknown network beckoning me to jump in, stop by, visit, pray together, share some food and fellowship and get to know everybody.

I have rediscovered in this whirlwind year the beautiful and certain truth that the Church is not primarily an institution, an organization or a structure, but rather people! Wonderful, amazing, diverse and good people - young and old, with various skin colors and languages, a multiplicity of backgrounds and life experience, all over the economic spectrum, married couples and singles,



priests, religious, deacons and lay ministers, volunteers and professional staff, some deeply involved in the life of the parish, others just barely hanging on to some form of religious practice - all united in a common baptism and a relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

In studying the history of our diocese, I have come to appreciate and value the enormous contribution of the original French missionaries who preached the Word of God and planted the faith in the rich soil of northern Indiana, the priests, religious and laity who arrived in later years from different parts of America, as well as Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Ireland, Germany, Mexico and the Philippines, just to mention a few. Thousands of people came here in the 20th century, to work in the steel mills, factories and on farms to build a better

life for their children, bringing with them little else besides their ardent Catholic faith and a generous spirit of work and enterprise.

Our forebears built our churches and schools, our hospitals and orphanages to serve the needs of these hard-working people of faith and their children, providing not only prayer and faith formation but also health care, social services and education - to contribute to the common good, as well as to nurture a society where every person could flourish in dignity and freedom.

Many cultural, economic, racial and social changes have transformed the landscape of our region and the Church since the establishment of the diocese in 1957. The changes in the steel industry, the mass movement of people from the city of Gary to the suburbs, the economic downturn of the industrial Midwest, the profound revolutions in communication, transportation, government, education, music, sexuality and culture have led us to a vastly different experience of society, marriage, family, economy and values.

In the midst of such rapid change, we as Catholics have experienced and lived out the profound ecclesial shifts inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council. Since the establishment of our diocese 59 years ago, the world, the

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United States, our region and our Church are remarkably different realities. How we think, relate, communicate, work, learn and play are in a ferment of change that only seems to move faster. We would be naïve to think that all of these rapid social shifts would have no impact on the life of the Church or how we believe and pray together.

In my travels around the diocese, meeting thousands of people, listening to your dreams and hopes, your frustrations and sufferings, witnessing your deep faith and joyous generosity, celebrating together at the table of the Eucharist and so many other tables of fellowship, I have served the Lord alongside you. I have prayed for and with you. I can honestly say that I have fallen in love with you and this diocese. I have consulted, pondered and prayed over the decision to call a diocesan synod, which will culminate on Pentecost Sunday June 4, 2017. My strong impression is that all of us are ready to continue moving forward in a dynamic way to live our Catholic faith with joy, share our relationship with Christ with others, to serve the needs of the poor and sick and to grow our parishes and families in dynamic discipleship.

The synod will be both an animating experience of sharing faith and planning for the future of our diocese. It will be a defining moment for us, a time for spiritual renewal and special graces for our local Church. My

hope is that it will be a new springtime for all of us as we rediscover the precious treasure and joys of our Catholic faith, ultimately bringing about a rich and authentic encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be a time of asking and answering the questions of life. What does it mean to live as a disciple of Christ? How can I have a relationship with Jesus? How can I have a deeper prayer life? How can I serve others, especially the poor and the suffering? How can I help heal our broken world? How do we bring others to the beauty we have discovered in the Catholic faith?

Here in our diocese, I see such a solid foundation of faith, so much inherent goodness and so many ecclesial strengths to build on. Our priests, deacons and lay ministers generously serve with dedication and zeal in so many varied ministries. Our consecrated religious perform many ministries of charity and justice, integrating well into the life of the diocese. Our lay people love their parishes, volunteer unstintingly and seek deeper ways to live and express their faith. Our seminarians are impressive, in their mature spirituality and generous spirit. Varied and numerous, our Catholic health care institutions are innovative and dedicated, serving as essential providers of medical services to the broader community, especially the poor.



The Catholic community is passionately dedicated to the religious formation of our children and young people, pouring many resources of time, talent and treasure, both into our parochial schools and our religious education programs. A sense of stewardship is strong in our people, as they respond to so many causes, collections and special projects. Our physical institutions are vast and varied, needing much attention and upkeep, but also serving the needs of our parishes and communities.

When I ponder our diocesan synod as a process of prayer, thought, discussion and decision about our local Church, eight areas of our faith life stand out as defining principles of our central mission and varied activity. We can readily see these eight ecclesial areas in the life of the diocese, the organization of the Pastoral Center, the activity of our parishes and the structure of our local pastoral councils.

I invite you to ponder these central parts of our common mission with me, lifting up our strengths and blessings but also acknowledging the challenges and raising the questions.

EVANGELIZATION

The central mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel to every creature. The Good News of Jesus - his Incarnation, ministry, miracles, preaching, Passion, death and resurrection - constitutes our hope of eternal life and forgiveness orients our earthly pilgrimage towards its heavenly goal, teaches us how to live, act and speak, informs what we value and embrace. As Pope Paul VI reminded us, the Church exists to evangelize, to share this Good News with every person on the planet, to invite everyone into a loving and saving relationship with God through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Since the pontificate of Pope Paul VI, an increasing awareness and focus has coalesced in the Church around the “new evangelization,” a term coined by Pope John Paul II which refers to the urgent need to evangelize not only peoples and places usually considered “missionary” but also persons and cultures that have traditionally embraced the faith but are now stagnant and disengaged. The missionary nature of our Christian discipleship demands that we give witness to Jesus Christ, seeking opportunities to draw the people we encounter at home, at work, in school and within friendship into a deeper faith and communion with the Church.

We express this evangelizing witness primarily through the details of a holy life, centered on the Word, the sacraments, the



commandments and a joyful love, but we also need to invite, encourage, befriend and bring others to the Lord and his Church. A bold and gentle spirit, an active prayer life, practical knowledge of the faith and the ability to articulate cogent answers to spiritual questions contribute greatly to the effectiveness of the new evangelization. A Catholic who believes, practices and explains the faith with conviction, simplicity and goodness will bring other people to Jesus Christ by the integrity and passion of their discipleship.

For many generations, Catholics in the United States relied on a vibrant faith culture of overflowing parishes, parochial schools, religious organizations and ethnic neighborhoods to inculcate Catholicism in the young. People naturally absorbed the faith in such an environment which was reinforced by an abundance of priests, sisters and brothers working in our ecclesial institutions.

For a complexity of reasons, that whole Catholic subculture has almost disappeared from the sociological map of our country. Today, we need to intentionally invite, encourage and facilitate people to practice the faith and embrace a life of discipleship. Our parishes, schools, families and individual believers need to be formed, catechized and trained, not only to work out their own salvation, but also to effectively invite others into a dynamic relationship with the Lord and his Church.

Clearly, many people all over our diocese are evangelizing on a regular basis. Sharing the faith within families, serving the poor, inviting a friend to Mass, driving a neighbor to Bible study, answering a religious question from a coworker, living a moral life at college are all evangelizing activities. Some of our parishes send visitation teams house-to-house to draw folks into the faith; others have “Catholics Returning Home” programs, while still others have parish staff specifically dedicated to the task of

evangelization. On the diocesan level, I have asked all our program coordinators to immerse themselves in the work of evangelization.

While we joyfully acknowledge the many great efforts to spread the faith in our diocese, we must also painfully admit that most Catholics are not regularly at Sunday Mass, do not celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, are not involved in their parishes, and by any measurable benchmark, do not have a living relationship with the Church.

On top of that challenge, more people in our society, especially the young, self-identify as non-affiliated when it comes to religion. Many times, when celebrating Sunday Eucharist at a local parish, I have looked around the pews and realized that if we factored out everyone over the age of 65, there would not be many people left. We may have a priest and religious shortage but we also have a laity shortage. We have much to learn from engaging and listening to people who have disconnected from the Church or have stopped practicing faith altogether.

So we ask central questions worthy of our prayer and discussion in the synod process...

- How do we equip our parishes, schools, families and members to be effective and engaged in the central Church task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- How do we form intentional disciples and come to view our parishes as circles of faith, love and discipleship?
- What formation do we need to offer our people?
- How do we fire up the lukewarm, disengaged or those who are hurt or disillusioned to discover Catholicism or recover a faith perhaps grown cold?

SACRAMENTS, PRAYER and WORSHIP

At the core of our Catholic faith are the sacraments, those fundamental encounters of grace that sustain the life of Christ within us. Baptism is the sacred door that leads us into the Church, binds us to Christ and leads us into the life of the Trinity. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, our fundamental act of worship, in which we participate in the priestly offering of Jesus Christ to the Father, hear the Word and receive the sacred Body and Blood of the Lord. Confirmation is the completion of baptism, sealing us in the power of the Holy Spirit and sending us to proclaim the Gospel.

Reconciliation offers us the abundant mercy and forgiveness of God as we acknowledge our sins and trust in his love for us. The anointing of the sick extends the healing ministry of Jesus in the lives of the suffering, proclaiming the victory of the cross, even in the face of pain and difficulty. The

sacraments of vocation, marriage and holy orders, are specific ways that members of the Church live out the spousal relationship between Christ and his Bride, in the service of communion and life.

I applaud and affirm the many people, programs, classes and methods making possible the celebration, preparation, formation and support of the faithful who celebrate the sacraments in our diocese. Priests, deacons, religious, lay ministers, catechists, parents, teachers, sponsors are all deeply engaged in this essential sacramental work, knowing well that the Church would cease to exist without the life-giving force of the sacraments in our lives. When I ponder the thousands of sacramental encounters we collectively experience on a daily basis, I praise God and the Church for this fount of grace, mercy, salvation and divine life that flows over us.

So we ask central questions worthy of our prayer and discussion in the synod process...

- How can we make all of our sacramental preparation even better and more effective in the lives of our people?
- How do we catechize, teach and preach about the sacraments, so that everyone understands and participates in the communal prayer of the Church?
- How do we help our parishes and pastoral leaders to celebrate the Eucharist and the other sacraments in a deep spirit of prayer and joy, so that our people are drawn into the love and presence of God?
- How do we respond to the disturbing fact that fewer people celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday, marry in Church or have their children baptized?
- How do we teach people the necessity and method of personal prayer?



DISCIPLESHIP/ FORMATION

Catechetical formation in the faith is a key component in the life of a Christian disciple. An integrated, practical and encompassing knowledge of the Scriptures and the Tradition, the creed and the commandments, the basic teachings of the Church is necessary to live, profess and share all the richness of salvation that the Father has given us in Christ. This religious formation must be ongoing, for children, youth and adults. It must be contextualized in a life of worship, prayer, service and love. It is a knowledge growing into wisdom.

To this essential end, our diocese commits many resources to religious formation. Our schools, religious education programs, sacramental preparation experiences and adult learning all contribute to both the heart and head knowledge of the Catholic faith that we all need.

Our 17 grade schools and three high schools form our young people in a holistic environment of faith. In my visits and encounters at all of our schools, I have been deeply impressed with the quality and commitment of the principals, presidents and pastors, the enthusiasm and professionalism of the teachers and the joy, respect and kindness of the students. Both the reverence and the participation of the school community at the Eucharist is a joy to experience!

While some may question the expense and effectiveness of Catholic education today, I whole-heartedly support it. Catholic school graduates consistently live their faith, succeed professionally, contribute to the common good and the needy at higher levels than those who do not attend a Catholic school. That is not to say that Catholic education is necessarily for every child, but it remains an essential component in the Church's evangelizing and catechizing mission.

I applaud our schools for the depth of their Catholic identity, the quality of their education, the integrated character formation and the commitment of our personnel. I am inspired and grateful for every school in our diocese. The challenges include the recruitment and retention of quality teachers and administrators, their ongoing religious formation, financial stability, accessibility to middle and lower income families, governance and ongoing viability.



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We move from asking, "What do I have to do?" to "What can I do for you, Lord?"
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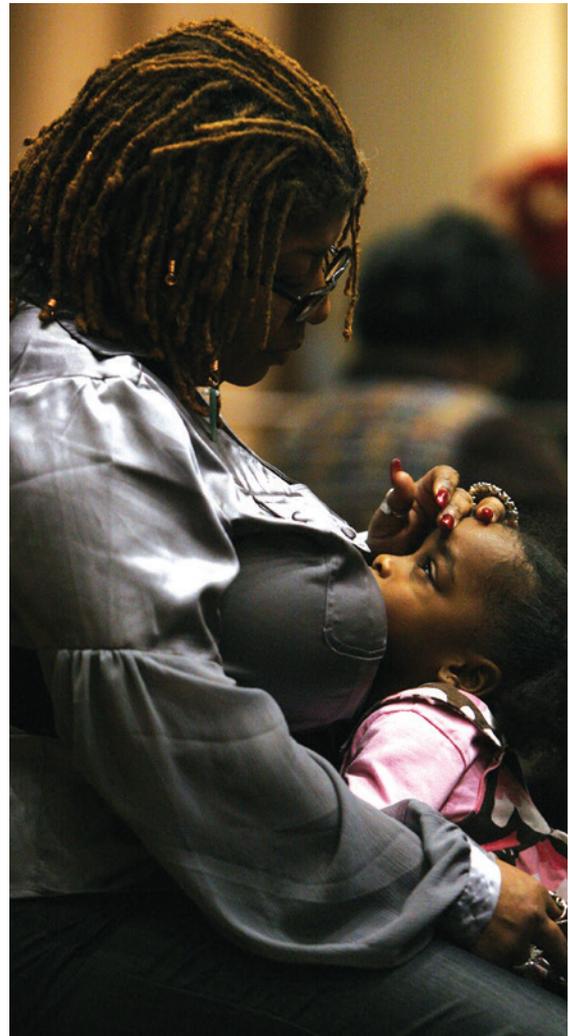
We ask...

- How do we keep Catholic education from being elitist while at the same time ensuring its quality?
- In the case of our grade schools, is it realistic to think that, in every case, a single parish can support and maintain a school, or do we need to think about different models of governance and support?

I am also impressed and grateful when I spend time with our children and catechists in our parish-based religious education programs. With a limited budget and a volunteer staff, our directors of religious education make an exemplary effort to form our children in the Catholic faith in the context of only several hours per week. The commitment and generosity of so many in the great work of our children's religious knowledge and spiritual experience is invaluable to the life of our parishes and our diocese.

Here, too, lie challenges...

- How do we effectively and integrally form volunteer catechists in order to offer a high quality formation experience to our young people?
- How do parishes, especially those with schools, allocate adequate resources for our parish-based religious education programs?
- How do we better integrate the formation and sacramental preparation of both our children in schools and parish-based programs?
- Since confirmation is celebrated in 8th or 9th grade, how do we create effective catechesis for public high school students when there is not necessarily a structured program?
- In all cases, how do we foster greater parental participation and support, reminding fathers and mothers that they are indeed the primary catechists of their children?



Sadly, many Catholics stop learning more about their faith in any substantive way when they get confirmed. Imagine applying for a technology job, based on a computer class you took 27 years ago. Our Catholic faith is so richly complex and substantively deep that we need a lifetime to even begin to plumb its depths.

I praise the activities and efforts throughout our diocese to provide adult formation for our people; some parishes truly excel in this important effort. I have consistently found, both as a priest and a bishop, that many adults are spiritually hungry, want to know and understand their faith, want a deeper relationship with God, want to know how to share it with others. They have great questions and profound insights. Our ability to evangelize is profoundly linked to our ability to articulate the faith in a cogent yet simple fashion to others.

Consider...

- How can our parishes and the diocese expand and deepen the opportunities for adults to continue to grow in their knowledge, understanding and practice of the faith?

SOCIAL TEACHING

A constitutive component of our faith is knowing and living out the social teachings of the Church. The dignity of the human person, the primacy of the common good, solidarity with the poor and marginalized, the vibrancy of marriage and family life, the dignity of work and rights of workers, human rights and responsibilities, and care for the environment are core values of Catholic belief and practice.

Our faith is not simply a private relationship between God and us, but rather, has social implications for the world and society we live in, including politics, the economy, culture, work and technology and the environment. Salvation in



Christ is not only about what happens to us after this life, but is about a rich and full human flourishing in the here and now. Both charity and justice demand that believers strive to uphold the dignity and worth of every human being, especially the unborn, the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, people with special needs, immigrants and the incarcerated. This conviction explains why the Church feeds, houses, educates and heals more people than any other single institution on the planet. We see ourselves as servants of the human person, created by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. The Church has always striven for a just social order in which every human being can achieve spiritual greatness as a child of God.

In the light of this inspiring and challenging Catholic social vision, I strongly affirm the myriad number of parishes, organizations, health care facilities, programs and individuals who heroically live out the social teaching of the Church in our diocese. As our official “social arm,” Catholic Charities offers a great quantity and quality of service to women in crisis pregnancy, seniors, struggling families and needy individuals. I find great inspiration and hope in the countless deeds of charity and mercy offered in the name of Jesus Christ.

Through organizations, such as the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and our Diocesan Peace and Social Justice Commission, we also strive to educate, advocate and work for fundamental structural change that will eradicate the root causes of poverty in our midst. The recent deanery discussions regarding the Indiana Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Poverty are a good step in the right direction.





In embracing all the social good that is done, we also need to ask some questions to guide our future efforts...

- What emerging needs in our communities demand our attention and best efforts?
- How can we better coordinate and focus the rich variety of services and programs that are currently offered throughout our diocese?
- How can we better educate, motivate and mobilize the great number of people in our parishes who want to serve and help others in need but don't know how to begin?
- How do we improve and grow our efforts in the area of advocacy and societal change, especially in the areas of family life, employment, health care and education?

- How do we continue to address and challenge the racism that still persists in our communities and within ourselves?
- How do we help parish peace and social justice committees to be an ever greater haven of influence for both justice and charity in their communities?

MARRIAGE and FAMILY

In our rapidly changing culture and our ever busier lifestyles, marriage and family life become ever more challenging. In the midst of work, parenting, sports and managing a household, the time and energy needed to live fully the spiritual and emotional depths of marital and family life seem in particular short supply. Many parents have shared with me that they would like to spend more time together as a family, have “date nights” with their spouse, pray and get more involved in

the parish, but they simply do not have the time. The pressures and stresses of contemporary living leave us often exhausted and empty.

The Catholic Church has a remarkably rich theology and spirituality of marriage, centered on the sacramental power of a woman and a man, bound in the love of Christ, giving themselves completely to each other in a profound manner that is exclusive, permanent and fruitful. By reflecting the sacrificial love of Christ for the Church, a married couple make

present in their family and the world the presence and grace of Jesus in a particular way. By becoming human and entering into a family, the Lord has sanctified marriage, parenting and children. For us as Catholics, the family is truly the “domestic Church” where children learn to love, serve and reverence God and each other.

As discussed at the recent synod in Rome, marriage and family today face extraordinary challenges in our rapidly changing culture. Many people simply choose not to get married at all, many marriages end in divorce, single parents face particular obstacles in their important responsibilities, many countries have redefined marriage to include same-sex unions, and cohabitation finds common acceptance, even among practicing Catholics. Many married people, including those who go to church regularly, do not necessarily grasp the deep spiritual meaning of their sacramental life as consecrated spouses. And many people simply reject the Church’s traditional teaching on marriage, sexuality and human life as outdated and irrelevant.

In the face of so many challenges, many questions come to mind for us as believers...

- How do we support married couples and families not only in the understanding and practice of their faith, but also to grow in love, generosity, respect and stability?
- How do we better prepare engaged couples to grow successful marriages?
- How do we welcome and help divorced and separated Catholics to feel at home in the Church and find healing and strength in their faith?
- How do we help gay people to feel welcomed and loved in our communities?



- How do we pastorally accompany people who are not living all of the teachings of the Church, while being faithful to the demands of both love and truth?
- How do we help our people, especially the young, to discover the beauty and integrity of their sexuality?
- How do we offer people the help and support they need and deserve to live the good news of marriage and family?
- How do we support people living the single life?

Our pastoral responses to these questions should constitute a significant component of any parish's energy and activity.

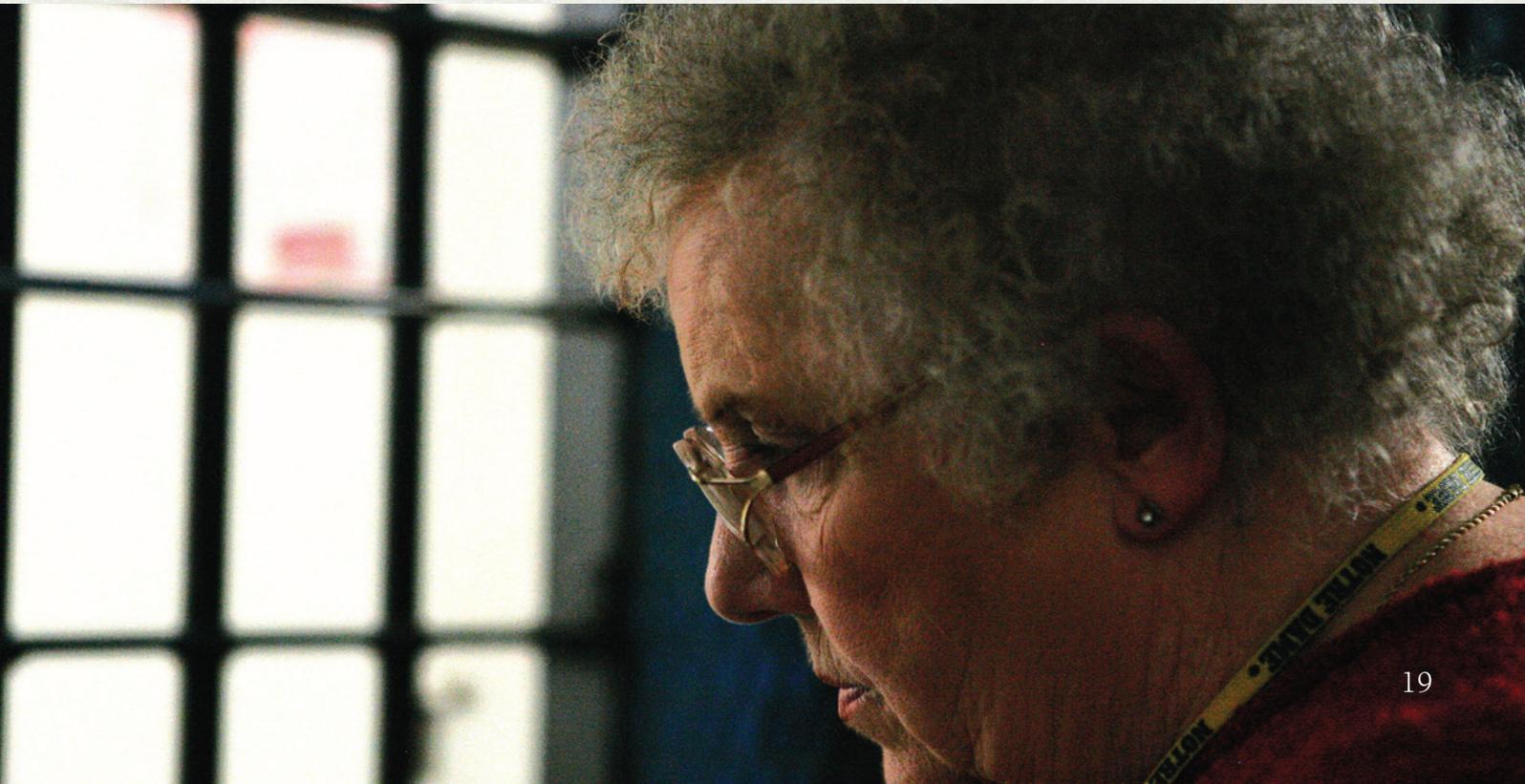
YOUNG CATHOLICS

Anytime I talk with Catholics about what should be our top priority as the Church, the immediate answer is “our young people.” Everyone recognizes the goodness, gifts and blessing that the young are for us.

They are our greatest treasure and our hope for the future. Youth is the time of life when we solidify our beliefs and values, mature in wisdom and grace, discern and prepare for our vocation in the Church and the world. The well-being of our youth directly flows from the stability and health of marriages and families.

The role of parents is essential in the spiritual formation of our youth as they mature and grow. We want every young person to know God, to feel loved by him, to have a secure and stable home, to be safe, happy and healthy. Leading and forming our youth and young adults is no small task in a culture that offers infinite options, choices, lifestyles and belief systems. More and more young people define themselves religiously as “none-affiliated” or “nones” for short.

In our diocese, I have met so many wonderful young Catholics who joyously and generously live their faith, want to serve the Lord and change the world and are open to the things of the Spirit. They look for their place in the Church and sometimes find it difficult to feel at home there. Many of our programs and



PRAYER

activities revolve around married couples and family life. They see few people their own age actively present in the community; they struggle to know what to do with their lives and are pulled in myriad directions.

Young Catholic ministry will be a top priority at the synod so....

- How do we better form, catechize, welcome and lead our youth, especially those who attend public school?
- How do we help parishes to call and equip leaders to accompany, serve and form our young people?
- How do we enable our youth to better make their vital contributions of joy, energy, idealism and deep love to our parishes and communities?
- How do we keep them engaged in the life of the Church, integrated within her very fabric and not just as a separate youth group?
- How do we provide more opportunities and space for young adults to find their place among us?
- How do we help everyone see that catechesis/ formation/ discipleship all continue after confirmation and high school, indeed for the rest of one's life?
- How do we listen to the needs, dreams and frustrations of young Catholics and welcome their leadership and their ideas?
- How do we call forth their gifts and help them discern their vocations?

STEWARDSHIP

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the early Christian community was of one mind and heart, sharing all their possessions in common for the good of all, especially the poor and needy. From the beginning, Christianity embraced the vision of a holistic stewardship, recognizing that all we possess is a gift from God and is meant to be shared with others for the building up of the Kingdom. When we link stewardship to evangelization and discipleship, we recognize that one who follows Jesus will commit time, talent and treasure to his mission of salvation, love and peace.

As a parish priest, I never really talked about or asked for money directly. I would speak about the mission of the Church, our projects, tasks and needs, accomplishments and challenges of the moment and



then pretty much say, “If you like what is happening and believe in the vision, please support your community.” It always seemed to work.

If people have not bought into the vision, they will not support it, and more appeals from the pulpit for money will only be off-putting. Once folks are engaged on a level of faith, falling more deeply in love with God, moving from a position of minimalism to one of maximalism, stewardship simply becomes natural. We always have time, money and energy for the people, things and causes that matter the most to us. We move from asking, “What do I have to do?” to “What can I do for you, Lord?”

People in our diocese are generous givers, for which I am particularly grateful. We are called on to support our parishes, the work of the diocese, Catholic Charities, multiple collections, service organizations and countless other worthy causes. The appeals for money, volunteers and involvement can become overwhelming at times. Yet, I see that our people respond with great sacrifice and goodness. Without such support, the mission and work of the local Church could not continue.

The challenge is to engage the large number of people registered in our parishes who are not engaged in the mission. So consider...

- How do we reach them to start celebrating the Sunday Eucharist with us but also embrace a life of Catholic stewardship?
- How do we move those who may be minimal givers to a greater vision of possibility and generosity?
- How do we sustain and support disciples of Christ who are fully engaged and sometimes risk “burning out”?



Stewardship programs for parishes, an evaluation and rethinking of the Catholic Services Appeal and increased focus on evangelization and discipleship will certainly help to inculcate in all of us a deeper commitment to the sharing of our gifts for the salvation of the world.

VOCATIONS and LEADERSHIP FORMATION

If we seek to truly grow the Church here in Northwest Indiana, we will need to dedicate needed resources to the

development of vocations and ecclesial leaders on all levels, including priests, religious, deacons, lay ministers, lay leadership and married couples. Despite our efforts to catechize and form young people regarding the gift of vocation, I wonder how many people truly understand that every single person in the Church has a calling to live Christ in some particular committed way. Any organization which seeks to flourish must attend to the calling, development and sustaining of good leadership.

I am grateful for the strong leadership of our priests, deacons, lay ministers and lay leadership. These dedicated servants offer the vision, the structure and the resources to continue the life and mission of our diocese. We need to continue and strengthen our efforts to form, support and sustain our present leaders in both confidence and competence, even as the Lord calls new people to join their ranks.

Pastoral councils make a significant contribution to the vitality and growth of their parishes. I applaud the generous leaders who serve in this capacity as representative voices, as they offer vision, counsel, and support to our pastors in the cultivation of our faith community.

How can we equip pastoral councils to be even more effective in their leadership?

I am grateful for all the efforts that our vocation leaders make to promote the call to priesthood in our diocese. The seminarians we have are exceptional young men who will serve the Church well; we just need more of them. The significant majority of our priests are middle-aged and beyond. Without our senior clergy generously continuing to serve, we would face a serious sacramental challenge. The priests we have heroically

serve but their decreasing number challenges us to promote priestly vocations within our families and among the young with greater passion and purpose.

I am impressed with the formation that our deacons and lay leaders receive here in the diocese. Being formed at least partially together leads them to embrace a common vision and purpose as they prepare to lead and serve in our parishes, schools and institutions. We continue to partner with religious communities who are an essential and valued part of our diocesan leadership, seeking to help them to promote vocations to the religious life. As discussed above, we need to catechize more effectively on the nature, dignity and purpose of marriage and family life.

Consider how we might nurture a greater number of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life and lay leadership...

- How do we invite, call and form our young people to discern their vocation within the Church?
- How do we make our Catholic schools and religious education programs more intentionally vocational, so that more leaders emerge from our parishes and schools?
- How do we create a culture of vocation in our families and parishes that is so pervasive that young people naturally discern what the Lord is calling them to do?
- How do we link young adult ministry and vocational formation more effectively?

CONCLUSION

In the most difficult, trying times and in the most joyful moments, I have often pondered deeply St. Paul's words in Scripture "Love never fails." I am convinced that, in the end, love always wins. In all that we do, say and think, we should do it with love, in love and for Love Himself. As I get to know our diocese, leaders and people, I have encountered that Love here!

Thousands of people heroically live their faith in Christ, sacrificing much in a spirit of generous stewardship for our parishes and schools, our young people and all those in need. There is much to celebrate. We also face some significant challenges of dwindling numbers of active Catholics, available resources, young leaders as





many of our parishes and schools struggle to grow in vitality. The synod will be a dynamic experience allowing all to gather, pray, converse, discern and plan a future that will truly be a fruit of the Holy Spirit and will guide us for years to come.

This future will ask much of us, especially our priests, deacons and lay ministers. We will need to collaborate and work together in new ways, come to a much deeper level of co-responsibility for the life of the whole diocese, surrender any parochialism, competition or isolation that keeps us divided, break out of the torpor that often says, "We've always done it this way," shatter the complacency that can keep us in a spiritual rut and be more proactive and inviting in our evangelization efforts. If we do not embrace such a vision, our local Church will simply continue a slow and steady slide towards a painful diminishment of the faith in our people.

When Simon Peter and the early Church, newly anointed in the Holy Spirit, stepped into the Jerusalem street and proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ as the new meaning of human history, the Gospel's evangelizing power was unleashed into the world. The profession of the Good News of God's love for us in Jesus formed new churches, sent fresh disciples, built cathedrals, hospitals and universities, commissioned missionaries and eventually reached the rich soil of Northwest Indiana. We are the inheritors of this remarkable legacy of Catholic faith.

This opportune moment of the synod is the time for us to let the Spirit of the risen Christ be unleashed in us and through us as we live the transforming power of the Gospel.

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

-Matthew 28:19-20



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