



GO AND ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD

Pastoral Letter

Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing

April 5, 2012

Holy Thursday



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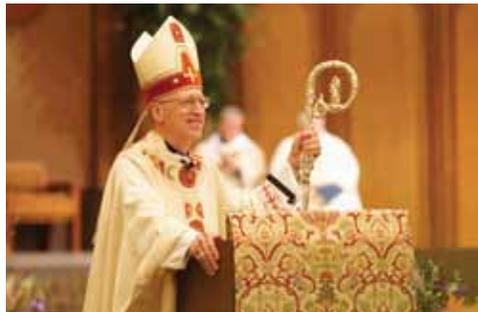




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“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” So ends Mass. This proclamation reminds us that the Mass does not end there. Strengthened by the Body of Christ, sanctified by the Blood of Christ, and enlightened by the Word of God, we are called to take that Word and change our world.

1. We are being challenged, my sisters and brothers. Every year in our diocese we see fewer and fewer of our community members joining us in Sunday worship as we listen to the Word of God and are fed at his table. This situation led to the establishment of a task force early last year to offer some suggestions about how we might engage our Catholics more deeply, re-engage our fallen-away sisters and brothers, and be an evangelizing force in our community¹. After reflecting on the December 2011 report of the task force and with the benefit of thoughts shared by the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, I offer this pastoral letter. My particular hope is that each of our parish councils and the boards of the other diocesan institutions will use this text for study purposes and then propose and implement their own responses.

Many today do not know Jesus. Let us evangelize our world! There are sisters and brothers, family members and friends who have left the Church. Let us re-engage them in the life of the Body of Christ! We cannot do this unless we ourselves are converted more fully to the Lord Jesus. Let us be his disciples!

¹ Many thanks to those who served on this Task Force: Deacon Daniel Foley, Mr. Craig Pohl, Father John Byers, Ms. Sharon Falinski and Mrs. Patricia Nickerson. One of their recommendations was to produce a Pastoral Letter outlining a plan of action for the Diocese of Lansing. In addition, one of the directions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for the implementation of the Year of Faith is for every bishop to write a Pastoral Letter. It seems this is the opportune time to write this, my first Pastoral Letter.



2.

INTRODUCTION

After three years of joyful ministry, Jesus was executed by crucifixion. Yet, the power of Christianity is that death is not the end. The cross is the door – the narrow gate – to resurrection and eternal life. Before the resurrected Jesus returned to his Father in heaven, he gathered his eleven remaining apostles and charged those frightened and sinful men with an awesome task: to convert and gather the entire world into the Church.

3.

Jesus' Charge in Luke's Gospel

Cleopas and, I like to think, Mary, his spouse, had rushed back to Jerusalem from Emmaus and were telling the disciples about meeting Jesus on the road. Suddenly Jesus himself appeared in the upper room. Then, as he had done many times before,

... he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his [Jesus'] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power on high (Luke 24:45-49)." (Luke 24:45-49).

4.

"Proclaim in the name of Jesus" is the task given to us. We, my sisters and

brothers, are always on mission. We do not simply support missionaries. We are missionaries – all of us.

It seems so simple. All we need to do is tell others about the most important events that have ever occurred. All we need do is repeat the most loving and peaceful words ever spoken. All we need do is share with others the simple truths that will bring meaning to this life and eternal happiness in the next life.

Yet, like the apostles, we are frightened. Our society places religion on the short list of topics not to be discussed by polite people. We shy from conversations we fear will be awkward. We may admire those who can speak of Jesus without embarrassment, but we doubt this grace will be granted to us. We may even quote the wonderful phrase attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.”

We are all sinners, of course. Nonetheless, this is the necessary time to use words. We need a new boldness, tongues of fire given us by the Holy Spirit. I, like most of you, have many family members who have left the Church. Every day I meet other people who have never really had an encounter with Christ. I try to love them all, to pray for them, and to be a good example. However, I need an infusion of wisdom to know when words are, in fact, necessary and then greater courage to speak. May the Holy Spirit burn my lips with the holy embers of God’s Word, so that I will say what needs to be said!

5. We must proclaim: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins.” Perhaps this is what most troubles many of us. We know that God’s word always speaks the truth, always tells us of our faults, always challenges us to convert and to change. We have enough difficulty living this challenge ourselves. How can we place such a burden on others? We do this because death is not the end; it is the gateway to resurrection and life. The cross, the difficulty of converting and dying to ourselves, is the only doorway to that life. We do not call others to the cross for its own sake. No, we want to share life, life in abundance, but that door – the cross – is the only way to achieve life.
6. Finally, Jesus tells them to go to all the nations. No one is to be left out because all peoples deserve to hear this Good News, even when they do not know how much they need it. We should not hold it back only for ourselves; we should not put it under a bushel basket; rather, we need to proclaim this Good News to everyone. We fail Jesus and any person we are close to when we neglect to introduce them to each other.
7. This is an urgent task. The end of the world will come someday. It rather surprises me that it has not already happened. In fact, one of my daily prayers is that Jesus will come again in glory – and soon. It will happen. Let it not be said by any one of us that we neglected to carry out Jesus’ last command, that we failed to share the greatest gift in the world – the salvation of souls. Even if the world does not end today, an end will certainly come for many people this day and tomorrow. Someone’s eternal life may depend upon it. As St. Paul wrote: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9: 16)

Sisters and brothers, it may be that fatigue has settled upon us regarding our faith. We need to wake from that lethargy, not only for ourselves, but for all the nations.

8. Jesus' Charge in Matthew's Gospel

In Matthew's Gospel, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, one of the most beautiful places on earth, Jesus reminds the eleven of the wonders he worked in their midst. Jesus then sends his close friends forth to share what they have come to know:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, make disciples of all the Gentiles, 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. And behold I am with you all days until the end of the age (Mt 28: 18-20).

9. They are to make disciples or apprentices. However, instead of picking up a trade, these new learners are to become other Christs. That is why friendship with Jesus is at the base of any discipleship. We are to invite others into a band of friendship, a fellowship of the cross.
10. Baptism "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is no mere ritual. It grants entry to the very life of the Trinity: the Father's mercy and love, Jesus' cross and resurrection and the communion of the Holy Spirit. How can we not want this great gift for all people? We baptize because that is what Jesus told us to do. We share the riches of this divine life with everyone because that is what Jesus told us to do.
11. Finally, Jesus tells us to instruct others to follow the teachings of the Master. Teaching is at the heart of making disciples. All of our various formational and educational programs help us accomplish this task. This is not, however, just the work of professionals. We are all meant to be teachers. Of course, both our lives and our words must be the vehicles of our proclamation. Pope Paul VI once wrote, "Contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, or if he listens to teachers, he does so because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii nuntianti*, #41).
12. Jesus wants us to go to the nations. For his first disciples, this meant going beyond the familiar limits of the family, tribe and nation. My sisters and brothers, we likewise must allow the Holy Spirit to take us beyond our normal lives and go where we have never gone before.
- Let us go forth. We begin with the Household of Faith, our own community. We cannot stop there. Too many of those we dearly love are numbered among the Lost Sheep who have wandered away. Finally, in the Court of the Gentiles, a term to be explained below, we meet those who do not know the Lord.



13.

PART ONE: THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

As disciples, we need a strong faith and a close relationship with Jesus. Our own community of fellow believers, our parishes, will nourish us for the mission ahead. This is how St. Paul puts it:

And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for, in due season, we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. So that, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:9-10).

14.

This pastoral letter is primarily directed to you, my sisters and brothers, who are members of the Household of Faith. Few who have left the Church or have not really heard of Christ will ever read these words. So we are the ones who must become more engaged in the life of the Church and so help to build up the Body of Christ. Then we can fulfill the mission of Christ to go forth.



15 A Spiritual House

It is a long journey from our head to our heart. Until we have encountered Jesus at a deep and personal level, at a heart level, our engagement in the life of his bride, the Church, will remain quite limited. To change history, we must change hearts. That is why St. Peter instructed his people:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5).

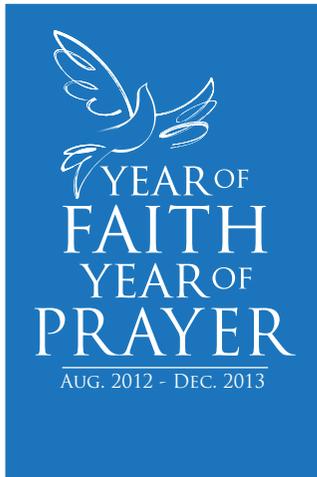
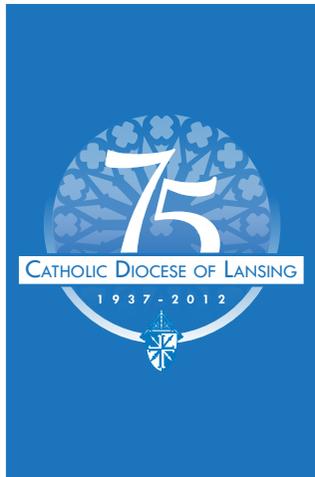
16. Jesus calls us his friends. Friendship is built on communicating with one another. Prayer is communicating, and so we need to pray. However, Jesus cannot tell us how much he and his Father love us unless we stop and listen to him first. One of the most beautiful images in the New Testament is of Jesus knocking on our doors and waiting outside for us to let him in (Revelation 3:20). He does not want to barge in. Real love, his love, always respects our freedom. And in our noise-filled world, his gentle rap at the door can sometimes seem no louder than a small whispering wind (1 Kings 19:11-13).
17. We also need to pray because the task ahead is daunting. In begging for God's help, we acknowledge that what we cannot do ourselves can be accomplished by the grace of God. How else can we be moved from lethargy to an active faith? How else will we have the courage to conquer the world with love and the Word of God? Prayer is opening that door so that God's will may be done in our lives.

God will then reign in our hearts and not just in our heads. Then we can become “living stones” in God’s “spiritual house.”

18. So, as we say at Mass, “Let us pray.” As a diocese, let us join in a long Year of Prayer, starting on Friday, August 3, 2012, and ending on Monday, December 9, 2013. This time frame coincides with the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of Lansing on August 4, 1937, and the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of our diocese and of our cathedral, dedicated on that day in 1913.

We will join the universal Church, which has been called to a Year of Faith by Pope Benedict XVI, beginning Thursday, October 11, 2012, and concluding on Sunday, November 24, 2013. This time period also includes the Ordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome during the month of October 2012 (the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council) when the bishops will advise the Holy Father on the theme of the New Evangelization.

I invite all our parishes, schools and agencies; our houses of consecrated men and women; and all families and individuals to pray that all of us in the Household of Faith will become friends of Jesus and a community of witnesses to the world. That we may be one community at prayer, I direct that this prayer be recited at the end of every Sunday Mass or at the end of the Prayers of the Faithful during liturgies celebrated in the diocese during our Year of Prayer:



President:

*Let us pray that every person within the Catholic Diocese of Lansing
Will come to know and love our Lord Jesus Christ in a personal way,
Grow in maturity as a disciple of Christ,
Become actively engaged in the full life of the Church,
And joyfully utilize his or her gifts
For the building up of the Kingdom of God
And the salvation of souls.*

(Pause for a moment of silence.)
*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
 And kindle in them the fire of your love.
 Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
 And you shall renew the face of the earth.
 O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,
 Did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
 Grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be
 Truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations.
 Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.*

19. A Mass at the cathedral will mark the beginning of our Year of Prayer, and the diocesan Office of Worship will provide resources for a similar Mass in each of our parishes for the weekend of August 4-5, 2012. There will be suitable Prayers of the Faithful for the year, materials to conduct a novena invoking the Holy Spirit's manifold gifts, prayer services for our Catholic schools and religious formation programs and a model forty-hour celebration (perhaps tied to a mission) to be used in at least one parish in each vicariate during the course of the year. Liturgy of the Hours might be used to begin meetings (as we now do regularly at the diocesan offices).

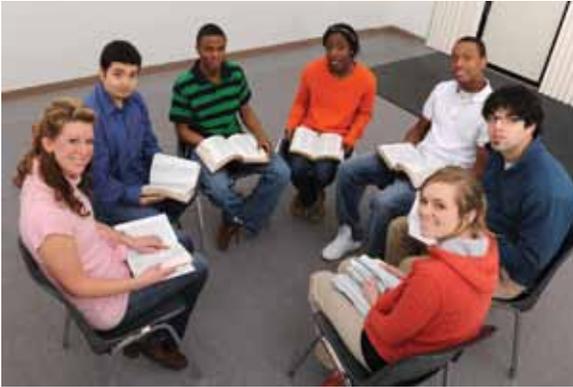
These events will seek to promote a deeper encounter with Christ, the renewal of the entire diocese, the restoration to the fold of those who have wandered away, and the salvation of all.

20. The young particularly demand our attention. They, too, want to learn to pray. I have found that young people are very much attracted to the adoration of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Perhaps young people, living in a world of distractions and never having been taught the beauty of silence, are especially moved by the discovery of Jesus himself in the quiet simplicity of the consecrated host. Through song, formal prayers and silence, our younger sisters and brothers can encounter Jesus and thus hear his call to friendship. Let us increase Eucharistic Adoration throughout the diocese, especially in gatherings of youth.

21. Catholic prayer, in all its wondrous and blessed diversity, must be available to the people of God. I urge all to teach and encourage the praying of the Rosary. All our children should learn this simple prayer form, something that families used to pray regularly – and can do again.

Parishes should offer novenas, such as before the feasts of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Christmas and Pentecost; Stations of the Cross every Friday in Lent; Eucharist processions on Corpus Christi; missions and retreats; pilgrimages; and other devotions, common to local culture.

Sometimes, these devotional activities can be more effective on the vicariate level. I invite our vicars to examine how such spiritual events might take place in a more collaborative manner. They should have as their aim the rediscovery of the baptismal faith that graces each Christian's life and the resulting task of giving witness, which that faith entails.



22. **A House of Faith**

Jesus calls us to friendship, but also to the truth about God, ourselves and our world. Here again St. Peter can help us. After encouraging his people to be faithful even in the face of persecution, he tells them:

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15).

23. We all know that there are shortcomings in the way the elements of our faith have been taught. We all need to do a better job of learning the content of that faith. Then we will be equipped to hand on to others what we ourselves have received.

This process, called catechesis, requires some basic tools. Just as every home should have a Bible that is weathered with use, so should there be a dog-eared copy of at least one of the three versions of the Catechism, either the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1994 (second edition, 1997), or two more concise versions published in 2006: the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* or the *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

These volumes contain the guidance of the Church as found in the Bible and in her constant teaching tradition, including the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus at the Last Supper, assures the truth of the Church's teachings on matters of faith and morals. In a world where relativism reigns, we should raise a prayer of gratitude for the Spirit's presence in the Church. Jesus did not leave us orphans (see John 14:18).

24. Other resources are our Catholic schools and religious formation programs. The diocesan "Maintenance to Mission" initiative is challenging us to hand on the faith more completely and more holistically. We seek faith formation, as well as virtue and ethics formation in our schools and religious formation programs. We know that these aims are of benefit not only to our children, but to our society as a whole. We know this because our children are not just citizens of our country, but persons with souls made for God. Thus we seek to instill both academic ex-

cellence and a full commitment to Jesus and the practice of the faith. The union of faith and reason in our young people is the goal for which we strive. This is a common good for the Church and the world. I particularly want to thank our parishes and parents for the incredible amount of time, energy and resources they devote to our schools and I summon all of us to support them.

A crucial element is the proper preparation of our teachers and catechists at all levels (youth through adults), through initial certification, as well as by means of ongoing formation. In addition, our parishes and vicariates need to provide more opportunities for the faith formation of all our people. To achieve this, we may need the able assistance of parish-based or vicariate-based Education/Formation Councils.

25. We have a long-standing and very rich relationship with our only Catholic university in the Diocese of Lansing, Siena Heights University. Recently, we have renewed that partnership for the theological formation of the key leaders in this diocese. This has involved a reformulation of the course descriptions in the program, with a call for a greater engagement with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In addition, I see that one of my primary roles, in implementing *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, is to deepen the relationship between the bishop and the academic community of Siena Heights University.

26. Some of us older folk remember the sermons of the pre-Vatican II era, which would often center on the Ten Commandments and other moral and faith teachings of the Church, without reference to the Scripture readings of the day. Since the Vatican Council, there has been an emphasis on homilies rather than sermons, that is, on preaching on the readings. These homilies can be very good at motivating us to live as Christians, but they rarely impart instruction in the content of our faith. I urge our clergy to find more connections between the readings of the day, which the preacher must continue to understand and “break open,” and the contents of the Catechism as they prepare their homilies. I have put together a three-year cycle that covers nearly all of the Catechism for any who might want it.

Sisters and brothers, we must both witness to Christ and provide the truth about him to all we meet.



27. **The Domestic Church**

To be a people more engaged in our faith, a community of witnesses and teachers, we must begin in the family, where divine love needs to be manifested more clearly. Marriage and family are central to the divine plan for human happiness and well-being. Marriage, as a sacrament, mirrors Christ's own ever-faithful union with the Church, a source of fruitfulness for the world. This is quite an ideal and, on our own, no one could hope to reach it. Yet, that is why marriage is a sacrament, a means of grace, a means of the very life of God and the strength of God, not only for the wife and husband but for their children, for the Church as a whole, and in fact for our society.

Our Office for Family Life and our Office for Worship will designate one Sunday a year as a day for the renewal of marriage vows for all married couples in all our parishes. All our parishes need to promote Marriage Encounter and other programs that assist couples to be better spouses and better parents. We also need to conduct a study of our marriage preparation programs. Do they assist the couple to become disciples of Christ and ministers of the sacrament of marriage? Do they help couples see their role in the formation of their families into domestic churches? Our schools and religious formation programs will need more instruction on the *Theology of the Body* of Blessed Pope John Paul II and on Natural Family Planning. Our permanent deacons and their wives can be great resources to promote more attention to marriage and family in our parishes.

28. I also invite those who struggle with same-sex attraction to participate in Courage and their family members in Encourage. The aim always is to help everyone live that chaste life to which God calls us. Our sexuality can be a great challenge for all of us, yet we are all called to be saints.

29. I am aware of the gap that exists between Church teachings on marriage and what is actually being experienced in many households. Couples are practicing forms of contraception or sterilization; cohabiting as a trial-run before marriage or even in lieu of marriage; and living in second or third marriages without seeking

to bring their lives into conformity with the teachings of Jesus on divorce and re-marriage (Mark 10:11; Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18; see Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Our aim is not to be heavy-handed with Church teachings, but rather, gently yet persuasively, to call all to conversion. We cheat cohabiting couples if we do not, in that same compassion and love, ask them to separate as they prepare for marriage. Likewise, we should gently guide toward our diocesan marriage tribunal those remarried couples whose situations keep them from full communion with the Church. All these services, if embraced by more of our families, will create truly vibrant domestic churches in each of our households. These will be places where the faith will be witnessed and taught.

The Church, as the domestic church, thrives in the homes of Catholic men and women who embrace with joy the blessings of marriage and children. Our efforts to evangelize the world will be launched from these homes, or they will not be launched at all.



30. **Consecrated Life and Movements**

The Church, for millennia now, has had groups of women and men who have been consecrated to Christ. In the Diocese of Lansing, they include our consecrated virgins, hermits, sisters and brothers, and religious order priests. When we think of these wonderful men and women, most often we think of the great work they do. Those who were educated in Catholic schools particularly know the incredible and self-sacrificing ministry performed by our sisters. Yet, all this great work is not the most important part of their lives.

They lead vowed and consecrated lives. Fundamentally, this means that they

have placed Jesus Christ at the center of their lives. This is a call – a vocation – that leads to a way of life. In short, their lives show us how all of us are to live, each in his or her own way, with Jesus at the heart of it all. In our world, which is so obsessed with consumerism, licentiousness and a lack of respect for authority, they tell us that what really matters is the poverty, chastity and obedience found in the heart of Jesus.

And so, all you consecrated persons in our diocese, all you religious women and men, please review and renew your vowed living. Know how much we love you and appreciate all that you have done and are doing. And I call upon all young men and women to consider giving yourselves to Christ totally and to be proof for the rest of the Church and the world that Jesus lives and reigns both in your hearts and in our midst. Our consecrated sisters and brothers are invited to work closely with our own diocesan Vocation Office to help create a culture of vocation in our diocese, where all of us will see our lives as a response to the call of God to each of us to become saints.

31. I remember, as a high-school student, after the Second Vatican Council, being involved in a program called “Church, World and Kingdom,” which was meant to involve groups of families in discussions about the council. This engaged a large number of people. There have, of course, been many programs in the past to renew our people in the faith. However, what is really being called for is not so much a program as a movement.

32. Recently, there has been a real flowering of new kinds of witnessing to Jesus. These are often called ecclesial movements or new communities in the Church. Again, these are not programs, but commitments – choices made by individuals to engage Christ in common with others. These communities, whose only purpose is to build up the Body of Christ, are the result of the ever-creative energy of the Holy Spirit.

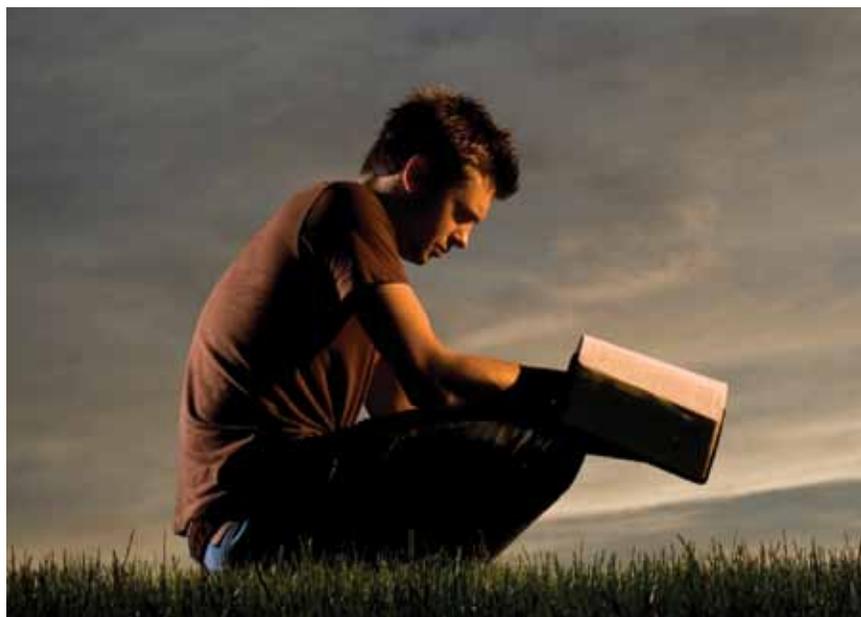
Most of us are acquainted with the Knights of Columbus and Marriage Encounter. Many know of the Charismatic Renewal and of *Cursillo* or various youth movements. Fewer have experience with Communion and Liberation or the Neocatechumenal Way or third orders (for example, Secular Carmelites, Lay Dominicans and Secular Franciscans). But to name these is only to scratch the surface. There is immense value in journeying with others deeper into the faith. If you have never considered joining one of these movements, please explore them with your priest or with another knowledgeable Catholic.

No movement is perfect. They, too, are composed of sinners and need constant conversion to Christ. Yet, on the other hand, these movements also enrich the Church. I encourage all our pastors to be especially welcoming of this new life in our Church as yet another means for the “joyous rediscovery of the faith and its renewed transmission” (*Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Year of Faith*, January 6, 2012, #10).

33. Of course, the most fundamental ecclesial movement should be each parish. Thus each parish must, above all else, beg for God’s grace and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, especially as that parish gathers in the Lord’s Upper Room every Sunday to sing and pray with great joy. In that assembly, we await the gifts of God that will help us be the people we were created to be and the people we long to be

for the salvation of the world.

The Household of Faith is to be a place of hope, not of fear; a place of energy and the Holy Spirit, not of fatigue; and a place of enthusiasm and joy, not of dourness. To be filled with hope and joy, we need, every one of us, to encounter Jesus yet again or for the first time. Then we need to know him and his great bride, the Church, far better than we currently do. Finally, we need to commit ourselves and our whole life to Jesus. Only then can we be able to seek out the lost sheep and proclaim the Good News in the Court of the Gentiles.



34. **PART TWO: THE LOST SHEEP**

Why have so many left the Church? While this is an important question, the more important question is why are we sitting around tending the ninety-nine and not going after the one who has been lost (Matthew 18:12-14)? One reason is that the approach taken by Jesus – leave the ninety-nine sheep untended to find one – makes no human sense. We imagine all the harms that could befall the ninety-nine, so we write off the one sheep. Yet, God's wisdom is not ours. One sheep wanders away, then another, then another! Soon we are forced to ask why we are tending the fifty sheep and not going after the other fifty who have been lost. Perhaps this is how we got to where we are now, by ignoring each one who has wandered.



35. Reconciliation

There remain a host of reasons for the departure of so many from the Church. I believe that one of the chief reasons is sin – the sin of those who have left and, at least as often, our own sins.

Let us look at this second matter first. Many lapsed Catholics have wandered from the fold because of the perceived hypocrisy of the Church and of her members. Let me be clear: I am a sinner and I never pretend to be other than that. Like St. Paul, I can daily say:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7: 15, 18b-19, 21-25a)

Jesus came for sinners, to make them his friends. If we do not admit that we are sinners, then there is no need for a redeemer, for Christ's death and resurrection. St. John tells us this truth most clearly:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

There is only one path by which we can find the lost sheep. We must step into the confessional first and regularly. We especially must seek forgiveness for the ways in which we have driven others away from the fold. Then we, having passed from sin and death to newness of life, can seek out and share the mercy of God with other sinners, as Jesus did.

In this diocese, a number of our Indian priests have strongly promoted the sacrament of reconciliation. Where they have done this, sinners have come out of the woodwork. My brothers in the priesthood, we must be more generous in scheduling times for the celebration of this sacrament. We must preach the sacrament often. We must have welcoming spaces for the sacrament. And we must pray that St. John Vianney will intercede to gain for us the confessor's wisdom and kindness we need.

36. Just as we acknowledge our personal sins before we go in search of the lost, so must there be acknowledgment of our sins as members of the Church, particularly those related to the terrible scandal of abuse. We human members of the Church have sometimes failed to accord individuals and groups the full measure of dignity, charity and justice they deserve. Blessed John Paul II, as part of the celebration of the Jubilee Year of 2000, publicly repented of these kinds of sins. I ask the Office of Worship to put together a penance service at our cathedral during our upcoming Year of Prayer. I wish to lead us in this repentance.

37. We all need a reawakening of appreciation for the sacrament of reconciliation. It should be a part of the preparation for all the sacraments – for parents prior to the baptism of their children and prior to each child's first reconciliation, and for our young people prior to confirmation and marriage. I have recently finished reading the Diary of St. Faustina, the Polish nun who promoted the devotion to Divine Mercy. Her deep appreciation of the mercy of God resonates with my own: I am not worthy of God's great mercy, but I am certainly grateful for it! Each of our vicariates should gladly promote Divine Mercy Sunday on the Sunday after Easter. We need to acknowledge our sins. We need to repent. We need to believe firmly in God's abundant mercy. Who will be able to resist the joy we then shall display?



38. **The Search for the Lost**

Fifty years ago, our pastor told my mother that the only way to bring back family members who have wandered is to love them, to pray for them and to be a good example to them. Even the Latin poet, Virgil, who lived around the time of Jesus, knew that “love conquers all” (*amor omnia vincit*). If we are not motivated by love, then no effort we expend to seek out the lost will ever be successful.

With this love, we now can gently approach those who have left. Our spiritual tradition speaks of “fraternal correction.” Most of us are good at criticism, judgmentalism and gossip, but not at “fraternal correction.” Yet St. Paul reminds us:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1).

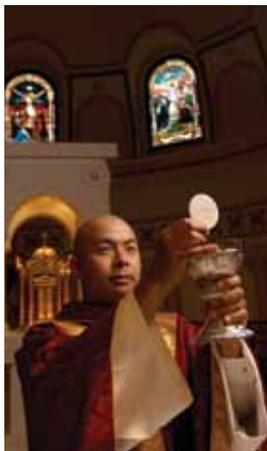
Desiring to share our joy and experience of the love and mercy of God, we seek to know the heart of the other person with its hurts and confusion. Real fraternal correction is more listening than getting something off our chests, more desirous of the good of the other than imparting a lesson. Then we shall be able to speak the truth in love such that it will be heard and be effective.

39.

One of the regular parish events that I recall from my youth is the parish census. In today’s world, there may be better ways of counting our Catholic population (if that were all we had in mind). However, the actual process of conducting a census – neighbors talking to neighbors – can provide a wonderful opportunity for positive interaction with those who have wandered away. I ask each parish council to consider how something like this might work in your own parish. There certainly

are many models that can be used.

It should be clear that this task of seeking out the lost sheep is not primarily the responsibility of the priest or the deacon. It is primarily the task of the neighbor, of the relative, of the friend. My sisters and brothers of this Diocese of Lansing, I need you to seek out a lost sheep and invite him or her back to the fold. As you read this, think of which person you will approach. It will take time and prayer, patience and love, but the Holy Spirit will guide you in your efforts.



40. **The Liturgy and Preaching**

Many claim that Mass is boring. Would any of us have been bored in the Upper Room on Holy Thursday evening or when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples? Would any of us have been bored on Golgotha on Good Friday? Would any of us have been bored near the empty tomb on the third day? The Mass is a direct participation in these mysteries of our faith. We hear God's word. We render the worship which is due to God. We kneel in the presence of Jesus Christ. We sing songs along with the angels and saints. We take within ourselves the very Body and Blood of our crucified and resurrected Savior! Boring? Only if we have no understanding of what is taking place.

We go to Mass on Sundays. We give one hour a week in service to our God – not to be entertained, but rather to give ourselves in gratitude for all that God has given to us. We do not *have* to attend Mass. We *get* to attend Mass.

41. Now having said this, none of us should be satisfied with Sunday worship that is less than the best we can give to God. If we are going to seek out the lost, we need to bring them back to something that will indeed satisfy their deepest longings.

This past Advent we began using the new translation of the Mass. This has been quite a draining experience for many of our priests, including me. You probably have noticed that we priests are rather glued to the book these days. We will get better at this. We will become more familiar with these sacred words and our warmth and ease will return. We still need, however, to improve the whole gamut of our celebration of the Eucharist. This is the only way to improve the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in

the sacred liturgy.

All the persons who, along with the clergy, are involved in our Sunday liturgies – lectors, musicians, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, sacristans, ushers, servers – need ongoing formation in their roles. Not every parish can achieve this with limited resources. Our Office of Worship can assist our vicariates to provide continuing formation experiences for all of our ministers.

42. Some claim that we Catholics are less welcoming than some other groups of Christians. I recall the experience of my own parents when, after attending the 11:30 a.m. Mass at their parish for many years, they had to attend the 10 a.m. Mass due to schedule changes. They found the change unsettling – they even had to find a different pew! Imagine a person who is coming to our parish for the first time. What would the experience be like? The lost sheep need not only be found, but also brought back and festively welcomed. This does not mean we have to turn Sunday Mass into a town-hall meeting. There are ways to achieve both a welcoming spirit and a deep reverence at worship. In fact, welcoming is best done in our neighborhoods, at other parish functions and before and after Mass. This may involve more efforts to pray over people and to care for their needs. People desire to belong to others and are made to do so. Personal joy and warmth can go a long way in making someone feel that he or she has finally found a home.

43. Some also claim that they have left the Church because of the content (or lack of content) of the preaching in their parish. This is especially true for those drawn to powerful preaching about God's grace and the personal experience of Jesus as one's Lord and Savior. The great advantage of the Catholic Church is that we draw people beyond this initial stage, as vital as it is, into a full Christian life with sacraments, spiritual traditions and the teachings of the Church. Still, those we seek out will need to be fed well, both at the table of the Word and at the table of the Eucharist.

44. I already have mentioned the need for the homily to have a greater catechetical component. Here, I wish only to emphasize that all of us, priests and deacons, need

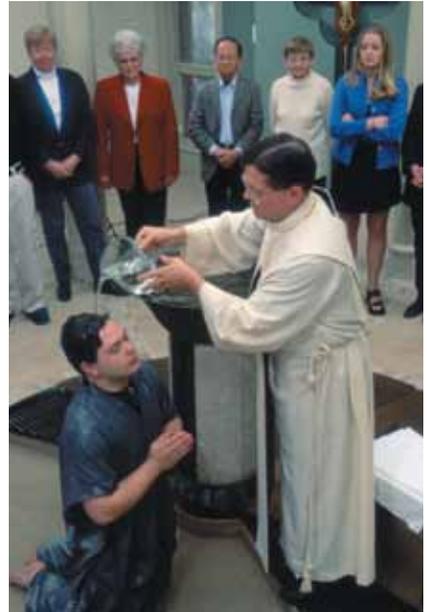


to be spending more time and energy preparing our homilies. This focus applies at all levels of preparation. Humanly speaking, some of us need to be retrained in public speaking, accent reduction, projection, articulation and speech organization and theory. In addition, we need to know our community, something which should flow from our pastoral sense. Most of you, my brothers, have been in your parishes for many years – you know the needs and yearnings of the folks you serve. This should immediately be apparent as we begin to preach. And we should never stop learning.

A homily is not an academic lecture, but we must be scholarly in our preparation – both to avoid speaking error and to provide our parishioners with the historical and doctrinal context of the readings. Finally, homily preparation must include significant time for prayer – prayer about the texts, prayer for our people and prayer that we will preach what God wants preached.

I would like our Department of Formation to provide more opportunities for improving the quality of our homilies for both priests and deacons. In addition, I urge all priests and deacons to become part of some homily preparation session, perhaps with other clergy or with some parishioners, which would meet weekly, or at least regularly, to study, pray over and reflect upon the upcoming Sunday readings.

Besides serving those directly affected by our sacramental ministry, we need to be very conscious of how we present the love and mercy of God at funerals, weddings and baptisms. These events are opportunities to re-evangelize all who are present in the Church for those occasions. Our every word and action has an impact.



45. **Food for the Long Journey**

When I arrived in Lansing four years ago, Bishop Mengeling told me about the lack of follow-up for those who are baptized at the conclusion of the RCIA process. He noted that too many fall away from the practice of the faith soon after being initiated into the sacred mysteries. Clearly, the Church had in mind a period of mystagogia after the Easter sacraments, a period of time to reflect on the truths and mysteries into which these newly baptized had been initiated. We need to do better at this.

Comparable challenges face some persons who receive other sacraments. Couples who are newly married, parents of newly baptized children, newly confirmed young

adults – all have gone through strong programs of preparation. They have enjoyed prayer, catechesis, ritual, Christian service, engagement in parish life, reconciliation and meeting Catholics who testify. Then, too often, it all ends on the day the sacrament is celebrated. To fully engage these sisters and brothers, our parishes need to find ways to assure a full and smooth transition into the mainstream of parish life and to establish relationships that will endure. Parish councils, with diocesan support, should reflect on how best to engage these disciples for the long journey ahead. How do we walk with them on the road to Emmaus so that they keep coming back to the Upper Room?

There are many studies that can assist parish councils in seeking to engage their lost sheep as they are welcomed back. Gallup, for example, has shown that we need to help them find ways to contribute to the community and thus share the faith. Being personally invited, participating in small group activities and growing in discipleship with others, they will experience the Body of Christ as lived out in the parish.

46. We all have a particular concern for our young people. Those who make a personal connection with Christ during their teen years are more likely to hold to that experience after high school. Parental involvement, example and engagement throughout the high-school years are very effective means of supporting the teenager's faith life. Parishes, vicariates and the diocese need to support our families as they seek to transmit the faith to their teens and young adults.

College students also face great challenges. Each year, we are blessed with an influx of perhaps 30,000 or more Catholic young people attending the universities and colleges in the Diocese of Lansing. Our campus ministry programs are strong, but I know there is much more we can do. We actually are reaching a very small percentage of these young people. I believe that we can and should serve more effectively the religious responsibilities of the parents of these young Catholics who are temporarily in our midst. Perhaps the most promising approach is some program of peer testimony. I ask our Education Department to determine and advance best practices for us to use.

47. Obviously, this outreach to our lost sheep is a task for every Catholic. I call upon every parish council (and vicariate councils where they exist) to discuss this letter, and formulate a set of local responses. I also call upon the diocesan staff to support with great energy the pastors, principals and agency directors as they, in turn, support the efforts of the laity to find and heal the lost sheep. In this regard, we recognize, with St. Paul, that Jesus provides the gifts we need in order to

... equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Ephesians 4:12-16).



48.

PART THREE: THE COURT OF THE GENTILES

Pope Benedict XVI speaks formally each year to his staff, the Roman Curia. His December 2009 talk included these words:

As the first step of evangelization we must seek to keep this quest [for God] alive; we must be concerned that human beings do not set aside the question of God, but rather see it as an essential question for their lives. We must make sure that they are open to this question and to the yearning concealed within it. Here I think naturally of the words which Jesus quoted from the Prophet Isaiah, namely that the Temple must be a house of prayer for all the nations (cf. Is 56: 7; Mk 11: 17). Jesus was thinking of the so-called “Court of the Gentiles” which he cleared of extraneous affairs so that it could be a free space for the Gentiles who wished to pray there to the one God, even if they could not take part in the mystery for whose service the inner part of the Temple was reserved. A place of prayer for all the peoples – by this he was thinking of people who know God, so to speak, only from afar; who are dissatisfied with their own gods, rites and myths; who desire the Pure and the Great, even if God remains for them the “unknown God” (cf. Acts 17: 23). They had to pray to the unknown God, yet in this way they were somehow in touch with the true God, albeit amid all kinds of obscurity. I think that today too the Church should open a sort of “Court of the Gentiles” in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery, at whose service the inner life of the Church stands.

Thus, as disciples, we must not only seek to engage more deeply the Household of the Faith, and to reconcile ourselves and the Lost Sheep to one another and to Christ, but also to evangelize all the nations, especially in the Court of the Gentiles.



49. **Church's Social Teaching**

For those who do not know the Lord, perhaps our most effective initial form of witness is our social ministry. Of course, we do not promote justice as a device to attract the attention of the unchurched. We do it to respect the creation God has given us. Our social teaching is found in the Holy See's 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and the materials regularly produced by the Michigan Catholic Conference. This teaching demonstrates that the Church stands with every person of every time and place. The Church is a sacrament of God's love for this creation.

As Catholics, we promote principles that are the foundation of our social doctrine and that are integral to our evangelizing ministry: the dignity of the human person; human solidarity; the principle of subsidiarity; and the promotion of the common good. These principles are to be manifested in the fundamental option for the poor; the right to religious liberty; the promotion of justice and peace. These principles at their root seek the good of the human person, who is always being called by God to salvation. They do not speak only to Catholics, but to the world. Catholics have an obligation to speak of justice and peace to this world, as we seek to create a civilization of love.

50. It is vital that each of our parish councils examine how well they are living out and promoting these core principles. This witness will attract others quite natu-

rally and serve to be an integral part of our Court of the Gentiles.

51. It must always remain clear that our promotion of the social doctrine of the Church is an articulation of principles. It is for those active in the civil order – including political parties, schools of economic thought and other academicians and appropriate leaders – to determine the most practical and effective means of applying those principles. While the Church’s steadfast witness to life, for the poor, for marriage and families can never be compromised, we always must be open to the possibility in other areas that some may, in good conscience, interpret the application of principles differently. We must continue to teach the moral absolutes in the public arena so that in the Court of the Gentiles all will be drawn to the splendor of truth, and thus find the God who is the source of that truth.



52. **Missionaries**

We are all to be missionaries. We need to meet people where they are – to value them and their own experiences as preparations to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. Then, we invite them to Jesus because we believe in this Christian life and we are happy living it. We want to share our joy with others. Just as missionaries of every generation have crossed oceans to bring truth to those who yearn for it, so must we help people see what fulfills the longing of every human heart. Our own witness of how faith in God has made a difference in our lives can demonstrate to others how their own restlessness can be satisfied. Our joy, of course, is the best witness we can give.

Unfortunately, human longings are often misdirected. We know from our own lives how easy it is to have false gods, to direct our best selves toward something

that is clearly not worthy of us, that may even be destructive. These false gods do not provide the real, lasting happiness we all seek. We need to redirect this focus toward what is good, true and beautiful in their lives. St. Paul invited his little community at Philippi to center their own lives on such things:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

We missionaries must affirm what we see as good in our world, our society, our culture, our communications, our science and technology, our politics and our economy. This can be a powerful way to redirect the world from its false gods. It takes courage to point out false gods and to point to the truth. The Holy Spirit alone provides this gift. Thus, the missionary's every endeavor is under girded by prayer – prayer for courage and prayer for open hearts and minds.

53. There also are times when the missionary must explicitly counter false notions of God's revelation. After all, we want to call people to the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. St. Paul accused the Galatians of turning to another gospel,

... not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:7-8)

Perhaps the most common of these false notions is that God calls us to one virtue only – to be “nice.” Flowing from this is the false notion that God, who wants us to have good self-esteem, surely admits everyone into the Heavenly Kingdom – in effect, there is no judgment or hell. However, we know that heaven and hell are real, because Jesus has told us



so. The cross of Jesus Christ confirms this reality. Jesus died because of our sins. Sin is real, as are the consequences in this life and in the next. It is not just that bad things might happen to us; it is that we ourselves do bad things for which we must repent and change. This earthly life is important and the decisions we make in this life are important. They affect our eternal salvation.

54. All of this, of course, means that there is a right way and a wrong way to live. I am convinced that the examples of the saints and their lives of virtue need to be presented as attractive models of what it means to be a human who is fully alive. In particular, their willingness to sacrifice themselves, to surrender themselves, to be for others, all because of God, appeals greatly to the zeal of our young.

It never gets easier! Where we encounter self-centeredness, superficiality, and excessive individualism, we counter with the gift of self for the other. Where we find rampant subjectivism, where each individual judges what is true and moral, we teach the objective realities, in season and out of season (cf. II Timothy 4:2). Where we find skewed cultural, economic, scientific, technological or political values, we highlight those virtues that mark the human person created in the image of God.

It takes courage to shine a light upon the world. Each parish council should examine how to be like salt, giving its community a proper seasoning, and how to be a leaven in the community. Along with courage, this witnessing requires abundant patience. It is for us simply to plant seeds. God gives the increase. Sometimes, the seeds we sow bring forth a harvest that is readily visible and can lead us to rejoicing. Usually, however, we sow not knowing how we have been of benefit. The psalmist gives us hope:

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:5-6).

55. Our diocese is blessed to have *FAITH* Magazine, the wonderful vehicle created by my predecessor, Bishop Carl Mengeling. It reaches our whole Catholic population and has been shown to be effective in lifting up the Household of Faith. It has also helped shepherd home some who have wandered from the fold. I ask our publisher, FAITH Catholic, to reflect on ways, using the full gamut of modern media, to promote the faith beyond the homes of those who are Catholic. We must reach out to those who, as Pope Benedict XVI says, “while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world” (*Porta fidei*, 10).



56. **The Witness of Charity**

The Book of Proverbs has this statement: If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you (Proverbs 25:21-22).

St. Paul cites this text and then adds: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Of course, we Christians believe that, in one sense, no one is our enemy – all are neighbors, especially those in need. And thus our first response to anyone is to love him or her.

Our witness through the corporal works of mercy can be a most effective way to draw the unchurched into the Court of the Gentiles. When unbelievers come to our Catholic Charities agencies, our Catholic health systems and our hospices, they should see the hand of God. When they participate in a funeral liturgy and the quiet dignity of Christian burial, they should hear the voice of God. All our works of mercy should be undertaken so that even those unschooled in Scripture can sense that we are not serving customers – rather, we are caring for Christ himself in his least brothers and sisters (Matthew 25:31-46).

While our primary motive for any of these activities is to love as Christ loves, it is also clear that every one of these services provides a Court for the Gentiles, a place for them to encounter Christ serving them, even as we encounter Christ in the ones we serve. Here, after anointing them with the burning coals of love, we yearn to have them become one of us in worshipping the Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. In other words, these acts of service always are a

ministry, a witness of charity and a witness of the God of love. They are meant to draw all to the source of that love, to help them latch onto the “unknown god” (Acts 17:23) of their lives.

57. I invite parish councils to examine how well each parish is addressing the needs of the local community. The quiet heroism of the St. Vincent de Paul Societies in our parishes is well known. There are many other similar organizations at work. Councils should not only examine the good work being done, but also the spiritual foundations of that work and how that work seeks to open a Court for the Gentiles in their midst a place where their local community might see that hand of God.

58. Our Catholic schools and universities play a role in the Court of the Gentiles. They provide a setting where those unarticulated yearnings and longings can be satisfied. God made us to be seekers of truth. Our schools help us to see the truth, all to the glory of God. This is why philosophy and theology always will be components of our academic programs. In other words, our schools always must see themselves in dialogue with our culture, not by becoming like the culture, but, rather, by intentionally preserving and developing their unique Catholic character – a transcendent perspective on the world, which is something the culture needs. The world needs us to be consistently faithful to our truest selves. Thus our schools do not conform to the shape of society, but, rather, present to the world an authentic construction of learning based on our faith in the God, who came to live among us. We take seriously human dignity and the formation of the whole person; an integrated ethical vision; and the handing on of a rich tradition that helps shape our engagement in the contemporary world. These truths are attractive.

59. Truth-seeking is not so much about countering error and falsehood. Rather, as John Crosby has noted, we also have the positive task “... of appropriation, incorporation, assimilation” of all the good we find in the world of the gentiles and thus “... enlarging the ‘Catholic fullness’ that we inherit” (*Proceedings of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars*, 2007). We are to do this with an eager and ardent search for and commitment to truth, all flowing from our faith which seeks that truth.

Yet, the formation of a Court of the Gentiles is not just a matter of intellectual activity; it is also about helping our students become excellent citizens who will contribute to a culture of love. This is why all our schools are part of the ministry of the Church – they evangelize our culture and our world by forming men and women to seek the common good and the freedom of all creation. St. Paul tells us:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:19-23).



60. **The Public Liturgy**

For ours to be a Catholic witness, the world needs to realize that we are Catholics. We must present our faith as the means of salvation for us and for all. The sacred liturgy, our worship of God, is something the world needs to see. In days gone by, Catholic processions, Catholic feast days, Catholic days of fast and abstinence, Catholic art and music and architecture, Catholic pilgrimages, and, ultimately, the Catholic profession of faith all made a visible impact on our society. Unfortunately, we have become much less certain of our place in this world.

We know we are to be in the world, but not of it, as Jesus prayed to his Father at the Last Supper:

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world (John 17:14-18).

Unfortunately, too many of us live as though we are of the world (by our attachment to it), but not in it (by our unwillingness to be witnesses to our faith in the world). We do not show our faith. And an often-hostile secular culture is only too pleased by our self-censorship.

61. I ask our parish councils to examine how we might more clearly demonstrate our faith. Our objective is not to condemn the world, but to show the world where its hopes should rest. As but one of many examples, consider a well-publicized pilgrimage to one of my favorite places – the tomb of Father Solanus Casey in Detroit. He was the Capuchin priest who managed the door at St. Bonaventure’s Monastery on the east side of Detroit for many years. Hundreds of people still alive can personally attest to a healing of themselves or of family members, through the intercession of this holy priest’s prayers. It is a great place of pilgrimage. Our Office of Worship for the Diocese of Lansing can provide resources and ideas for other manifestations of the faith.





62.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Father Raniero Cantalamessa, the Capuchin preacher of the Pontifical Household, noted in one of his 2011 Advent sermons:

The effort for a new evangelization is exposed to two dangers. One is inertia, laziness, of not doing anything and leaving everything to others. The other is launching into a feverish and empty human activism, with the result of losing, little by little, the contact with the source of the Word and of its efficacy. It is said: How can I pray in stillness when so many demands lay claim to my attention, how can I not run when the house is burning? It is true, but let us imagine a group of firefighters who would run to put out a fire and who discovered that they had not one drop of water in their tanks. This is how we are when we run to preach without first praying. Prayer is fundamental for evangelization because 'Christian preaching is not primarily a communication of doctrine but of existence.' He evangelizes more who prays without speaking than he who speaks without praying (Second Advent Sermon, 2011).

63.

First and foremost, we need to pray. Therefore, as indicated, I am designating the time period from Friday, August 3, 2012, to Monday, December 9, 2013, as a "long year" of prayer for the spiritual renewal of our diocese, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us, and for the salvation of our souls, those of our lost sheep and, indeed, of the whole world.

64.

During this time, I also ask that parish councils examine the many matters contained in this letter and begin to ask themselves whether everything that is done in

their parishes is furthering the engagement of disciples, the reconciliation of the lost, and the creation of a Court of the Gentiles in their parishes. As to each parish activity, let us inquire whether and how it can introduce and deepen faith in Jesus Christ.

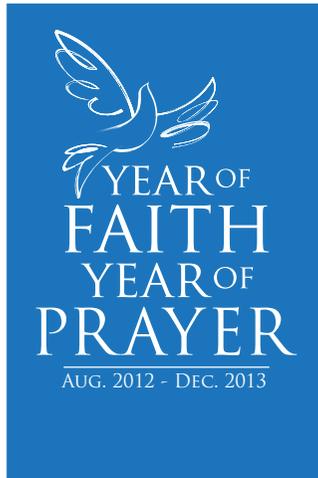
65. I also ask that the regional vicars lead discussions among the clergy and laity so that best practices can be shared. Many wonderful efforts already are under way. We need to share our experiences and perhaps our resources, as well. These regional discussions will encourage thought and reflection – and generate proposals to help guide the diocese for years to come.

66. In addition, I ask our diocesan officials to undertake a similar self-assessment of our diocesan high schools, our diocesan charities and of the diocesan curia. Those with oversight responsibility of the religious orders in our diocese, of the Catholic health systems and of the Catholic university should likewise reflect on how their ministries can contribute to this evangelization of all our people. Also, I would ask our Catholic university, as part of the Year of Faith proclaimed by Pope Benedict, to consider a symposium on the relationship between faith and reason as it is carried out in our own local Church.

67. At the end of this time period, I intend to summon a diocesan assembly. The preparatory work, as described above, will be done by our parish councils, vicariate gatherings and other juridic persons in our diocese. The result of such an assembly would be a long-range plan that should easily take us to 2026. In addition, this solemn gathering of the Church of the Diocese of Lansing will be an opportunity for the celebration of our faith and a public renewal of that faith, to “profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our cathedrals and in the churches of the whole world” as Benedict XVI has requested (*Porta fidei*, 8).

67. I am somewhat fearful of all this, wondering about all the work involved, and nervous that we should somehow not achieve great things for the glory of God. Yet, this is a reminder to me that all we can do is sow the seed and allow God to work his will. On the other hand, I am also excited to lead us on this adventure of faith. I almost feel like St. Paul as he faced the vision of the Macedonian (near present-day Istanbul) inviting him to cross over from Asia to the European continent (*Acts* 16:9), or like St. Columba in the 560s as he stared at Scotland to the east from his island of Iona and pondered the conversion of the Picts, or like Blessed Junipero Serra in the 1700s as he sought to share the Gospel with the Native Americans of present-day California. Perhaps they, too, experienced some trepidation as they faced their mission. We, however, like those who have gone before us, are full of the confidence that God will achieve what our weak efforts cannot – his glory and our salvation. “For with God nothing will be impossible” (*Luke* 1:37).

Announcing:



August 3, 2012: beginning of the Diocesan Year of Prayer

August, 4 2012: anniversary of the formal establishment of the Diocese of Lansing

October 11, 2012: beginning of the Year of Faith called by Pope Benedict XVI

November 24, 2013: ending of the Year of Faith

December 9, 2013: 100th anniversary of the Cathedral
and ending of the Diocesan Year of Prayer

October 2014: Diocesan Conference on Evangelization and Discipleship



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