

***Called, Formed, Sent: Missionary Discipleship  
and its Consequences for Ministry in the  
Diocese of Birmingham***

**A Pastoral Letter  
in Preparation for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama**

**Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.  
Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama**

***“We have the mind of Christ.”  
(1 Corinthians 2:16)***



Dear Friends in Christ of the Diocese of Birmingham,

On November 24, 2013, Pope Francis issued an apostolic exhortation on evangelization entitled *Evangelii Gaudium*. The theme of the letter was “Missionary Discipleship.” According to our Holy Father, Missionary Discipleship means sharing Christ from the depths of our intimate relationship with him. This sharing can involve the direct proclamation of the Gospel, but it also means accompanying the sick, sorrowful, and poor. It means coming to see the world through Christ’s eyes and responding accordingly.

What is new about Missionary Discipleship?

In one sense, there is nothing new about it. The Pope is simply recalling us to the ancient pattern of proclaiming Christ as the source of all true apostolates. In another sense, however, there is a newness that comes from focusing on our specific circumstances. Pope Francis asks us to become critically aware of those purely human systems, procedures, schedules or infrastructure in the Church today that may hinder our missionary witness. Without denying the need for systems and procedures, Pope Francis asks us not to be the slaves of such endeavors.

Missionary Discipleship is not a program, but the Pope says that it should have “programmatic significance.”<sup>1</sup> We should be willing to invent, revise, subordinate, or even eliminate programs that do not serve the ends of missionary witness.

I invite all in the Diocese of Birmingham to enkindle a spirit of Missionary Discipleship described in these pages, in an effort to become better Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus.

The current scandals in our Church are the result of a deep spiritual and pastoral crisis. That crisis can be addressed directly by a vigorous spiritual and pastoral renewal, based on Missionary Discipleship!

This Pastoral Letter is dedicated to St. Joseph, the Foster-Father of Jesus and the Patron of the Universal Church in this Diocesan Year of St. Joseph. We ask St. Joseph to pray and intercede for our efforts to prepare as a diocese for a Eucharistic Congress, June 28-29 of 2019, on the occasion of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. May St. Joseph bless all our efforts to make that celebration special, including the humble message of this Pastoral Letter!



Devotedly yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.  
Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama  
August 15, 2018

Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary  
Diocesan Year of St. Joseph

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25. Cited hereafter as EG.



# ***Called, Formed, Sent: Missionary Discipleship and its Consequences for Ministry in the Diocese of Birmingham***

## **Introduction: The Context**

Since the promulgation of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, whole dioceses around the world have taken up the call to Missionary Discipleship.<sup>2</sup> In July of 2017, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops convened a “Convocation of Catholic Leaders” from around the country to discuss and plan for implementation of the pope’s vision. This call resonated deeply within my own heart.

***The focus of the pope’s vision is that mission, not maintenance, should guide, renew, and reform pastoral ministry in our Church.*** He warns against a culture of “closed and elite groups” within the Church that seek to control or dominate the flow of grace, to benefit leadership or institutions rather than God’s people. Programs and card games, meetings and dinners, plans and statistics can all serve a purpose, but their end must be mission—drawing all people to encounter Christ more deeply in the Gospel, in the sacraments, in prayer, and in one another.

The priority must be encountering Christ and drawing others to that encounter. Missionary Discipleship is not a “program.” There is no “strategic plan,” building, structure, training program, or curriculum that contains within itself the power to convey an encounter with Christ that ends in mission. St. Francis de Sales noted something similar in his classic text *Introduction to the Devout Life*. He explains that our favorite prayers, charitable works, and even the liturgy itself do not constitute true devotion. They aid our devotion, guiding and directing us to our true end. Authentic devotion, however, is nothing other than the very love of God.<sup>3</sup>

Missionary Discipleship embraces and deepens our preferential option for the poor. Pope Francis emphasizes that the option for the poor “must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.” Pope Francis explains, “The worst discrimination which the poor

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the entire Diocese of Detroit recently completed a period of missionary discernment, complete with cycles of prayer, listening sessions, focus groups, and professional consultation, culminating in Archbishop Vigneron’s pastoral letter *Unleash the Gospel*, available at [www.unleashthegospel.org](http://www.unleashthegospel.org).

<sup>3</sup> “But, in fact, all true and living devotion presupposes the love of God; —and indeed it is neither more nor less than a very real love of God.” Fort Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, 2015.

suffer is the lack of spiritual care.”<sup>4</sup> Missionary Discipleship, seeing with the eyes of Christ, must beget a loving attentiveness to the poor.

Pope Francis dreams of “a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, actions, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”<sup>5</sup> I also dream of a missionary option for the Diocese of Birmingham. Many parishes already share that vision, seeing their focus as being permanently in a state of mission.

### ***The Need for Missionary Renewal in the Diocese of Birmingham***

It has been my great privilege to serve the Diocese of Birmingham as bishop these ten years. During this time, I have seen many signs of ecclesial renewal and authentic Missionary Discipleship: new apostolates and religious communities have flourished, and parishes have undertaken programs of pastoral renewal. I venture to mention just a few of the many positive contributions to evangelization going on in our diocese.

The Guadalupan Missionary Sisters arrived in our diocese in 2002 to minister to the growing Hispanic population. Their social and spiritual work at “La Casita” reflects an authentic expression of Missionary Discipleship, identifying and meeting social and spiritual needs. In recent years, several of our parishes have found new ways to participate in the Church’s social mission by cooperating with these sisters in their apostolate in Birmingham and in Greene County. Their ministry in Greene County was capably preceded by the labors of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, currently devoted to Center City apostolates.

Furthermore, thanks largely to the influx of Hispanic Catholics, our diocese has avoided the demographic decline that has affected the Catholic Church in other parts of the country. We have as a diocese sought to help our government embrace comprehensive immigration reform legislation to address confusion in our current system and assist parishes in properly welcoming Hispanic Catholics into our faith communities.

In 2007, Holy Family Cristo Rey Catholic High School (HFCR) transformed Holy Family High School into the first Cristo Rey school in the South. By combining a corporate work-study program with a rigorous academic curriculum, students who normally would not be able to afford a college preparatory education now have a chance to work their way to higher education. In addition to combatting generational cycles of poverty and violence, educators also

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, 199-200. Cited hereafter as EG.

<sup>5</sup> EG, 27.

witness the love of Jesus Christ to those who might not otherwise encounter the presence of Christ in the Catholic Church.

Missionaries with FOCUS (The Fellowship of Catholic University Students) are now ministering to college students in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, offering friendship, Bible study, and faith formation to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. At the newly renovated St. Francis of Assisi parish in Tuscaloosa, college students meet the Lord in regular cycles of Eucharistic Adoration and fellowship with one another.

Since the beginning of my episcopal ministry, I have deeply admired those Missionary Disciples that go out from the depth of their experience of Christ seeking new ways to save the lost, the broken, the poor, marginalized, or addicted. In a special way, I value the missionary witness of my dear friend, still enthusiastic, though hampered by illness, Mother Elvira Petrozzi. She was one of the poor among the poor, whose own family had been broken by addiction and abuse. She responded by breaking out of “the way things had always been done.” She founded a new apostolate that succeeded beyond all human expectation, the Cenacolo Community, which I have earnestly promoted in the United States. Community members continue to walk daily in faith, hope and love, undeterred by the bonds of addiction that crippled them in the past. Cenacolo in Hanceville has provided new hope and healing for those suffering from addiction.

Family Apostolates like Catholic Family Fest have taken advantage of the diocese’s newly renovated Camp Tekakwitha to enjoy time together and to worship the Lord in the beauty of nature. Camp Tekakwitha, in fact, has been designated as a Center for the New Evangelization.

The Courage apostolate now offers support, encouragement, spiritual guidance, community prayer, and fellowship to people in our diocese who experience same-sex attraction.

In September of 2017, youth from across the diocese descended on the Shrine of the Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville to adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament at a Eucharistic Youth Congress. Many hundreds came for what has been described as a new and life-transforming encounter with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

In May 2018, a new Franciscan community, the “Poor of Jesus Christ,” took up residence in the West End neighborhood of Birmingham at Blessed Sacrament Parish. The brothers carry out a joyful “ministry of presence” on the streets, bearing witness to the faith through their charity, their friendship, and their brown Franciscan habits and bringing hope to those who are living in cycles of destitution and despair. In the upcoming months, we expect the sisters to follow. Our Lady of Fatima parish has offered their facilities to promote this apostolate.

For over a century the Diocese of Birmingham has been blessed with Benedictine Communities of men and women in Cullman and elsewhere in Alabama, which have brought St. Benedict’s charism of community prayer and hospitality effectively to our diocese. Dominican

and Franciscan spiritualities have been fostered by the Sister Servants of the Eternal Word, the Franciscan Missionaries of the Eternal Word, and the teaching Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia of Nashville, Tennessee. A community was formed of priests and brothers from the Philippines at Christ the King Monastery near Cullman, and Sisters from the Philippines engage in parish ministries in the Cullman area.

Parishes and schools have experimented with new forms of catechesis, education, outreach, and organization. Examples include participation in the Amazing Parish renewal program, seminars from the Dynamic Catholic organization, *Totus Tuus* missionaries, brought to our diocese by Father Josh Altonji, who evangelize the young, and the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* for the very young.

Several parishes now make use of *Ábreme: Escuela de Evangelización*. This Spanish language course aims to introduce Catholics to a personal relationship to Jesus, to deepen their faith, and to inspire them to share Christ with others, spreading the Gospel throughout the world. Many have also used *Formed*, from the Augustine Institute, to deepen parishioners' knowledge of the faith. Others have found *Christlife* to be a useful tool. This English language program offers "a relational way to make missionary disciples by helping people discover, follow, and share Jesus Christ."

We note the great contributions of Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), founded by Mother Angelica in our diocese in 1981, with its radio and print subsidiaries. EWTN addresses a world-wide audience, bringing the Gospel message in various languages to many nations of the world.

We are also aware of great efforts at evangelization and charity by apostolates such as the Knights of Columbus, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the St. John Vianney Society, which promotes vocations to the priesthood and Religious Life, the Legion of Mary, and Charismatic Renewal. We also commend and thank all those engaged in the following special apostolates: Nazareth House, the Encuentro movement among Hispanic Catholics, Search weekends for youth, Alabama Awakening, Alpha retreats, LifeTeen, Cursillo, Camp Joseph, Engaged Encounter, Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille, and the Avila Institute, helping young and old develop a better prayer life. I especially encourage weekend retreats around the themes of this Pastoral Letter: "Called, Formed, and Sent."

In light of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, we also recognize the Natural Family Planning (NFP) apostolate, which has grown a great deal in the United States.

We have also worked hard to build better race relations in our diocese, stemming from our March, 2016 conference on *Black and White in America: How Deep the Divide?* which also highlighted individuals and groups working to build bridges between the races. Of course, we know that we still have a long way to go!

In addition to the great contributions made by our Black and Hispanic communities to the life of the Catholic Church in northern Alabama, we celebrate the blessing brought to us by our Asian and Pacific Island Catholics. Liturgies are celebrated in the Korean language in Birmingham and Huntsville. A thriving Vietnamese parish, Our Lady of LaVang, recently celebrated fifteen years of outreach to Vietnamese Catholics. The Filipino community brings to parishes in our diocese each year before Christmas their celebration called “Simbang Gabi” involving evening Masses (Misa de Gallo), followed by a communal reception, in anticipation of the Solemnity of Christ’s birth on Christmas Day. How grateful we are to our ethnic communities for their cultural celebrations that embrace the faith of all.

This is not an exhaustive account of new and old pastoral initiatives or Missionary Discipleship in our diocese. We could not begin to name all the individual contributions of faithful Catholics. Long-standing ministries in our diocese also continue to thrive. We can see clearly that the Spirit of the Lord is not idle. He inspires Missionary Disciples in every age.

Despite these palpable signs of revival and hope, we must still consider the need for a missionary renewal in our diocese. Changing culture and demographics have created new pastoral challenges for which we are not adequately prepared. The rapid growth in our Hispanic population is the most obvious example. The decline of religious orders traditionally committed to care of the African American population is another.

Other social and cultural challenges exist for pastoral ministry. Marriage and a cultural esteem for marriage, for example, are in decline nationally, with devastating effects on the stability of family life and the welfare of children.<sup>6</sup> Changing cultural attitudes about religion generally and about the Catholic church specifically have also negatively impacted religious faith and practice. The fastest growing religious demographic in the country is those identifying with no religion at all. The rise in irreligion has been accompanied by an increasing coarseness, negativity, and nihilism among the young. The nation is as ideologically divided as ever, with seemingly no common transcendent norm to which all can appeal.

Culture has changed in ways that present special problems for Catholic spirituality. From the late 1980s to the present, Catholic scholars and sociologists have conducted numerous generational surveys that all reveal a common trend. Catholics have moved consistently towards a more individualistic religious philosophy, emphasizing personal choice, autonomy, and subjective religious experience over objective moral norms, liturgical life, or the authority of tradition.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> See especially the series of studies by William V. D’Antonio, James Davidson, Dean Hoge, and Ruth Wallace.

Others who leave the Church commonly cite a perceived conflict between the Catholic faith and modern science.<sup>8</sup> Religious pluralism and cultural relativism make it difficult to form or keep lifelong commitments to one religious tradition. The explosive rise in social media and internet use has disproportionately touched the young, often in dangerous ways. Studies show strong negative correlation between the use of new media and religious practice.<sup>9</sup> These challenges call for creative pastoral approaches, “a creative apologetics,” Pope Francis says, “which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the internet is changing our brains. There is good reason to believe that social media use inhibits our ability to sustain attention to complex tasks or ideas.<sup>11</sup> In a world of anti-Catholic soundbites, it becomes increasingly difficult to direct attention to the quiet world of contemplative prayer, to the sacrifice of faithful marriage, or to a non-political, non-ideological vision of social justice. The need for a deeper recollection, meditation, and contemplation could not be greater.

As religious practice falls off nationally, the Catholic Church has suffered great loss in members, both in percentage terms and in absolute numbers. This decline has hit the younger generation the hardest. According to Dynamic Catholic, 85% of young people now stop practicing their faith within ten years of Confirmation.<sup>12</sup> Most young Catholics now say they would be just as happy in any other church.<sup>13</sup> In the Diocese of Birmingham, many Catholic families have departed from our Eucharistic fellowship and either stopped practicing their faith altogether or taken up with various non-Catholic religious bodies, especially the “mega-churches.” According to Bishop Robert Barron, “The most significant challenge facing the Church today is the attrition of our own people.”<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, the malaise in the Church caused by the clerical abuse scandals and the egregious failures among some pastoral leaders that became known have been devastating to all and have challenged the Church to immediate reform. We as a diocese must continually evaluate

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<sup>8</sup> Matt Hadro, “Catholics are Leaving the Faith by the Age of Ten-So What Can Parents Do About It?” <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/catholics-are-leaving-the-faith-by-age-10-so-what-can-parents-do-about-it>

<sup>9</sup> Wilfred Emeh, *New Media and the Christian Family: Experiences from the USA and Africa* (Birmingham, AL: Wilfred Emeh, 2016)..

<sup>10</sup> EG, 132

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (NY: Norton, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Ella Hadecek, “Confirmation Programs Teens Will Love: Ascension Press and Dynamic Catholic Produce New Resources,” <http://www.ncregister.com/site/article/confirmation-programs-teens-will-love>; cf. also the great work on Confirmation done by Father Robert Spitzer, S.J., and the Magis Center.

<sup>13</sup> D’Antonio, et al. *American Catholics Today: New Realities of their Faith and Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007). 32.

<sup>14</sup> Jim McDermott, “Three New Bishops for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles,” *Dispatches* (blog), *America*, July 21, 2015.

how well we are doing to protect children entrusted to our care and must be constantly vigilant in this responsibility. With the Office of Child and Youth Protection and our Diocesan Review Board, we are strongly committed to these efforts.

Clerical sexual abuse has indeed been a factor in people choosing to leave our Church. However, when asked, “Why did you leave the Church?” the most common response is far more pedestrian. Seventy percent of those surveyed answer, “My spiritual needs were not being met.”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, we can attempt to do more to meet the pastoral challenges of our present situation.

Research shows that Christians who are nurtured in their faith, embedded in supportive social networks, and who practice a regular prayer life are far more likely to feel close to God and to continue the practice of their religion. Unfortunately, internal surveys of Catholic belief and practice reveal that many Catholics fail to experience these blessings. Many Catholics do not understand their faith or how to practice it. They do not have adequate social support. If they do not have this experience in the Catholic Church, the data shows that they will turn elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

In 2005, Catholic researchers collaborated with the Gallup organization and Georgetown’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to find out what Catholics knew, what they valued, and what they had been taught about their Catholic faith. Surprisingly, most reported that they had been taught about the importance of a personal relationship with God. However, only twenty percent learned that the Church itself was important to Christian discipleship or to their relationship to Christ. In such an environment, it is not surprising that Catholics would “shop around” for the ecclesial community that meets felt needs.<sup>17</sup>

***It is the thesis of this pastoral letter that the best solution for these challenges is Pope Francis’s call to Missionary Discipleship.*** At every layer of Catholic identity, from personal prayer, to the homily, to Catholic schools, social service, or the university, we must emphasize a robust, deep, and thoroughly Catholic encounter with Christ that addresses the moral, intellectual, social, and physical needs of our community. We now focus on how to implement Pope Francis’s call to Missionary Discipleship, as we address the issues of Vocation, Formation, and Mission in the Diocese of Birmingham.

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<sup>15</sup> Pew Religious Landscape Study (2014)

<sup>16</sup> A 1990 study of Protestant congregations identified two factors as having the strongest positive influence on the faith maturity and loyalty of adults: *lifelong involvement in Christian education* (during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) and *lifelong involvement in the life of the Church*. Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Search Institute, 1990). See also research by James Davidson, *Catholicism in Motion: The Church in American Society* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> D’Antonio, et al, 21.

## **Part I: Vocation (We Are Called)**

*“As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw James, the son of Zebedee and John his brother, mending their nets, and he called them.”*

*Matthew 4: 18, 21*

*(cf. also Matthew 9:9 and Luke 6:12-16)*

After his hidden life and temptation in the desert, Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the Kingdom of God. As potential disciples began to gather around, he singled out some by name into a deeper intimacy with himself. Peter and Andrew were fisherman. When Christ first met them, he simply asked to use their boat! Then he invited them to follow him more closely. He did the same with James and John, Matthew the tax collector, and the rest.

The message of Missionary Discipleship is a call to discernment of vocation, not a definite, preformulated plan to be imposed on every parish. Pope Francis encourages each particular church “to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform.”<sup>18</sup> In the same way, as Bishop of Birmingham, I do not seek to impose a single evangelistic program on every parish, association, or institute. Instead, following the example of Pope Francis, I want to “allow the flock to strike out on new paths.” My goal is simply to foster a “dynamic, open, missionary communion.”<sup>19</sup>

Rather than prescribing the precise path, I wish to invite participation, to recall priorities, to identify some pitfalls, and to suggest resources for the development of a vocation in the Church. I also call to attention a few select examples of creative missionary witness in our diocese. My goal is not a comprehensive evaluation of pastoral ministry, but an invitation to “share all good things” that are happening in ministry. (Galatians 6:6)

The concept of vocation is more profound than that of charism. The catechism defines vocation as “the calling or destiny we have in this life and hereafter.” Vocation provides the context within and the purpose for which we use our special charisms. The vocation of every Christian is to union with God through holiness. On that path, however, we must each discern our proper state of life.

Tradition identifies the most perfect vocation, the one most expressive of Christ’s own life, as the consecrated life. “This means that the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses

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<sup>18</sup> EG 30.

<sup>19</sup> EG 30

her very nature.”<sup>20</sup> Taking up the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, consecrated religious dedicate themselves to God with special abandon.

No letter on vocation and mission can neglect the role of the consecrated life, for “*the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life*.... [Consecrated religious] cooperate effectively in the mission of the Lord Jesus and contribute in a particularly profound way to the renewal of the world.”<sup>21</sup> We can promote Missionary Discipleship in our diocese most effectively by engaging the ministry of active religious and by constantly referencing the contemplatives in the Church, even those who live a cloistered life.

The holy priesthood is the most sublime vocation to which God calls a man. “The ineffable greatness of the human priest stands forth” in this, that “he has power over the very Body of Jesus Christ, and makes It present upon our altars. In the name of Christ Himself he offers It as a victim infinitely pleasing to the Divine Majesty. ‘Wondrous things are these,’ justly exclaims St. John Chrysostom, ‘so wonderful, they surpass wonder.’”<sup>22</sup> The priest is the dispenser of the mysteries of God. Most sublime and most necessary is the ministry of the priest.

How grateful we are to all in our diocese who help our retired and infirm priests and religious through their visits, prayers, and generous donations to help our St. John Vianney Residence for Priests and the Bishops’ Retirement Fund for Religious. Helping our retired and infirm priests and religious is an important way to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

Something as profound as vocational discernment cannot be reduced to a program or seminar. Nevertheless, it must be integral to our presentation of Missionary Discipleship. Furthermore, there are programs that have shown themselves effective in aiding vocational discernment. Many young men have discovered vocations to the priesthood by serving as *Totus Tuus* missionaries.

One apostolate promoting the discernment of charisms is the Catherine of Siena Institute. Their program *Called and Gifted* teaches Catholics to identify their gifts, to discern what may be hindering their use, and to learn how to employ them for the good of the Church.

*Fraternus* is another apostolate that has been fruitful in vocations. For example, in the Diocese of Nashville, twelve men from their relatively young *Fraternus* chapters have entered the seminary. When you consider that Nashville had nineteen seminarians in 2017, the impact of this ministry should be obvious. *Fraternus* provides brotherhood and mentorship in masculine virtue, close contact with the sacraments, and practical formation in liturgical spirituality.

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<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Pius XI *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, 16.

Happily, our Birmingham chapter continues to grow, and their plans are to begin a new chapter in Huntsville.

The faithful must know that sacramental marriage is also an ecclesial state. Not only do spouses bring forth children in marriage to replenish society, but by their love they bear witness to the world of the love of Christ. “By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God.”<sup>23</sup> Marriage preparation and enrichment should emphasize the missionary quality of marital life and the role of the home in fostering vocation. We are grateful to the wonderful Marriage Encounter apostolate in our diocese, which helps make good marriages better.

Efforts to foster good marriages should be encouraged in all our parishes; and, where possible, solid Catholic marital and family counseling should be provided, as currently exists on the diocesan level. Dr. David Anders’ book, *The Catholic Church Saved My Marriage: Discovering Hidden Grace in the Sacrament of Matrimony*, (EWTN Publishing, 2018), is a good guide on how a Catholic vision of marriage can bring healing and happiness to married life.

Dr. Anders presents in his book a clear discussion of the Church’s teaching on the validity and non-validity of marriages. Our Diocesan Marriage Tribunal assists the bishop in rendering judgement on whether a union between a man and a woman fulfilled the requirements for a valid sacramental marriage. In this regard the Church acts to uphold the dignity and permanence of a sacramental marriage, while bringing healing to couples where such a marriage does not exist.

Then there are those committed to following Christ in the single life. Through the grace they receive in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, single Catholics receive both a call and a mission to serve Christ in his Church with the special gifts and talents they possess, and they share in the universal call to holiness of life.

Jesus’ general invitation to discipleship – to follow him, is vividly portrayed in his words in Matthew’s Gospel (11:28-30): “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis, popularly known as Father Simeon, a Cistercian monk serving in Rome, has reflected beautifully on the meaning of “coming to Jesus”: “Coming to Jesus,” he says, “is the condition for finding relief. All we need to do is choose to enter the sphere of his presence, and the unnatural pressures borne down upon us by both the world and ourselves begin to dissipate. To the extent that we are far from Jesus, we are the source of our own greatest burdens; without him as Lord, we are in thrall to the tyranny of our passions and, therefore,

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<sup>23</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

susceptible to the world's manipulation and the influence of the Evil One. Without the all-consuming love of Jesus burning in our heart as pure transforming fire, the passions roam the landscape of the soul like ravenous orphans....

“Jesus, whose name means ‘Savior’ is by definition the source of relief from all oppression, whether self-generated or imposed on us from without. The toil of living, abstracted from the compassionate power of God only bears fruits of dejection and despair.”<sup>24</sup>

In this vein, Dom Blosius the Venerable says: “The servant of God, then must believe without the slightest doubt that the invisible God is near him, yes, within him.... He finds God in himself now whenever he fills his memory with the thought of his presence, but in a far more excellent way will he experience his presence when he has found out how to penetrate to the inner sanctuary of his own soul.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis; *Magnificat*, Vol. 20, No. 5, pp. 276-277;

<sup>25</sup> Dom Blosius the Venerable, pp. 316-317, *Magnificat*, same issue.

## **Part II: Formation (We Are Formed)**

*“He came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, “where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds?”*

*Matthew 13:54*

Jesus said, “Come follow me.” Only later did he reveal the special vocation of the Twelve. He lived with them and asked them questions. For instance, he asked Peter, “What do you think? Do we owe Caesar the tax, or not?” Jesus also challenged them. “Peter,” he said, “Satan wants to sift you as wheat.” James and John, he rebuked for their rashness. When others abandoned him for claiming to be Bread from Heaven, he put the question to them, “Will you leave, too?” He taught them that their faith was of supernatural origin. “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you,” he said, “but my Heavenly Father.” Finally, he opened his own life to them in friendship. “I no longer call you servants,” he said, “but friends.” (John 15:15) Christ did more than convey information. He befriended his disciples and then challenged them to abandon their former way of life.

### ***Coming to See as Christ Sees***

***The heart of Missionary Discipleship is a relationship with Christ. Simply put, a person falls in love with Jesus and then wants to share him. But what do we mean when we speak of a relationship with Christ? It is not enough to have a sentimental attachment to Jesus. Relationship with Christ is not merely an emotional response to a message. It is more than adopting an ethical stance or pursuing a social or political agenda. Relationship with Christ cannot even be reduced to a profession of the creed or to participation in the liturgy.***

***Authentic relationship with Christ, Pope Francis says, “is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him.”<sup>26</sup> Authentic relationship with Christ means coming to share his mind, his way of seeing. “Faith,” writes Pope Francis, “does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing.”<sup>27</sup>***

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<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 18.

Authentic relationship with Christ is inwardly transformative. “Be transformed,” St. Paul writes, “by the renewing of your mind.”<sup>28</sup> Relationship with Christ recreates in us the power of his divine life. “From now on,” Paul says, “we regard no one from a human point of view. Even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”<sup>29</sup>

The beginning of this inward transformation is conversion. Conversion starts at a definite point but is not simply a one-time event. True conversion initiates us into a life characterized by contrition for sin, repentance, and continual renewal. Our constant prayer becomes, “Lord, I am not worthy, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

Relationship with Christ is an ecclesial reality. It is not a purely individualistic affair, but presupposes the public worship of the Church, the liturgy, sacraments, fellowship, and service. We cannot experience these things completely other than addressing how they subsist in the One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church.<sup>30</sup> As St. Gregory of Nyssa says, “He who beholds the Church, beholds Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

St. John Eudes (1601-1680) was a French priest who lived during one of the most violent periods in European history. His response to social conflict was to form missionary disciples and evangelists, preaching the peace of Christ. For St. John Eudes, success in ministry flows from a deep, abiding, and mystical relationship to Jesus. He explains also how our inward relatedness to Christ flows together with our outward connection to his body the Church:

I ask you to consider that our Lord Jesus Christ is your true head and that you are a member of his body. He belongs to you as the head belongs to the body. All that is his is yours: breath, heart, body, soul and all his qualities. All of these you must use as if they belonged to you, so that in serving him you may give him praise, love and glory. You belong to him as a member belongs to the head. This is why he earnestly desires you serve and glorify the Father by using all our faculties as if they were his.

He belongs to you, but more than that, he longs to be in you, living and ruling in you, as the head lives and rules in the body. He desires that whatever is in him may live and rule in you: his breath in your breath, his heart in your heart, all the faculties of his soul in the faculties of your soul, so that these words may be fulfilled in you: Glorify God and bear him in your body, so that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in you . . .

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<sup>28</sup> Romans 12:2

<sup>29</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 3:10

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Henri De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 73.

Finally, you are one with Jesus as the body is one with the head. You must then have one breath with him, one soul, one life, one will, one mind, one heart, and he must be your breath, heart, love, life, your all. These great gifts in the follower of Christ originate from Baptism. They are increased and strengthened through Confirmation and making good use of other graces that are given by God. Through the Holy Eucharist they are brought to perfection.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Formation in Pastoral Ministry – How It Happens***

***Pastoral ministry leading to mission must begin with leading Catholics to encounter Christ in the Church. We cannot be Missionary Disciples if we do not first know Christ ourselves.*** We cannot take relationship to Christ for granted. Merely because a person attends Mass or attends a Catholic school does not assure that that person knows Christ in his other interior life.

In her influential book, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell suggests this problem may be more widespread than we might think. She tells the story of speaking to Catholic catechetical leaders in Canada about their work. She described one woman in leadership who was engaged in a lot of activity on behalf of the Church, but whose ministry seemed to lack coherence or meaning. Suspecting a spiritual problem, Weddell asked her, “Could you briefly describe to me your lived relationship to God?” This leader stunned her by answering, “I don’t have a relationship with God.”<sup>33</sup>

In the Bible Belt, we are less likely to meet people who say they have no relationship with God. On the other hand, we are very likely to meet many whose ideas of God or Christ do not include a robust appreciation for the Catholic Church, her liturgy, magisterium, or traditions. This poses the precise pastoral challenge for Catholics in the southeastern United States. How do we lead people to find Christ specifically within the richness, beauty, and goodness of the Catholic Church?

One approach would be to diminish the uniquely Catholic elements of our tradition, and to emphasize only those things we share with other Christian communities. This is an illegitimate solution, and one which the Church rejects. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught, “Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Taken from the Office of Readings for the Memorial of St. John Eudes (Lib 1, 5: *Opera Omnia* 6, 107, 113-115)

<sup>33</sup> Sherry A. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 10.

<sup>34</sup> Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.

Pope Francis suggests a better way. According to the pope and the Council, doctrinal and moral truth is ordered in a hierarchy from which flow all the other elements of Catholic life. ***Pope Francis says that pastoral ministry must continually reference those truths and realities most central to that hierarchy.<sup>35</sup> That means emphasizing above all Christ's life, death and resurrection (kerygma), our communion with him in sacrament, prayer, and Christian friendship (koinonia), and our service to him in mercy, justice, and love (diaconia).***

### **Kerygma**

Pope Francis has placed the concept of the *kerygma* at the center of his call for evangelization.<sup>36</sup> The word *kerygma* means “preaching,” “message,” or “announcement.” In the language of theology, it means the message of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection on our behalf. According to the Pope, this message cannot give way to something more solid. “Nothing,” he writes, “is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation.”<sup>37</sup>

Catechist James Pauley suggests an application of this idea. According to Pauley, we should conceive of our education and evangelism ministry as planning opportunities for parishioners to *consciously* encounter Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. “When a parish makes the *kerygma* central to its vision,” Pauley writes, “parishioners will eventually become more confident in seeing Catholicism as a life of knowing and following the Lord Jesus, who in the Holy Spirit, brings us into communion with the Father.”<sup>38</sup>

Years ago, the renowned Jesuit liturgist Joseph Jungmann explained the significance of this approach. According to Jungmann, many Catholics grow up knowing discrete teachings about the sacraments, Peter and Paul, Adam and Eve, or the Blessed Virgin Mary. What they often lack is a unified sense of how it all fits together, an understanding of the “wonderful message of divine grace.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> EG 36-37.

<sup>36</sup>EG 164: “In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or *kerygma*, which needs to be the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal.”

<sup>37</sup> EG 165.

<sup>38</sup> James Pauley, *Liturgical Catechesis in the 21st Century: A School of Discipleship* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2017), 78.

<sup>39</sup> Jungmann, “Theology and Kerugmatic Teaching,” *Lumen Vitae* 5 (1950): 258; cited in Pauley, 56-57.

***“Who is Jesus? Why did he die? Why did he rise again? What does this mean to me? How can I receive the grace he promises me?” These questions can never be pushed to the margins. Instead, they must remain the touchstone for evaluating the quality of pastoral ministry, evangelization, and catechesis.***

***It is in answering these questions that the uniqueness of the Catholic vision shines through most clearly. The Catholic answer to these questions is not the same as what one commonly hears in non-Catholic churches. The Catholic answer must continually emphasize the sacramental means of encountering Christ, the necessity of a faith formed in charity, the primacy of contemplative life, and the universal call to holiness.***

### **Koinonia**

Nothing characterizes Pope Francis’s teaching more than the word *accompaniment*. One of the important messages of his pontificate is the idea that doctrine, sacraments, and Church ministries must be lived in the context of open and receptive human relationships. “The *kerygma*,” he writes, “has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others.” Nothing is more sterile, fruitless, and even superstitious than a punctilious concern for order, structure, and schedule if these things do not lead us into loving engagement with God and with one another.<sup>40</sup>

Pope St. John Paul II often spoke in a similar way, referencing the biblical idea of communion (*koinonia*). “Conversion,” he wrote, “leads to fraternal communion, because it enables us to understand that Christ is the head of the Church, his Mystical Body; it urges solidarity, because it makes us aware that whatever we do for others, especially for the poorest, we do for Christ himself.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> EG 169: “In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people’s lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.”

<sup>41</sup> Pope Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 26

***The sacred magisterium teaches that there can be no Missionary Discipleship without lived, personal witness, born in friendship. This is something that one cannot take for granted. Simply because people attend Mass together, one cannot assume they consciously experience their communion in Christ.*** Our communion is grounded in the sacraments, but it must still be intentionally cultivated.<sup>42</sup> In practical terms, this means that “The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this ‘art of accompaniment.’”<sup>43</sup>

Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of priestly accompaniment in the confessional. St. John Paul II drew special attention to the accompanying role of the laity. “The People of God,” writes St. John Paul II, “through a spirituality of communion, lead their brothers and sisters to encounter the living Jesus Christ. The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity. Therefore, they are largely responsible for the future of the Church.”<sup>44</sup>

The magisterium has given specific instructions for this formation in accompaniment. First, the art of accompaniment begins with being silently and contemplatively present to the Lord so that we can learn how to be attentively present to one another. Second, the Church must foster relationships on a scale that allows for genuine, human interaction.

Pope Francis offers several specific suggestions for cultivating a contemplative relationship with Christ. He identifies *lectio divina* as a privileged form of this encounter.<sup>45</sup> He also recommends mental prayer as it is associated with Ignatian spirituality.<sup>46</sup> In the final analysis, however, he encourages us to take up any contemplative practice that brings us into the presence of God.

How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that “we speak of what we have seen and heard” (*1 Jn* 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that

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<sup>42</sup> “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

<sup>43</sup> EG 169.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 44.

<sup>45</sup> EG 152

<sup>46</sup> *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 20.

we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.<sup>47</sup>

***We cannot assume that people in our pews enjoy relationships of accompaniment. In addition to time with the Lord, pastoral ministry must take pains to allow and encourage encounter between individuals. This is something that Pope St. John Paul II and the American bishops have emphasized for some time. Ministry in the parish must make space for authentic, reciprocal human relationship.***

It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allow for true human relationships. This will make it possible to live communion more intensely, ensuring that it is fostered not only “*ad intra*,” but also with the parish communities to which such groups belong and with the entire diocesan and universal Church.<sup>48</sup>

## **Diaconia**

Genuine communion (*koinonia*) elicits genuine concern for my neighbor’s welfare. With the early disciples, this realization developed into a formal ecclesial ministry, the diaconate. In this way, the “*diaconia*”—the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way—became part of the fundamental structure of the Church.”<sup>49</sup>

Diaconal ministry is not “a purely mechanical work of distribution.” It is a spiritual work of material assistance. We cannot reduce the charitable work of the Church to the level of a secular NGO or, worse, assimilate it to political ideology.<sup>50</sup> Nor is the ministry of charity restricted only to ordained deacons, whose ministry is very highly valued by priests, religious, and laity of the diocese. Without denying the need for institutional or even political responses to social problems, the Church reminds us that the ministry of charity is essential to the Church’s nature at all levels – the individual, the family, parish, diocese, and universally.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> EG 264

<sup>48</sup> *Ecclesia in America*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, 25: “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diaconia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”

<sup>51</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 20.

***Pope Francis has become well known for his admonition to attend to the “peripheries.” The peripheries can be anyone outside the present pastoral activity of the Church. Missionary Discipleship does not rest content with existing institutional ministry, but actively seeks out the lost, wounded, lonely, and poor in places no one has already looked.*** Like the woman in the parable, the missionary disciple lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully for the lost coin.

As we assess the state of pastoral ministry in our diocese, let us examine ourselves, our families, and our parishes. Where are the poor in our midst? Our families, parishes, and schools? Authentic Missionary Discipleship must cultivate an immediate, personal, and loving contact with the poor.

Finally, the call to service cannot be separated from the reality of vocation. Every Christian is called to love, to holiness, and to share in the evangelizing mission of the Church. We are not all called in the same way, however. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.” Our outreach to the poor and our share in the ministry of charity will be conditioned by our gifts and our state of life. Missionary Discipleship must be attentive to how God calls the individual to service. Starting our day, every day, with the Morning Offering prayer enables us to allow daily prayer to heighten our awareness to the call to Christian service.

## ***Relationship with Christ: Evaluating Pastoral Ministry***

How would we know if we are succeeding in our pastoral ministry? How can we tell if we are leading people to a relationship to Christ that leads to mission? We cannot measure the presence of grace in another soul, but the Church does give us some specific benchmarks for good pastoral practice. If we do our job well, we will nurture Catholics in a faith that is living, explicit, and fruitful.<sup>52</sup>

### Living Faith

The faith we seek to cultivate is a living faith, born of the life of grace in our souls which enters our life at Baptism and continues to grow by the reception of the other sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. It grows, develops, and goes through seasons. It is characterized by frequent reading or listening to the word of God, personal prayer, and reception of the sacraments. It is actively involved in the community and ministries of the Church, participates in works of justice and mercy, and fulfills the obligations of family and society. Living faith seeks understanding, probes, questions, and reflects critically on the reasons for belief. It is keenly

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<sup>52</sup> *General Directory of Catechesis*, 82. USCCB, *Our Hearts were burning within us*, 45-63.

aware of the power of sin and turns frequently to the sacraments in a pattern of contrition, repentance, and renewal.

### Explicit Faith

Living faith is not a vague sentiment, but a definite embrace of the teaching of Christ and the Church. It is explicitly Trinitarian, ecclesial, and founded in the word of God. A living faith is rooted in personal relationship with Jesus *as he presents himself to us in the Catholic Church.*

### Fruitful Faith

Finally, a living faith is fruitful. We see in it the fruits of the Spirit, especially the fruit of compassion and justice. Fruitful faith is evangelistic. Like the Apostles, we say, “we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20) ***Pope Francis has gone so far as to say, “a baptized person who does not feel the need to proclaim the Gospel, to announce Jesus, is not a good Christian.”***<sup>53</sup>

Christian formation is a lifelong process. We do not have to attain the holiness of the Twelve before we can be of use to the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, we cannot rest content with the *status quo*. The Scriptures are filled with exhortations for us to deepen our relationship to God, to “put on the mind of Christ,” and to attain “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13.) ***Study, private prayer, the liturgy, fellowship and service are the privileged means of personal formation.***

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<sup>53</sup> Hannah Brockhaus, “A good Catholic proclaims the Gospel, Pope Francis says,” <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-neFrancws/Vatican.php?id=17844>

## Part III: Mission (We Are Sent)

*Then Jesus said to them, "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. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world."*

*Matthew 28: 19-20*

*(cf. also Mark 16: 15-16)*

Christ sent his Apostles in stages. In Matthew 10, Luke 9, and Mark 6, we see something of a trial run. He told them to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to heal the sick, raise the dead, and to cast out demons. After the Resurrection, Christ conveyed their full commission. His words in St. John's Gospel still astound me: "As the Father sends me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven." (John 20:21,23.)

How can we live this pattern personally? How are we "Called, Formed, and Sent?" ***What Christ did in his Apostles, he reworks in us through the liturgy and sacraments, and the habits of Catholic life.*** What follows are some thoughts about applying this truth to ourselves.

I urge parishes to enter a time of discernment to consider the extent to which they embrace the priorities of Missionary Discipleship. Pastors may wish to consider the formation of leadership teams charged with the analysis and ongoing implementation of a process of missionary reform.

The Office of Catholic Schools has recently begun a program of strategic planning, seeking to bring all stake holders together to evaluate the state of Catholic education in the diocese. I urge school leaders to participate fully in this process and to engage with a willingness to change. Look upon this as an opportunity to not only strengthen the academic, athletic, and financial components of schools, but especially their **Catholic missionary witness**. Please remember: "the Catholic school forms **part of the saving mission** of the Church," **and that mission is to evangelize.**<sup>54</sup> Parents who homeschool their children generally instill a sense of mission and discernment of vocation in their catechetical programs. Their efforts deserve our support and commendation.

***I ask all Catholic agencies, whether or not their specific competence is explicitly evangelistic, to consider the call to missionary witness. Even if your task is remote from "frontline missions," consider how you might bring encounter with Christ more deeply to bear on your present apostolate.***

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<sup>54</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), 7,9.

***Finally, I urge all Catholics to personal conversion, confession, prayer, fellowship, and testimony. Decide to follow Christ more deeply. Commit to learning your faith, and how to share it. Discern your vocation and your charism. And, if you see a need, go meet it. Be bold! Go and make disciples of all nations.***

### **Recalling Priorities**

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church's magisterium has been fruitful in articulating plans and priorities for the evangelistic and missionary renewal of the Church. In addition to the Council itself, special note should be given to the 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntianidi* of Blessed (soon to be Saint) Pope Paul VI. In it, Blessed Paul VI refocused the Church on its primary vocation:

Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.<sup>55</sup>

Other important milestones are the publication of the *General Catechetical Directory* in 1971, its revision in 1997, *The General Directory for Catechesis*, and the "New Evangelization" promoted by Pope St. John Paul II and elaborated in documents such as *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), and *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), and also in his presentation to the world of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, Second Edition, 1997). At the meeting of Latin American bishops in 1983 Pope St. John Paul II noted that the "New Evangelization" was not new in its message of salvation through Jesus Christ, but new in ardor, methods, and expressions.

The chief development since 1997 has been the redefinition of catechesis as a key moment in the process of evangelization. Evangelization does not end with the proclamation of the love of God but must extend to an explanation of the life of grace, morality, and the coherence of faith with reason.

Already evangelization is underway on a large scale in our diocese. We are grateful to our diocesan Propagation of the Faith Office for helping efforts of evangelization outside our diocese, including dioceses in poorer countries of the world. The Catholic Relief Service annual Rice Bowl Collection during Lent connects Catholics of Alabama with needy people struggling for survival in all parts of the world. Catholic Centers of Concern in our diocese and other charitable endeavors undertaken daily by our Catholic Charities coordinators and volunteers translate the mind and heart of Jesus Christ to our area of Christ's Kingdom. Parishes in our diocese have regular outreach in countries such as Haiti, and individuals bring medical expertise

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<sup>55</sup> EN, 14.

annually with teams of doctors and nurses going to Latin America. A deep sense of mission already exists in the hearts of many people!

### **Kerygma and Mission**

The Philippian jailor poses the question to which all Catholic ministry must respond: “What must I do to be saved?”<sup>56</sup> Our presentation of the *kerygma* cannot stop with the facts of Christ’s life, but must end with the call to conversion. The Church “wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life.”<sup>57</sup> That call to conversion is a mission component of the *kerygma*.

The *kerygma* has what we might call an objective aspect and a subjective aspect. Objectively, it includes the meaning of the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery, and the offer of grace. Subjectively, it involves *how we can receive and cooperate with that grace*.

Pope Pius XI wrote that the grace of the sacraments often remains like a talent buried in a field. It is unfruitful because people do not know how to cooperate with grace.<sup>58</sup> Presentation of the *kerygma* must include instruction on cooperating with grace. (Grace is the life and activity of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – in the soul, bringing about our relationship with him.) That cooperation requires faith, contrition, repentance, sacramental and liturgical participation, ecclesial communion, moral and charitable life, and personal prayer.

Although faith is a gift of grace, it is also a thoroughly human act that involves the whole man, intellect and will.<sup>59</sup> ***Our presentation of the faith must include both the reasons for the hope that is in us and the relevance of faith to human life. This requires a presentation that is systematic, that stresses the hierarchy of truths, the historical character of faith, and the coherence of dogma, morals, liturgy, and prayer.***

The liturgy is “the most efficacious means of attaining sanctity” and a privileged place of encountering Christ.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, the liturgy must receive particular emphasis in our presentation of the *kerygma*. All too often, we hear the complaint, “I was not getting anything out of the Mass.” Without proper liturgical catechesis, there can be no adequate response to this challenge.

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<sup>56</sup> Acts 16:29

<sup>57</sup> *Veritatis Splendor*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Casti Connubii*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 154.

<sup>60</sup> *Mediator Dei*, 26.

While most Catholics of the Latin Rite are comfortable in the *Novus Ordo* of the Post-Vatican II Liturgy, many Catholics find a liturgical home in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, celebrated in several locations in our diocese. Those communities have been devoted to a serious study of that form of liturgy and find in the Extraordinary Form a heightened sense of reverence for the Eucharistic Lord. We also acknowledge the existence of the Byzantine Rite Churches in our area, who celebrate ancient liturgies, which are catechetical in their very form.

The Holy Eucharist, and devotion to the Lord of the Eucharist, remains the center and the source of all we do as Missionary Disciples. The promotion of reverential celebrations of holy Mass on Sundays and weekdays and the promotion of regular, even daily, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will inevitably lead to greater zeal for evangelization in our parishes and diocese, a deepened experience of sacrificial giving and stewardship in living the Christian life, and a realization of the missionary goals of the *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diaconia* spoken of in these pages. Parishes promoting Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament have seen spiritual growth among their parishioners and a greater generosity and ardor in sharing the Catholic faith.

Our presentation of the faith also takes account of the one to whom we speak. It varies according to the age, context, and receptivity of the listener. The *General Directory* identifies several norms related to this variety that we should consider.

Above all, a major form of catechesis must be the catechesis of adults.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, parents are the first and best catechists of their children. We cannot adequately serve the young if we neglect adults. For this reason, we are to regard the catechesis of adults as a *preferential option*.<sup>62</sup> In 1999, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a plan for adult catechesis that explained what that preferential option requires. According to the bishops' plan, adult faith formation must receive priority in physical space, scheduling, budgeting, staffing, mission, and pastoral leadership.<sup>63</sup>

Implementing such a goal is not easy. It requires real change in planning and priorities and often a significant change in parish culture. Despite the difficulty, I would urge pastors to consider how to implement the pastoral plan. I charge the Diocesan Education Office with assisting parishes interested in implementing the plan, known as *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*.<sup>64</sup>

***Adult faith formation should also include training in evangelization and the call to share one's faith.*** Adults should be equipped with the tools to share the *kerygma* and to answer common objections to the Catholic faith. Holy Spirit Church in Tuscaloosa offers

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<sup>61</sup> GDC 59.

<sup>62</sup> *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> *Our Hearts were Burning within Us*, 132.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/adult-faith-formation/our-hearts.cfm>

one approach to this need. Practicing Catholics are encouraged to take a “refresher course” by attending RCIA. In turn, attendees invite non-Catholic friends and neighbors to join them. More than a few inquirers have entered full communion in the Catholic Church by this means. At St. Paul’s Cathedral, parishioners have learned to share their faith by utilizing *Christlife*. St. Theresa’s in Leeds has had the same experience using *Alpha for Catholics*.

Another priority is the catechesis of families and within families. Studies show that family religiousness is the strongest predictor of continuing faith participation in the young. Parishes and diocesan offices are encouraged to consider ways to support parents in the “sublime office of being a father or a mother.”<sup>65</sup> We encourage parishes to consider the *Family of Faith* catechetical program (Sophia Press) presently being used by Annunciation of the Lord Parish in Decatur, which provides family-centered catechesis.

The *General Directory* also charges us to consider the various stages of evangelization, from first proclamation, to initiation, and ongoing formation. Pastoral programming appropriate to one stage may not be appropriate to another. For instance, many people who inquire about the faith may not be immediately ready for adult catechesis or RCIA. They are still at the stage of “first proclamation.” Parish programming should create “shallow entry points” where people could learn about the Catholic faith in a non-threatening environment and without the lengthy commitment of RCIA.<sup>66</sup>

One parish in our diocese has discovered a way to meet several of these challenges at the same time. At Holy Spirit Parish in Huntsville, members of the Hispanic ministry team offer family catechesis at the same time as children’s catechesis. In a non-threatening way, parents are invited for coffee, donuts, and friendship while their children learn. Team members focus on Christian witness and testimony first, on encountering Christ in the *kerygma*, and on more extensive catechesis as participants are more receptive. For this formation, catechetical leaders have used *Ábreme: Escuela de Evangelización*.

Ministry to the young and very young can be done in a way that respects the interior freedom of the child and their genuine capacity for relationship to God. Two innovative catechetical programs that take this approach are *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* and *Come Follow Me. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, which is currently in use at Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Paul’s Cathedral Parish and in several other parishes in our diocese, creates a space called an

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<sup>65</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> In his pastoral letter *Unleash the Gospel*, Archbishop Vigneron of Detroit makes several specific suggestions for this situation. He writes, “Many of those we evangelize will not be immediately ready for adult catechesis or the RCIA program. To bring an unchurched person directly into such programs is like throwing a non-swimmer into the deep end. An important part of welcoming the newly evangelized is therefore to ensure that every parish, insofar as possible, has a “shallow end”—an entry-level means of getting one’s feet wet in the journey of faith. This may include programs of initial proclamation of the Gospel, such as Alpha; it may also include social events where people can get to know others in a relaxed, non-threatening environment before making a commitment of faith.”

“atrium” in which Scripture is shared and illustrated in beautiful, quiet, but age appropriate ways. It inspires contemplation and prayer in the very young.

*Come Follow Me*, first developed by members of the institute *Notre Dame de Vie*, focuses on instilling a desire for prayer and the sacraments. The doctrinal content of the faith is integrated with prayer, stillness, and a dialogue about the Word of God. Scripture is central to this method. St. Mark’s Church in North Shelby County is one whose approach to sacramental preparation is similar. Catechetical leaders are highly attentive to the rites of the liturgy itself, rather than mere classroom instruction. Students are encouraged to view the liturgy as a place of encounter with the living Christ.

Leaders in youth ministry are coming to recognize the central importance of accompaniment, apprenticeship, and mentoring. The Y-Disciple program, developed by the Augustine Institute, helps youth to identify adult mentors in the faith. Youth ministry staff can work more as facilitators, connecting young people to those willing to apprentice them in the faith. Our Lady of the Shoals Church in Tuscumbia is one of several parishes making good use of this program.

Young adulthood is a critical time in developing and maintaining a life-long faith. Not only do young adults need friendship and accompaniment, but they need to own their faith and to discover ways to live it in the modern world. Our Lady of Sorrows Parish is one church meeting the needs of young adults. The Young Professionals Bible Study invites those in their twenties and thirties for times of study, fellowship and service. Participants read and discuss Catholic authors and consider how to apply their faith generously day to day. The Young Adult Book Club at St. John’s in Madison takes a similar approach. The ministry of Theology on Tap in Birmingham reaches across parishes to serve young adults in North Alabama in faith and friendship.

Catholic schools are a special consideration. According to Church teaching, Catholic schools exercise a unique catechetical ministry. They do more than teach core subjects with a little religion added. Instead, Catholic schools are to pursue a systematic integration of Catholic faith throughout the entire curriculum. Their task is to help students bridge the gap between their faith and culture. Our many Catholic schools pursue this task differently, each in a way that is appropriate to its audience. All schools can benefit, however, from collaboration and dialogue and a shared missionary vision. The Catholic Schools Office has encouraged all educational leaders to consider the Newman Society’s *Catholic Curriculum Standards*, which promote application of Church teaching on Catholic pedagogy.

### **Koinonia and Mission**

Our ministry seeks to foster a lived communion with God and with one another. We can identify several norms that must be considered in this process.

Prayer, supported by grace, is the foundation of our fellowship. The Church is more than a social club or an NGO. She is a family in communion with her Heavenly Father. The language of this fellowship is prayer. Pope Francis says:

Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God's word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life.<sup>67</sup>

There are many ways we can cultivate a culture of prayer in the Church. First, we should promote the practice of *lectio divina*. In fact, the *General Directory* says that "Catechesis should be an authentic introduction to *lectio divina*, reading of Sacred Scripture done in accordance to the Spirit who dwells in the Church."<sup>68</sup> Second, the popes have all encouraged us to make Eucharistic Adoration a privileged devotion in the Church.<sup>69</sup> Third, "Pastors of souls should see to it that the chief hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts. And the laity, too, are encouraged to recite the Divine Office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually."<sup>70</sup> Finally, we must instruct the faithful in the way of prayer. The contemplative life cannot be one option among many. It is the vocation of every Christian soul.

Authentic *koinonia* requires critical attention to parish culture. It requires programming specifically designed around encountering one another, a culture of greeting and friendship. St. Francis of Assisi Church in Tuscaloosa has a ministry ordered to this culture. Designated greeters help people to feel welcome as they enter church on Sundays for Mass. They offer smiles, handshakes, and kind words. This ministry is conducted with reverence for God and respect towards the other people attending the liturgy.

Creating authentic *koinonia* must allow for human relationships on a scale that makes real intimacy possible. This could mean cultivating small group ministry as an essential priority. Very often, those who leave the Church do so because they were drawn into small group relationships in another Christian community. Parishes might consider maintaining a registry of new members and visitors to receive special pastoral outreach from visitation teams. The Diocesan Office of Discipleship and Mission has offered help in implementing various programs for Catholic small group ministry.

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<sup>67</sup> EG 262

<sup>68</sup> *General Directory of Catechesis*, 127.

<sup>69</sup> See especially the encyclical letter by St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Cf. also page 25 - comments on Eucharistic Adoration.

<sup>70</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 100.

Authentic *koinonia* also requires collaboration in ministry and a willingness to challenge the current “business model” of Catholic ministry. One organization at the forefront of this endeavor is Amazing Parish. They believe commitment to healthy organization can serve discipleship and evangelization if our dependence is upon God in prayer and the sacraments. In our own diocese, pastoral leaders from Our Lady of the Valley in Ft. Payne as well as Prince of Peace, St. Peter’s and the Diocesan Chancery have all participated in Amazing Parish workshops.

*Koinonia* also includes building community relationships outside the Catholic Church itself. Jesus prayed in his final discourse to his Apostles that “all be one as you Father are in me and I in you...” (John 17:21). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council presented two documents promoting ecumenical and interfaith dialogue (*Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Nostra Aetate*). While maintaining that the fulness of *koinonia* resides within the Catholic Church, the Church acknowledges important elements that exist outside the Church. A priest of the Birmingham Diocese is presently completing doctrinal studies in Rome, Italy to assist our diocesan efforts at ecumenical and interfaith community relations (*koinonia*).

Pope Benedict XVI, in speaking about Catholicism’s relationship to Islam, once said: “... We must try to live the grandeur of our faith and to embody it in a vital way, while, on the other hand, trying to understand the heritage of others. The important thing is to discover what we have in common and whenever possible, to perform a common service in this world.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Diaconia and Mission**

Developing authentic *diaconia* requires regular engagement with the social mission of the Church. Several of our parishes have done this by participating with the Guadalupan Sisters in their mission to Eutaw. I would like every parish to include some form of service mission in the formation of their youth. To encourage this, I have charged the Office of Religious Education to help promote service as an integral part of Confirmation preparation.

*Diaconia* also requires discernment of charisms and vocation. We can help create a culture of service in the Church by encouraging Catholics to discern their charisms and put them to use for the common good. A charism is a spiritual gift that God gives for the building up of the Body of Christ. Some are teachers; some are healers; some build, others lead. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.”<sup>72</sup>

We are not all called to the mission of the Apostles, but we are called to bear witness to what Christ has done and to “let our light shine before men.” When Christ healed the Gerasene demoniac, the man begged to accompany Christ as one of the intimate disciples. However, this was not his vocation. Instead, Jesus said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much

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<sup>71</sup> Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2010, p.100

<sup>72</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:5

the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” (Mark 5:19) Not all are called to be Apostles, but all are called to some service. When we receive the sacrament of Confirmation, we are empowered in a special way to bear witness to Christ. Each of us is sent! Discern your gifts and vocation, then put them to work for the common good! “There are varieties of service,” Paul says, but “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12: 5,7)

The Catholic community needs to provide more opportunities for mission, especially for our young people, to enable them to reach out in the community boldly in support of evangelization and social-Gospel missions of the Church.

The Mormons require all men to give two full years in service to their missions and the women, one year.

Jehovah Witnesses send their people door-to-door to witness their faith.

In the Catholic Church, the Legion of Mary fosters outreach in their mission of service, including door-to-door evangelization.

***All parishes, apostolates, and ministries in the Church in the Diocese of Birmingham are invited to reflect on the mission component of their organizations. Are we as Catholics fulfilling Pope Francis’ invitation to Missionary Discipleship in all we are and all we do as Church?***

## **Part IV: Identifying Pitfalls**

There are some pitfalls or barriers to Missionary Discipleship that are particularly characteristic of Catholic ministry.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to Missionary Discipleship is the force of ingrained habit. Catholics who have grown up in one Catholic culture cannot conceive of revisioning ministry on different lines. We may never stop to think about how our pastoral practices appear to newcomers. For instance, I know of a convert couple who went to enroll a child for religious education at the parish. They were turned away for lack of space, since they had registered late. The husband said in disbelief, “Had this been our old church, they would have greased the child to squeeze him in!”

In his book, *Divine Renovation*, Fr. James Mallon gives an example of this kind of pastoral approach. When he began his priestly ministry in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Fr. Mallon wanted to implement a parish program teaching people about relationship with Christ. To do so, he had to ask parishioners in a card game to move their meeting to another night. Shockingly, he was told, “We don’t need to know about Jesus. We need cards!” Happily, Fr. Mallon was not afraid to gently upset the apple cart.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, he was able to bring about a missionary transformation of his parish.

There are so many examples of good ministry in our diocese, but how do we get the word out? Many people on the periphery of parish life never learn about opportunities to become more engaged. It may not be sufficient simply to list opportunities in the bulletin. We have to think intentionally about developing a culture of engagement, of entrepreneurial, creative leadership, and of lay initiative.

“Ministry silos” can create a form of bottleneck. On a farm, different grains are stored in self-contained, insulated silos. We can do the same thing in the Church when different departments and programs operate within their own domain and never reach out to, inquire about, or invite other ministries. We can shut off opportunities for ministry by cutting ourselves off from other pastoral workers.<sup>74</sup>

Another barrier to evangelization and missionary witness occurs when a small group of people control all pastoral activity in the Church and refuse to let others participate. Ministry bottlenecks can take many forms. In one place, a pastor may delegate ministry decisions or activity to a chosen few who become “gate keepers.” I have seen situations where highly

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<sup>73</sup> Fr. James Mallon, *Divine Renovation: Bringing your parish from maintenance to mission*. (New London, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 2014), 9-12.

<sup>74</sup> EG 102.

qualified, evangelistic souls are turned away for no reason other than jealous “turf guarding” on the part of a “pastoral elite.”

When pastors themselves engage in this behavior it may indicate a form of clericalism. Pope Francis warns that clericalism can choke off lay initiative and leave lay people not fully aware of their evangelistic responsibility. Important here is a careful defining of the distinct roles of clergy and laity for mutual harmony in ministry.

Pope Francis also warns that we must not war among ourselves. Catholics are particularly prone to this danger since Catholic ecclesiology can accommodate a variety of theological opinions and ideologies. We do not split off into new denominations every time we have a disagreement. Instead, we must learn to live with one another. The key is to put aside our ideologies and our private theological opinions when we engage in public ministry.

Bishop Robert Barron is famous for having articulated the critique of “beige Catholicism.” This is a Catholicism that is too culturally accommodating, that accepts the ideological or philosophical straitjacket that the dominant culture would place upon the exercise of pastoral ministry. Beige Catholicism is never missionary Catholicism. The Gospel is countercultural because it always calls us to transcend culture. Instead of beige Catholicism, we must propose the true, good, and beautiful in Catholic tradition and show how the Church can transform culture.

In a sense, each of these potential pitfalls puts us at risk of superstition. When the main thing is not the main thing, anytime we exalt the peripheral over the essential, we are at risk of superstition. We may be induced by pride, sloth, or the ignorance born of ideological possession. We must repent of our superstitions and our sins. There is only one thing necessary, to hear the Word of God and to live by it.

## **Part V: Conclusion**

### ***Called, Formed, and Sent: The Pattern of Missionary Discipleship***

The heart of Missionary Discipleship is a lived experience of Christ. It is Jesus who forms us into living witnesses. As we think about a missionary renewal of our diocese, we should turn first to the example of the Master. Jesus did not induct his disciples into a bureaucracy. First, he called them to friendship. He lived with them, loved them, challenged and questioned them. His aim was to recreate in them his pattern of life. Gradually, he formed them into a community, taught them to pray, and provided them with new rites and a new sacrifice. Finally, he sent them to the four corners of the world, to make disciples of all nations, teaching them everything he commanded, and baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I invite all parishes, families, institutes, and centers of Catholic apostolate to take up the call to missionary conversion. Convinced that the heart of Missionary Discipleship is devotion to our Eucharistic Lord, I have called a Eucharistic Congress to be held June 28-29, 2019 in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the diocese.

My prayer is that the next year can be time of preparation, discernment, and reform culminating in a public celebration of our common faith and our diocese. I urge parishes, agencies, institutes, families, congregations, and individuals to look upon this time as a graced opportunity and to participate fully.

I ask priests, religious, deacons, and the members of my own curia to a renewed encounter with Jesus. Commit to the spiritual disciplines, to time with the Lord, to holy Mass and Eucharistic Adoration, and to the Word of God. Consider how you might embody, live, and express more profoundly the Church's *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diaconia* in your own life and ministries.

Pope Francis has challenged us to examine critically our ways of doing ministry, to highlight what is helpful, and to prune back what is not. Above all, we must unite ourselves to Christ in deepening our own personal conversion. Please join with me in this discernment, renewal, and conversion going on in our diocese in this Year of St. Joseph. Let us pray for a missionary renewal of the Diocese of Birmingham, putting our Missionary Discipleship efforts in our diocese around some of the observations and suggestions offered above.

***Help your pastor and your bishop promote a greater sense of vocation, formation, and mission in our diocese in preparation for our June 28-29, 2019 Eucharistic Congress. May our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph be our models and our guides as we see ourselves as Called, Formed, and Sent on a special mission as Disciples of Christ!***



***Prayer in Preparation for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Diocese of Birmingham***

*Heavenly Father, You call us by our  
Baptism and Confirmation to be  
Your faithful disciples, united with  
You and with one another  
through a faithful and worthy  
reception of Your Divine Son  
in the Holy Eucharist.  
Guide us with Your Holy Spirit  
so that our words and actions  
witness to and build up  
the loving union that You desire.  
We ask this through the prayerful  
intercession of St. Joseph and Our Lady  
of Fatima, and in the holy name of Jesus,  
who is our Lord and Savior, forever and ever.  
Amen.*

*Dios Padre, que nos has llamado por  
medio de los sacramentos del bautismo y la confirmación  
a ser fieles discípulos tuyos, y nos  
continúas llamando para estar unidos  
a Ti y a nuestros hermanos por medio de tu Hijo Jesucristo,  
que nos encuentra en la Sagrada Eucaristía,  
síguenos guiando por medio de tu Espíritu Santo,  
para que nuestras palabras y nuestras acciones  
testimonien tu presencia y construya  
nuestra unidad. En comunión con San José  
y con nuestra madre la Virgen María,  
bajo la advocación de Fátima,  
elevamos esta oración por la intercesión  
de tu Hijo Jesucristo, nuestro Señor y Salvador;  
por los siglos de los siglos.  
Amén.*