



Most Reverend Louis Tylka
Diocese of Peoria
Office of the Bishop

Pentecost 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The great Solemnity of Pentecost is a reminder to us of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Indeed, our life as disciples in the Church is animated by the Holy Spirit who empowers and equips us for the mission that the Lord has given to us. Therefore, it seems appropriate to use this feast as a point of reference to look to our future as we build upon our past.

On Easter of 2022, I wrote to you to outline what I proposed as the five foundations for renewal in our diocese. These five foundations are: our call to discipleship, the task of evangelization, the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives, promotion of vocations, and supporting the legacy of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen. It is important to recall that these foundations emerged as a fruit of the dialogue and the discernment I had with the priests and the faithful of the diocese.

In addition to articulating the five foundations, we launched a pastoral planning effort last August, which we are calling "Growing Disciples." This two-year effort engages the entire Church in the Diocese of Peoria through prayer, reflection, dialogue, and discernment to chart a path of growth for a mission-driven Church that is sustainable for the future. While there is a necessary step of realigning our resources to create an opportunity for growth, which will include a reduction of parishes, the goal is to align our available resources with our legitimate needs as we renew the Church for the foreseeable future. I am extremely grateful for the hard work that has already been put into this effort, particularly the work of the Core Team that is guiding the process with the help of consultants from Catholic Leadership Institute.

While looking to the future, it is my desire through this letter to update you on the good work that has begun in each of the five foundations. One way to chart our

Phone
309 671-1550
Address
419 N.E. Madison Avenue,
Peoria, Illinois 61603
Website
cdop.org

progress is by watching the videos that have been posted on the Growing Disciples website. They are conversations that have taken place regarding each of the foundations.

To say that the world's landscape has shifted over the past few decades would be a great understatement. As the Holy Father has indicated, and that has been affirmed by many others, we are living not only in an age of changes, but a change of ages! It is commonly described as a shift from the age of Christendom to a new Apostolic age. From the time of the Second Vatican Council through the teachings of Pope St. Paul VI, Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, the Church has continually affirmed that a greater and better evangelization is needed in the world today. Our faith in Jesus Christ is the same - yesterday, today, and forever. Yet the way we encounter and respond to Jesus necessarily must develop and meet the signs of the times. I truly believe that we have much hope for the future as we - the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Peoria - are deliberately, faithfully, and creatively taking up our calling anew by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

DISCIPLESHIP

We have been chosen by Jesus and called to be his disciples. A disciple is someone who has encountered Jesus, and because of the encounter responds with the commitment to be a life-long follower of Jesus. Disciples seek to imitate the life of the master, incorporating all that they experience and learn about Jesus into their own life. As we deepen our understanding of our calling and its application across all areas of life in the Church, we seek opportunities in our parishes to provide people with the means to grow in their understanding of being a disciple and the responsibilities that flow from discipleship. Everything we do, in every aspect of diocesan life, needs to be in support of our first calling to be disciples and focused on the mission to "Go make disciples." This entails our own personal conversion, a deeper understanding that Jesus has called us to be his disciple, and the development of our response to that calling. Here, I might suggest a book that I have given to our priests as a way to deepen your understanding of discipleship: *Into His Likeness* by Edward Sri.

EVANGELIZATION

Flowing from our understanding of being a disciple, the natural progression is to become an evangelizer of the relationship with Jesus. Jesus' presence and love transforms who we are and is so powerful that we desire to share the experience with others. Evangelization is the "big word" that essentially means the sharing of our faith. We share with others our experience of the encounter with Jesus so that they too may seek the same encounter. The Holy Spirit evangelizes through us and uses us as his instruments. To that end, progress is being made as we look to transform our parishes into evangelization centers: places where people can come for the authentic experience of meeting Jesus. However, it is not enough for us to provide a place where folks need to come, we must be a willing to go out to meet people. Many feel they are not adequately prepared for the task of evangelization. So efforts have begun to overcome this hurdle of self-doubt by developing opportunities that allow people to unpack the notion of evangelization and share how they have experienced their own role in the mission. Here, I might suggest another book that has been given to all our priests and Curia, *Start with Jesus* by Julianne Stanz. It offers insights to our calling to be an evangelizing Church.

Before moving on to comment on the three remaining foundations, I wish to highlight the efforts of the Diocesan Curia that are focused on strengthening the awareness that we are all called to be evangelizing disciples. Mr. Matthew Faley joined our staff as the Chief of Mission last September. A primary task of his is to assist all of us - in our parishes and in the Curia - to remain focused on the mission: "Go Make Disciples." As we renew our efforts, we earnestly desire to encourage and support our priests, religious, and parishes in their efforts to promote on a daily basis our calling to follow the Lord.

EUCCHARIST

We know that Jesus instituted the Eucharist as the source and summit of our Catholic lives. The Eucharist - his real presence among us - both nourishes us and sends us out to become bread for the world. It is essential for our growth as a Church that we foster a deeper understanding of the ways Christ is present to us - through the community that has gathered, in the priest who presides over the gathering, in the Word that is proclaimed, and most especially in his Sacred Body and Precious Blood. The awareness

of Jesus coming to us as we celebrate the Mass and remaining with us in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is interiorly transforming. Coinciding with the National Eucharistic Revival, we are focusing our efforts in deepening our appreciation of the Eucharist and the ecclesial unity among those who worship. A diocesan monstrance and a diocesan chalice and paten are traveling across the diocese and are used during holy hours and Masses. We recently held a Eucharistic Revival for all of our Catholic high school students that also included the presence of relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis and Saint Manuel Gonzales Garcia. And we eagerly anticipate the National Eucharistic Congress that will be held in July of 2024 in Indianapolis.

VOCATIONS

Recently, the Diocese of Peoria was recognized as one of the top dioceses for the promotion of vocations. God has blessed us with seminarians who are studying for the priesthood for our diocese and with young women who are entering consecrated life. Our responsibility as a Church is to promote and encourage everyone to discern and respond to God's call in their lives - in whatever path Our Lord has chosen for them. There is much work to do in this foundation - not only in promoting vocations to the priesthood or consecrated life, but also the vocation to holy matrimony. One recent effort was a pilgrimage to France to pray for vocations among our patron saints of vocations: St. John Vianney, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and Sts. Zellie and Louie Martin (the parents of St. Thérèse). We continue our investment in college Newman centers and our strong support of the Vocations Office and the seminaries of Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mount Saint Mary's, and now Mundelein Seminary of the University of St. Mary of the Lake. As we look to the future, along with our efforts to promote and support priestly and religious vocations, we are continually renewing our efforts to provide marriage preparation programs that assist and support our ministry to young people and families.

VENERABLE ARCHBISHOP FULTON SHEEN

The fifth of our Foundations is the promotion of the legacy of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen. How I wish that I could, with this letter, announce the date for our beloved native son's Beatification. Unfortunately, I am not able to do so. However, I believe that progress is being made. I had very encouraging conversations with the

Vatican's Secretary of State and with the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints when I was in Rome this past September. Additionally, we have locally continued efforts to renew our promotion of Venerable Sheen's legacy by celebrating Mass at his tomb three times a year (his birthday, his anniversary of ordination, and the date of his death). We have revamped the Sheen Foundation's newsletter; we have acquired additional treasures from various donors; and we have appointed new leadership to the Official Cause and to the Foundation. Lastly, we have just recently begun efforts to explore how we might better present and promote the legacy of Archbishop Sheen through the museum and possibly other ventures.

My dear sisters and brothers, there is much to be hopeful for as we keep this Solemnity of Pentecost! The Holy Spirit is alive in our Church. I have every confidence that trusting in the Holy Spirit's guidance, our efforts of renewing our response to God's call to make disciples will bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God. Archbishop Sheen wrote, "Conversions are not more difficult in our times than before, but the approach must be different." As we adapt our approach to meet the challenges of today, we will win many souls for Christ tomorrow. Building upon the solid foundations of Discipleship, Evangelization, the Eucharist, Vocations, and the Legacy of Venerable Sheen - we will build up a stronger, more vibrant, and mission-driven Church.

Come Holy Spirit! Renew us and Christ's Church!

Peace and Prayers,



✝ Most Reverend Louis Tylka
Bishop of Peoria