



Surrender to God Live in Christ



A Pastoral Plan



for Holiness of Life
for the People of God of

the Diocese of Cheyenne

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Over a year ago, we began a process to identify our pastoral priorities that would lead and guide our efforts as a Diocese over the next three to five years. For us as Church, any Pastoral Plan must help us achieve the Master's plan, which is to be witnesses to Christ and to proclaim His Gospel of grace to the world. (Cf. Acts 1:8)

I wish to express my deep gratitude to the many people who contributed to developing these priorities into a detailed pastoral strategic plan. I am particularly grateful to the Diocesan Management Team, Diocesan Pastoral Council and Strategic Plan Leadership Team for the hours they devoted to this process. I am grateful to all the pastoral leaders who participated in the January 2011 Institute, the many listening sessions or completed surveys and all those who served on the priority task forces that helped to develop our goals and objectives. My hope is that this Pastoral Letter captures the spirit of all that has been shared in the past year. The complete Strategic Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Cheyenne may be reviewed on our diocesan website.

God's Plan: Holiness of Life

For us Christians to truly accomplish the Father's plan, we must make holiness of life the first priority. (Cf. 1 Thess. 4:3) Holiness is a consistent desire and effort to model one's life on the life of Jesus Christ. This Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Cheyenne calls all the faithful of Wyoming to keep Christ always before them, for He is our Lord, the One who authors and perfects our faith. (Cf. Heb. 12:2)

I have recommended the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the entire Diocese because it reminds us that we are children of this loving God. (Cf. 1 John 3:1) Christ offers His Heart to us to strengthen us and feed our souls for the pilgrimage of faith. Our goal on this journey is to be strengthened in our relationship with Christ, through whom we are perfected as God's children. Christ's desire is for His divine life to mature fully in each of us, thus exalting our humanity to a higher dignity, and calling.

Holiness demands a longing to grow always in this relationship with Christ. Holiness enkindles a deep desire for the things of heaven; a thirst for the eternal life from which each person is drawn forth and destined to at the end of this earthly pilgrimage. Holiness is striving to live in a manner worthy of the life to come. St. Paul says, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,

where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." (Col. 3:1) Holiness instills the realization that our citizenship is in heaven, from where we await our savior, Jesus Christ. (Cf. Phil. 3:20)

To lead lives that are holy, the simple yet profound principle in the effort to please God is to find His will in every moment of life, whatever our state in life. (Cf. Jean-Pierre De Caussade, Abandonment to Divine Providence) In short, this means we do not need to "go looking" for God's will. His will is intertwined in each and every moment of our day. We do not need to develop our own "plan." God meets us in our every breath of every moment each day. All we need is the faith to embrace God in each event of life, and to cooperate with His plan for us. When we do our best to follow Christ as faithful disciples, keeping His commandments, we know we are on the right track.

When Jesus called His first disciples, they were mending their worn nets. (Cf. Luke 5:2) This says a lot about how Jesus meets each of us in the simple, mundane activities of life. Surely it is in the faithful and joyful fulfillment of the simple duties that belong to us, that we encounter Christ. It is also within these same activities that we are called to make Christ present in the world and to others. Jesus' ministry was a long





series of one-on-one relationships. This is still the model of ministry for us as Church today. Holiness is the day-to-day loving of our neighbor as the primary witness to our love of God.

In many ways, this Pastoral Plan is a call to every member of the Church to search for Christ in the daily routines of life. It is also a challenge to prayerfully consider how we are being asked as members of Christ's body to rediscover Christ, very personally and intimately. At the same time, we seek to discover new ways to proclaim Christ in the culture of today's world in a way that effectively passes on our faith. This particular challenge came to light as the leadership team wrestled with many of the suggestions that surfaced in our listening sessions. The leadership team honestly faced the reality that much of what was being proposed for our Strategic Pastoral Plan were ideas that have worked in the past, but frankly have proven to be ineffective in today's culture and Church.

Again, to use the image of mending nets, part of the task we face is to recognize what needs mending in our own faith lives, as individuals, as families, and as parishes. Are we prepared to be honest about the moral challenges we face in our culture and take a stand, trusting in God's desire to lead and guide us into a future filled with hope in His blessings? Are we prepared to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit who is waiting to show us the way to a more vibrant faith life, as individuals, families, and parishes?

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel regularly grumbled to Moses and to God that they would rather go back to Egypt than struggle through the desert towards

the Holy Land. (Cf. Exod. 16:3) Our faith, rather, calls us to continue our journey with hope and confidence in God as we move into the Kingdom of a renewed and vibrant Church. Christ explained, "Do not be afraid any longer little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

This future of the Church is yet to be revealed. But, it will only be revealed and fulfilled by God through us if we are willing to surrender to God and commit to allowing the love and goodness of the Father to take root in our hearts, in the person of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what we eagerly strive to understand and accomplish. We know that the cross will be a part of our journey, as it was for Jesus, but we embrace the cross with confidence in God and the new life He has prepared for us.

As the call to holiness beckons us to live our life in Christ, another key component to our faith life is a devotion to Our Lady. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta had a beautiful saying which speaks about the role of Mary; "Be only and all for Jesus through Mary." This simple saying teaches us much about Mary's great desire to lead us to her Son, Jesus. May all of us grow in our love for Christ and His Church through the intercession of Mary, the Patroness of our Diocese under the Title of Our Lady of the Assumption.





Image and Inscription

In Mark's Gospel (12:13-17) the Pharisees in an attempt to trap Jesus asked him whether it was right to pay the census tax to Caesar. In His response, Jesus requested to see a denarius. He asked them: "Whose image and inscription is this?" The coin bore the image and inscription of Caesar, and was rightfully due to Caesar. In a similar way, each of us is a person made in the image of God who has inscribed His law on each of our hearts. Thus, as the coin belonged to Caesar whose image it bore and therefore was due to him, each of us belongs to God since we bear His image and are due to Him. We are entrusted with rights to God's love as His children, but also are charged with correlating obligations towards God as our Father, as well.



The call to holiness invites us to deepen our awareness that we are made in God's image and likeness. God has given us the ability to know and love; this is how we are an image of God. So we must give back to Him by knowing God and loving Him. With renewed devotion to the Sacraments, we celebrate this mysterious work of God in us as we open our understanding to the moral compass of God's law of love inscribed in our hearts. The Sacraments nourish the presence of Christ within us and increase our sensitivity to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us according to God's ways as individuals and as the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Sacramental Life

Our first priority as Catholics is our Sacramental life. Our call to holiness revolves around the reality that through the Sacrament of Baptism, we have died to sin



and living for this world alone, and we live now in and for Jesus Christ. This truth about baptism is a great mystery for regular, prayerful reflection.

Reconciliation is another necessary way for Christ to nourish us. This being said, sadly, few people today practice this Sacrament regularly. They see no need to confess their sins to a priest when they feel quite capable of telling God directly how sorry they are for their sins. Granted, such sorrow may exist in our hearts after we commit sins, and God does hear us.

Personal efforts are a good starting point, yet the conscience still remains troubled, and the soul is still wounded as a result of sin without the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Only the grace of the Sacrament instituted by Christ and carried out by His priest heals the heart, soul, conscience, indeed the whole person. Thus, one no longer wonders if he or she has been forgiven and is no longer troubled by a guilty conscience because the Sacrament has indeed cleansed and renewed his or her relationship with God. The grace of the Sacrament also strengthens



the resolve of the individual to follow the interior “inscription” written on his or her heart and in the process conforms us more to the “image” of God in which we are made.

Yet Christ Himself willed that His ordained ministers, priests, be the dispensers of His own forgiveness. Christ appeared to His twelve ordained apostles, breathed on them and said, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20: 22-23) Christ has given His priests alone the power to grant forgiveness of sins. This same tradition is rooted in the Old Law, where the ordained priests alone could make offering for sins committed by the people. The Sacrament is not scary nor over demanding because the priest with a merciful heart looks forward to offering Christ’s absolution to any who are looking to be reconciled to God and amend their lives.

Just as Christ renews His divine life in us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so He strengthens and nourishes this Life in us primarily by the Eucharist. If we are to receive such a sublime gift, we must offer ourselves to God in return. This is one reason why the Church still holds as a basic precept that it is a serious sin to miss Sunday Mass. Yet even with such an obligation, Mass is a tremendous gift where we receive Christ, who is the Light to guide our way.

Acknowledging this fundamental role the Eucharist plays in our lives, it is important for every parish to give renewed attention to the celebration of the Eucharist. Our celebration of the Mass is to reflect the reality of this divine interaction of God with His people. Our participation in each Mass calls forth a conscious awareness of this great and transforming interaction between God and



the human family.

With the implementation of the new translation of the Roman Missal, it is a perfect time for parishes to devote renewed energy and attention to the training of every liturgical minister. It is an optimal moment to teach the worshipping assembly the various components of the Mass. This understanding leads to a deeper awareness, appreciation, gratitude, participation and cooperation with God’s grace during the Mass. Now is also the time to make sure that we are giving due attention to provide for sound liturgical music which gives worthy praise to God for all the good things He has done for us.

One very important part of parish life that every parish should review is the aspect of hospitality and welcome. The vast majority of people’s experience in the parish revolves around the Sunday liturgy. As people enter into this all-important moment of their faith life, do they feel welcome? Do they feel like a child of God and member of the community? Will each person leave the Sunday Eucharist feeling as if they have encountered the living God? Will they be inspired to live the Gospel that has just been proclaimed? Will they be respectfully challenged to greater conversion of life and generosity? Will they eagerly await the next opportunity to join this community in prayer?

With regards to hospitality, I recently learned of a person who discontinued the RCIA process in a parish. When asked why, he told the pastor that he had been attending Sunday Mass for months in the parish, and not once did anyone ever say, “Hello,” or make him feel welcome. He did not want to be a part of such a church. In a world where it is increasingly easy to walk through life anonymously, our goal as Church is to provide a loving community where all are welcomed.





Our Creed tells us that we are “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.” More and more, the Church is made up of members from many different nationalities and walks of life. Again, since the Sunday Eucharist is the primary experience of the Catholic parishioner, it is precisely in this Eucharistic celebration that our unity should be experienced in the diversity of our members. Perhaps the greatest such “shift” in this regard in our times is the presence of so many immigrants from Mexico. We will do all we can to expressly welcome these individuals and families into our parishes and Sacramental celebrations.

A similar concern of reaching out and welcoming is the pressing need for the New Evangelization. Every Catholic adult can probably name several individuals they know who no longer practice their faith. These may be family or friends who have been away from the Church for decades. We need to ask them to return “home.” At the same time, as a part of “mending our nets,” we need to take a hard look at what we are inviting them to return to. If these individuals were to attend Mass at any of our parishes, would they immediately recognize what they have been missing for so long? Or would they leave and not think twice about staying away for another decade?

This is the kind of hard, honest introspection required of us as Church today. Sunday Eucharist is not just about the caliber of the priest and his preaching. This is an essential and important element, and priests and deacons are also called to renew their own commitment to prayerfully preparing as presiders and preachers.

Consecrated Hands; Supporting Hands

As Church, we are many things. First, we are a family of God, which implies unity and support. We are a Church built upon the Sacraments. As such, we will always have a need for holy priests. But priests do not exist alone; they exist in the midst of communities of faith.



But the entire worshiping community must be renewed in prayer and faith.

We must be more than “consumers” when we come to Mass. We are there to receive the most precious of gifts, as conscious, active members of a worshiping community who share what they have received. As St. Francis tells us, “it is in giving that we receive.” This holds true in our worship as in all aspects of our Christian lives. If someone leaves any Mass feeling like they have not been fed, one of the questions they must ask themselves is: “Did I do all I could to enter into the spirit and heart of the celebration?” “Did I truly open myself to receive what Christ and His Church is actively accomplishing?” “Did my participation contribute to feeding the faith of the others who worship with me?”





In the Book of Exodus (Cf. Exod. 17:8-13), we hear the story of Israel's battle with Amalek. In this account, Joshua lead the troops in battle, while Moses stood on a hill overlooking the field with his hands raised in prayer. However, when Moses' arms grew tired and he lowered them, Amalek got the better of the fight. So, Aaron and Hur placed a rock beneath Moses for him to sit upon, and they supported Moses' arms during the remainder of the battle, which ended in Amalek's defeat.

This is a wonderful image of the kind of interaction necessary in the Church today. It speaks to the need for great unity - communion - between the Bishop and his people, and again between our priests and their parishioners. Such unity is what lies at the heart of the mission of the Church and is strengthened in a unique way in the reception of the Eucharist. This "communion" of life is exemplified best in the many parish staff members, volunteers and organizations that fulfill their ministries daily.

New Evangelization

At the heart of our call to holiness is faith. Because of the secular culture in which we live, we can be infected with a mediocrity that is satisfied with an approach to life that seeks only "my will;" that seeks to rely solely upon my own effort and resources. Without faith in God and in Jesus Christ, we will never progress beyond the limits of our own ideas and efforts. Jesus desires to do great things for us. Jesus also desires to do great things with and through us - but without faith in Him and hope in

I wish to acknowledge another critical set of links in the net that is the Church, cast lovingly by Christ into the sea of the world. We are blessed with tremendous organizations of the faithful in this Diocese, especially the Knights of Columbus and the Wyoming Council of Catholic Women. These groups of faithful men and women are already doing many good things to support the Church, but could be drawn even more into the everyday life of parishes. In a culture that is more and more "self-centered," more focus is needed to build up the sense of the entire community within the local parish. Organizations such as the K of C and the WCCW stand ready to assist in any way possible for such service.



His promises - our view will be forever restricted to a limited horizon and our progress in faith will be mired in hard hearts and narrow minds. We know the importance of faith from Jesus' own unwillingness to work any mighty deeds in His home town because of their lack of faith, which stopped them from grasping His divinity. (Cf. Mark 6:6)

In many ways, the New Evangelization is aimed squarely at the existing Church. Both Blessed John Paul II



and our present Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, tell us that this New Evangelization is for those parts of the world that have been evangelized, but where faith in Christ seems to be diminishing, due to a “practical atheism” and an ever growing “secularism.”

Here again, I find the image of mending nets applicable. The forces of this practical atheism and secularism have left holes in our practice of the faith, diminished numbers of parishioners in the pews, raised divorce rates, lessened the knowledge of the faith, decreased the number of priests, seminarians and religious, and paved the way for a greater willingness to question the fundamental basics of Church teaching and morality.

The New Evangelization is about our honesty in facing these challenges, and recognizing that the answer to each of these realities rests in the person of Jesus Christ. Evangelization calls us to a deeper knowledge of Christ. It calls us to a greater ability and willingness to share our faith with others, first by our example of lives, and second by the knowledge of our faith. The instruction of the New Evangelization is akin to that of St. Peter in his first epistle where he exhorts us: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Pet. 3:15)

The New Evangelization calls us to recognize afresh the love of God that is ours in the person of Jesus Christ. The New Evangelization calls us to humbly discover – perhaps for the first time in a meaningful way – that we have been saved, redeemed and renewed by and in Christ. This fresh understanding calls us then to live in the light of the saving events of Jesus’ life, passion, death, and resurrection. It calls us to begin living our life as a



true participation in Christ’s salvation.

This is what a deep identity with the person of Jesus does for the mature Christian. This deep awareness and participation in the saving work of Christ is what allows us, indeed, motivates us to embrace every moment of life with and for Christ. Whether we are healthy or ill, weak or strong, rich or poor, unemployed or working, we embrace all with, for and in Christ.

We must embrace the cross in all our sufferings and sacrifices – as painful as these realities of life can be – with a hope and trust that God is continuing the saving work of Christ in and through us. St. Paul said, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the Church.” (Col. 1:24) Indeed, every time we celebrate and participate in the Eucharist, we enter into the saving Mystery of Jesus Christ where we are strengthened, fed and made ready to imitate Him.

The New Evangelization is an invitation to us to recommit as individuals, families, and parishes to knowing Christ. The Gospels are full of references to Jesus spending time alone in prayer. These intimate moments with the Father were the foundation of Jesus’ apostolic works. We follow this example of Christ when we spend time in prayer, allowing the Lord to strengthen us in our relationship with Him, and allowing Him to draw us into the “heart of the Father.” “No one knows the Father but the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.” (Matt. 11:27)

Once we have been strengthened and renewed “through Him, with Him, and in Him,” then we are to show compassion to the crowds as did Jesus by casting our mended nets of faith into the sea of God’s people, to bring them to the same font of life that quenches our thirst. Parishes are encouraged to strengthen “the faithful

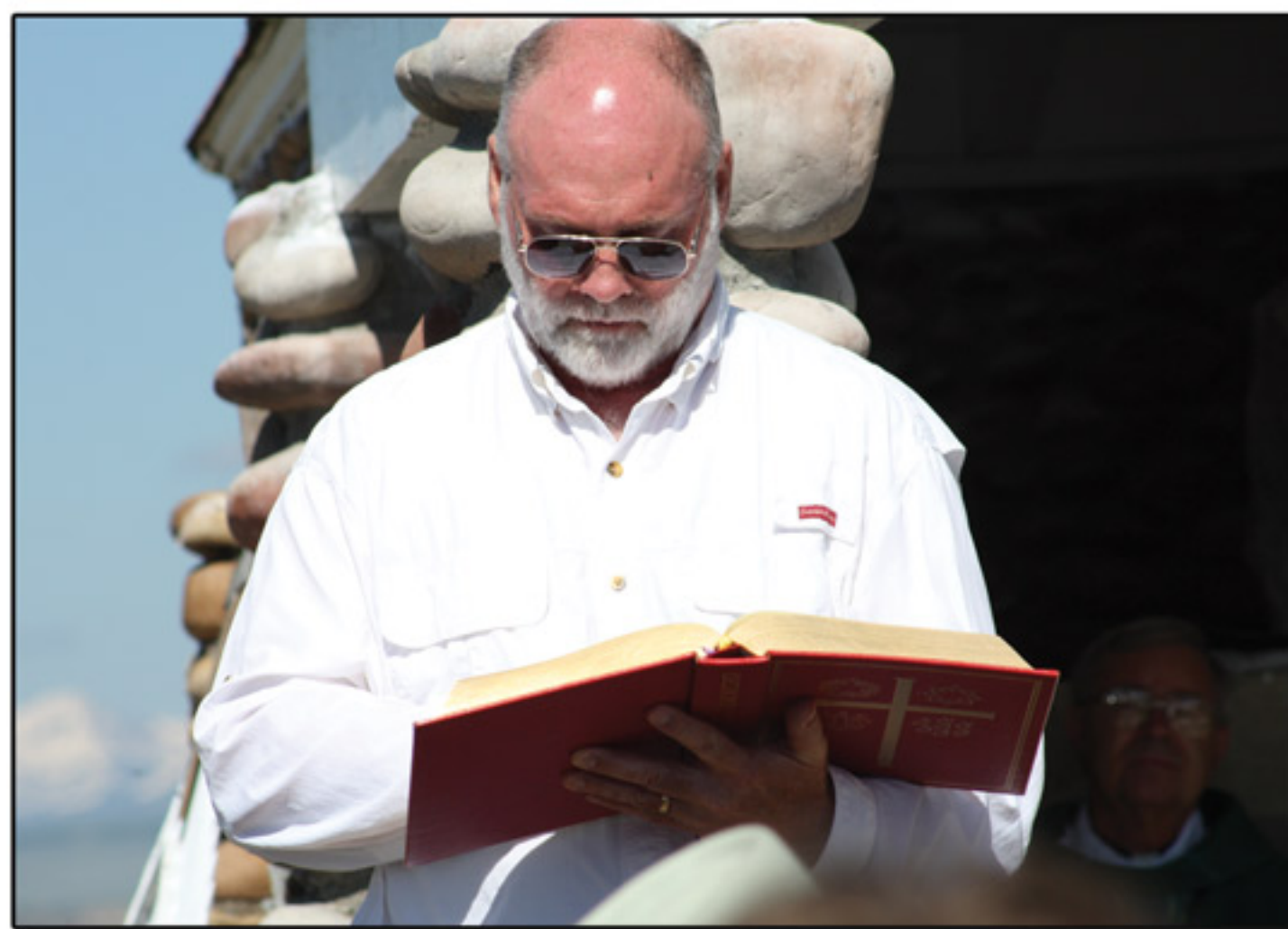




remnant” (Cf. Rom. 11:5) who still approach the altar of Christ’s Body and Blood, and then to reach out to invite our fallen away brothers and sisters to return home.

But first, we must honestly answer the question: “What way of life are we inviting our inactive family members home to?” Only when we give attention to this fundamental question and mend the nets accordingly, will we be truly effective in casting the net of evangelization. In St. John’s Gospel, only after the Resurrection did the disciples (following the instruction of the Risen Lord) cast their nets into the sea and haul in a great number of fish. (Cf. John 21:1-9) So also only after we enter maturely into Christ’s saving mystery, will we effectively engage in the New Evangelization.

The challenge before us is to receive the faith as Church, parish, family, and individuals and translate it for our present culture. It requires a personal embracing



of the faith, an ability to make the faith of Peter our own, proclaiming: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16)

Catechesis

As we grow in our understanding of evangelization, we will learn quickly the importance of and the need for a strong program of life-long formation. Catechesis is simply a formal name for the process of teaching the faith. A mature Christian faith is a life-long interaction between learning the basic teachings of our faith and living in relationship with Christ. Catechesis and personal encounter with Christ go hand-in-hand. A mature Christian faith is the regular interplay of study, prayer, and living a life of charity. This journey of learning and growing in our love for Christ begins early in life.

At Baptism, every parent makes a promise to raise their children in the faith. This learning takes place in many ways. Children learn much by example, whether in the home or during Sunday Mass, or in the interaction of the family in the many settings in society. To assist parents in the obligation to teach the faith to their children, the parish offers either a Catholic school or a formal religious education program, and sometimes both. Our Pastoral Plan, as well as the call to live our faith and grow in holiness, requires a commitment on the part of families to regularly attend Sunday Mass and

make sure that their children are enrolled in the faith formation programs at their local parish. This is another area where our nets could use some mending.

A recent study of our faith formation enrollment shows a disturbing reality. Since 2007, from second grade, when most of our students receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, to the fifth grade, we have lost 50% of the students enrolled in our faith formation programs. It is positive that our people still see the





need to have their children prepared for the core Sacraments of Initiation. But sadly, there seems to be a disconnection from parents at this point as to the importance of continuing to grow in the fullness of the faith, a fullness of our life in Christ.

Preparing young couples for marriage as a parish priest provided me a clear glimpse into this lack of knowledge of the faith. It also helped me see that so many people's understanding of God and personal relationship with Christ did not mature along with the rest of their human development. How many Catholics can speak as coherently about their faith and the person of Jesus as they can about their favorite pastime or profession? What does this say about our priorities? What does this say about our belief that our true goal in life is to get to heaven? What does this say about our belief that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven? Our nets need mending...

If we are to be authentic and credible witnesses to Christ, we must be prepared to properly preach and live the Gospel in this present day culture. The gifts and graces we receive in the Sacraments of the Church prepare us to do just this. It is critical to make sure we are offering the best instruction possible when it comes to the teachers of religion in our schools and catechists for Religious Education classes.

Our RCIA instruction and other forms of continuing education for young adults and adults needs to be engaging, as well as providing an in-depth knowledge of the faith. We must know the Truth if we are to live it in love. Our instruction in the faith enhances our encounter with the living Christ, and vice-versa.

One particular area of study within our Catholic tradition is the whole area of Catholic social teaching. This body of texts and instruction is an essential part of our Catholic faith. The principle themes of this part of our faith are the dignity and sanctity of the human person, common good and community, the preferential option for the poor, dignity of human labor, economic justice, and the proper stewardship of God's creation.

There are papal documents, beginning with the great encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, (On the Condition of Labor) written in 1891 during the time of the great industrial revolution. Since that time, many other popes have written about the principle themes of justice related to the human person. Our own Bishop's Conference has authored several key documents in recent decades to further develop this important body of principles that lead and guide us in our relationships with others and the world. There are many possibilities for parishes to offer short workshops or lengthy classes to study this important body of Catholic teaching.

It is important for every member of the Church to make time for on-going formation in the faith. Many pastoral staff members get frustrated because they offer materials and programs, and so few make serious use of their efforts. Our Pastoral Plan requires an increased level of commitment to the reality that our life of learning the faith never ends, and we have a commitment to each and every new generation.





Family Life & Vocations

The New Evangelization invites us to learn how to help our families be the first classroom of love and the primary place of learning, practicing, and passing on the faith. In a culture that is more aggressive in rejecting any mention of God and balks at all challenges to live according to ethical and moral standards rooted in ultimate Truth (Jesus Christ), we are called to help our families create a true Catholic culture in their homes and strive to cultivate this culture in our parish life.

Blessed John Paul II called the family the “Domestic Church,” because it is in the home, in the relationship of family, that one first comes to know one’s self as loved and accepted by another. It is in the home and this environment of love that one first comes to know of Jesus Christ. It is in the home where one is first imbued with the basic message of Christ, of receiving love and giving love in return. It is in and from the family that one receives the only name they will carry through life, and the means and obligations by which to bear that name with honor and respect. It is in the home that one learns the basics of the faith, and with the family, practices that faith with the broader community, the Church.

The family, by nature, teaches the importance of belonging; the importance of “community.” The family proves that isolated or separated, we cannot reach our full potential, but only with the help of others. The family is a microcosm of the Church, and likewise, when we allow ourselves to be isolated, and separated from the practicing community of faith, we are incomplete, whereas it is Christ’s desire that we be one. (Cf. John 17:20-21)

Families face many challenges today. Socially, there is confusion regarding a proper understanding of God’s



plan for family life and marriage. As Catholics, we clearly believe that marriage is the primary building block of society. It is the institution that precedes all other social structures, nations, and governments. Clearly, only a life-long union of one man and one woman - a marriage - can generate children and a family. No matter how governments wish to define other relationships, only the union of one man and one woman open to life can be defined as marriage.

The Church will always promote and defend this understanding of marriage and family life. At the same time, we acknowledge that many of our families look quite different. Many children today are raised by a single parent, or in different homes because of separated or remarried parents. Others are raised by their grandparents. The Church recognizes each person as a member of God’s family, and we will do our best to help each member know God’s love and grow in the Sacramental life and faith of the Church.

The family is the seedbed of all vocations in the Church. Pope Benedict in his pastoral letter, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (#25) teaches the following regarding the promotion of vocations in the life of the family:

The pastoral care of vocations needs to involve the entire Christian community in every area of its life. Obviously, this pastoral work on all levels also includes exploring the matter with families, which are often indifferent or even opposed to the idea of a priestly vocation. Families should generously embrace the gift of life and bring up their children to be open to doing God’s will. In a word, they must have the courage to set before young people the radical decision to follow Christ, showing them how deeply rewarding it is.





We all know the growing need we have for qualified priests to carry out the pastoral and Sacramental needs of the People of God. Even though we are blessed in this Diocese with a good number of diocesan and religious priests from “beyond our diocesan borders,” we must be committed to calling forth priestly vocations from our own families. Thus, we seek to create a culture of vocations within the Diocese to assist all our young people in their ability to hear the voice of God calling each of them to their unique vocation in the Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church delineates three “states of life;” those in Holy Orders (Bishop, Priest, Deacon), Religious Life, and Laity. All of us are called to share the common vocation that is the universal call to holiness. Christ calls the faithful to the perfection of holiness. (Cf. CCC #825) The vocation of the laity consists in seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. (Cf. CCC #898) Priestly and religious vocations are dedicated to the service of the Church as the universal Sacrament of salvation. (CCC# 873; 931)

Central to the discovery of one’s personal vocation is a rich relationship with Christ. We know Christ called each disciple by name, and He continues to do so for each person today. We all share this personal invitation of Jesus to follow Him. At the same time, we each share the responsibility to help our young people discover their vocation in life. As Jesus calls us by name, so we are to have meaningful relationships with our young Church, and personally invite them to consider a specific vocation.

Vocations research has shown the important role of

the priest in a young man’s decision to enter the seminary. Our priests have a great responsibility to know the young members of their parishes and to point out their unique gifts, talents, interests, and the correlation those personal traits may have with the life of a priest or religious.

This same lesson holds true for all adults, especially parents and grandparents. When any adult takes the time to share with a young person what they see as good and holy in them, it serves to build them up and strengthen their own self-esteem and confidence. It can also be a clarifying voice as they prayerfully ask God; “What do You want me to do for You and Your Church?”

Prayer is also vitally important in the work of building a culture of vocations. I would ask that every parish examine the possibility of establishing regular times for Eucharistic Adoration with the very specific prayer intention of asking God to raise up for our local Church of Cheyenne the priests, religious and holy men and women we need to serve, lead and guide our Church.

As mentioned earlier, our Blessed Mother holds a privileged place in our Catholic tradition. Her intercession in our prayer for vocations is crucial, and I encourage all our families to pray the rosary. I always include a particular prayer after each decade for priestly vocations, which I ask everyone to insert in their practice of praying the rosary:



God our Father, please send us holy priests, all for the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, all for the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, in union with St. Joseph.

We beg God for holy couples and holy families. We pray that the Master of the harvest will raise up ardent but gentle souls to serve at His altars. We prayerfully seek from God men and women willing to serve the Church as religious.



Stewardship

A serious practice of holiness calls for a generous gift of self to God and His people. A passage from the Old Testament Book of Sirach about how the just man should act offers a marvelous insight into stewardship. (35:1-12) It explains that to be just, one's entire life should be offered to God with a certain "fullness." This, in my estimation, is what a true spirit of stewardship seeks to accomplish and put into action. Here are some of the beautiful insights we can glean from this passage of Sirach:

"To keep the law is a great oblation." This says it all! Oblation is another scriptural term for "making an offering," or even "sacrifice." The sacrifice then that God asks is that we keep His law. As we know, Jesus summed up the law in these words: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. (Cf. Matt. 22:37) To do so is to "sacrifice a peace offering." This fulfilling of the law by loving God and neighbor are at the heart of stewardship.

Sirach continues in the same way, "In works of charity, one offers fine flour, and when he gives alms he presents his sacrifice of praise." Charity and alms are essential virtues of the Christian life and essential to stewardship. In many ways, charity is the root of all the other virtues. Charity is the essential spirit of stewardship, which directs the use of our energy, all our efforts towards the good of God and others. Charity asks us to offer "fine flour," or our best, to God and others. Ultimately, Charity is what motivates us to get involved in parish life to "build up" the local family of God.



Next Sirach says, "To refrain from evil pleases the Lord." Once again, an overarching spirit of stewardship is the desire to please the Lord in every decision and

action of life, including decisions to refrain from anything that would offend the Lord and His law. To make an offering of one's life to the Lord, would embrace the principle of offering only what is good, as only the good is pleasing. To offer anything "evil" would be offensive, and of no value.

Continuing, Sirach explains, "Appear not empty handed before the Lord...the just one's offering enriches the altar and rises as a sweet odor before the Most High."



These words express beautifully how God sees and receives everything offered in His honor with love. Every good act of our life, every right decision, every kindness enriches God's Kingdom! Thus the Book of Sirach goes on to say: "Glorify the Lord generously and be not lacking in freewill gifts."

Then, we hear from Sirach about the attitude that is to underlie our giving: "With each contribution show a cheerful countenance, and pay your tithes in a spirit of joy. Give to the Most High as He has given to you, generously according to your means." Only one who is rich in the understanding of God's infinite goodness and wealth will grow in such generosity and cheerfulness. All we have and are is a gift. Thus, a spirit of stewardship calls us to make a gift of self to our generous God and others, His children. We all have different gifts and different capacities. Thus we are not all asked to give the same amount, but we are each called to make an equal sacrifice according to our means.

Thus, as we grow in our practice of generosity, and make our life an offering to God, we quickly learn that God will not be outdone in generosity. Thus, Jesus tells St. Peter in Mark's Gospel: "There is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father



or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.” (Mark 10:28-31) How often do those who trust in God see this prove true!

A true spirit of stewardship calls us beyond a worldly mentality of “not enough,” which tends to be a selfish consumer attitude, to a faith imbued mentality of “abundance,” which reflects the generous spirit of the Gospel. For example, when Jesus performed the miracle

of multiplying the fish and loaves, there was an “abundance” left over, even after feeding the 5,000. It was in sharing with all the people that Christ multiplied the food to abundance. Blessed John Paul II teaches that this “abundance” of God’s infinite love still exists in the Church today in the person of Jesus, Who is still Head of His Church and present in the Eucharist. When we trust in this infinite love of God, and act with and from it, we need only step out in faith, practice charity, and witness the abundant good that God can do with such a generous response to His love.

Youth

We do not need to look beyond the words of Jesus to know the importance of children:

At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.” (Mt 18:1-4)

Acknowledging this Gospel value of the importance of children, and the imperative for all of us to model their humility and great capacity to trust in others and in God, we gladly welcome the opportunity to review and renew our efforts around youth ministry.

Young people have such a natural curiosity and capacity to learn. It is the perfect time to teach them our faith. It is also a critical moment in their human formation to model for them appropriate love and respect for others. As a part of our call to strengthen the bonds in this one family of God, I invite members of parishes to generously offer your gift of time to get involved with our youth. Make yourself known to your pastor, or if your parish is blessed with a youth coordinator, offer to help them. In short, all of us are called to be “ministers to our youth.”





Young Adults

In my various encounters with young adults, the one common theme I hear is their longing to “belong.” This is particularly true of single young adults. There seem to be numerous ways for youth and couples and families to “plug into” parish life, but this is not so simple for young, single adults.



Young adults are at a unique stage of life, and their presence in the Church is a vital component of our parish family. They bring their gifts to the community, and we have great need of their youth, vitality, faith and gifts. I hear from them a deep desire to better know and live their faith, as well as a longing for opportunities to gather with peers to share faith and fellowship. We long to provide these opportunities for them, as well as help them integrate into the broader life of the parish.

At the same time, we acknowledge this age group is very “transitory,” between college and careers. We need as Church to be “on the lookout” for them in the community at large, as well as in the faith community, and make sure they know they are welcome. This age group is particularly slow to formally register in a parish, so we must encourage them in this regard. This is one area of the strategic planning process that was “incomplete,” and we need to identify young adults who are willing to come together to help us further understand their needs, and to coordinate our efforts as church to see that we offer appropriate ministry to these important members of God’s family.





Conclusion

It is my heartfelt prayer that this Pastoral Plan will serve to renew the faith life of each member of our Catholic faith. As we are renewed in faith, may our life and worship serve as inspiration to the faith of many others in the New Evangelization. I pray in time we will notice a new vibrancy in the life of our parishes, and especially in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. And as we grow in this life that is ours in the Risen Christ, we may better hand on our faith through meaningful and effective programs of life-long formation.

At the end of this Pastoral Letter are two prayers, which I recommend to all our family members for daily, personal prayer. Christ has promised to remain with us always, and assures us that His Church will always prevail. (Matt. 16: 18) May our daily prayer be to remain with Him always. We also benefit tremendously from Our Lady's powerful intercession. We would do well to daily seek her guidance.

Please know of my consistent and fervent prayer for all of you, my beloved sons and daughters in Christ. My hope for our future is adequately summarized in the words of St. Paul to the Philippians (3:14): "Let us continue in pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus."

As always, I remain,
In The Heart of Christ,

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Bishop of Cheyenne
+ September 29, 2011,
Feast of Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael





In Gratitude for their Service:

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Rev. Thomas Cronkleton,
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Deacon Vernon Dobelmann,
Director of Pastoral Ministries
Mr. Matt Potter,
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Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus



Dear Jesus, Redeemer of the human race, look upon Your people.

We are Yours and Yours we wish to be;

We desire an intimate communion with You.

Look upon us as we freely consecrate ourselves to Your most Sacred Heart.

Many, indeed, have never known You; many too, despise Your precepts, and have rejected You.

Have mercy on them, most merciful Jesus, and draw them to Your Sacred Heart.

You are King, O Lord, not only of the faithful who have never forsaken You,

but also of the prodigal children who have abandoned You;

grant that they may quickly return to Your Father's house,

where they may enjoy Your Truth and Your Love.

Be present to those who are deceived by erroneous opinions,

or whom discord keeps aloof, and call them back to Your truth and unity of faith,

so that soon there may be but one flock and one shepherd.

Lord, Grant to Your Church, assurance of freedom and safety,

give peace and order to all nations,

and make the earth resound with one cry:

Praise to You, Most Sacred Heart,

Who achieved our salvation;

to You be glory and honor forever and ever.

AMEN

Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary



As the Father has chosen you, O Mary,
To be His Immaculate Child,
Joseph's spouse,
And the Mother of His beloved Son,
And of the whole Church,
So we choose you this day as Mother,
To guide our lives;
And we consecrate to you our souls
And our bodies,
And all that we do and all that we have,
Without exception.
Help us in union with your Spouse, the Holy
Spirit, to receive the Father into the depths
of our hearts,
the place of communion and discernment.
Help us to stay in communion
With your Son's mysteries,
Especially the mystery of His spousal gift.
Intercede for us,
So that Jesus might live this mystery again in us.
Pray that we might become obedient
Sons and daughters,
Eager to do only the will of our loving Father.
AMEN.



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