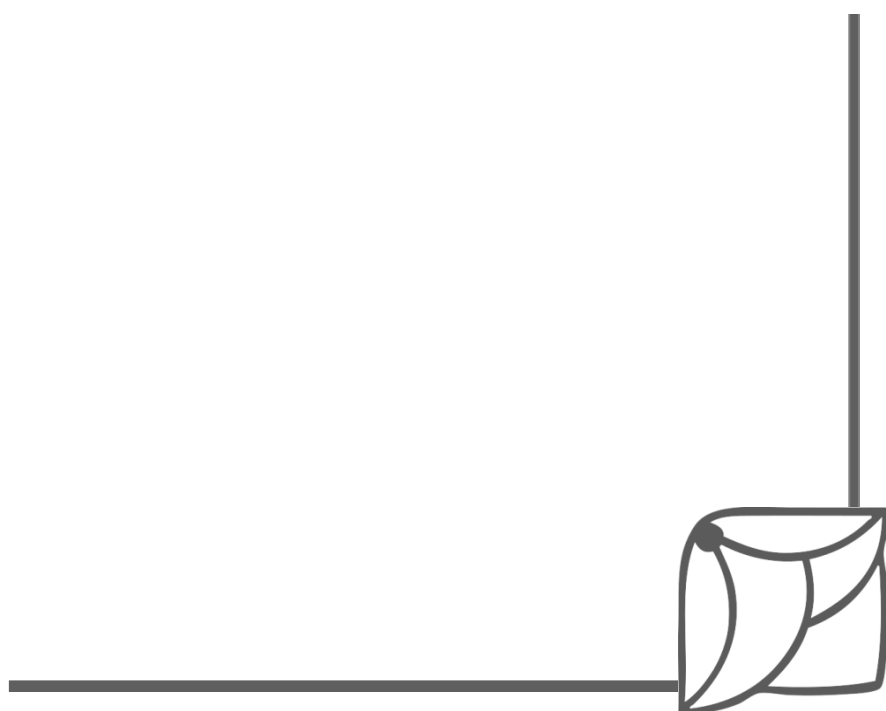


SECTION II

Pastoral Vision



CHAPTER 1. SYNOPSIS OF PASTORAL PRIORITIES

PRIESTLY PRIORITIES

1. *Formation in the Liturgical Life* – The faithful are encouraged to cultivate a deeper appreciation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, especially through a rediscovery of the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* and other magisterial documents on the liturgy issued by the Holy See following the Council.
2. *Promotion of Sacred Music* – Pastors and parish musicians are called to become familiar with the guidelines regarding sacred music as set forth by the Council Fathers and in subsequent magisterial documents on the liturgy. They should make use of the organ in liturgical worship to the extent possible. They are to incorporate use of the Latin language, especially in the ordinary parts of the Mass. They are also to make use of chant in the liturgy.
3. *Renewed Commitment to Eucharistic Adoration* – In every parish, or at least in every area faith community, pastoral leaders must set aside some time each week so that the faithful can adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.
4. *Promotion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation* – Priests are called to preach on the need for the faithful to have their sins forgiven and be reconciled with Christ and his Church. They must offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation at times convenient for their parishioners.
5. *Emphasis on the Importance of Prayer* – Every young adult and adult Catholic in the diocese is called to set aside some time each day for personal prayer. Pastors are to make the Liturgy of the Hours part of the life of their parishes. They should also discern what might be done to strengthen the fervor of the faithful in the practice of devotions.

PROPHETIC PRIORITIES

1. *Understanding the Teachings of the Second Vatican Council* – Pastoral leaders, directors of departments at the Pastoral Center, and leaders in various parish ministries are called to become increasingly familiar with its teachings – and especially its four constitutions – so that they can put them into practice.
2. *Renewed Emphasis on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* – We must heed Pope Benedict XVI's call to make “a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*” (*Porta Fidei*, no. 11). While this applies to everyone, it is especially important for parents, catechists, and religion teachers.
3. *Encouragement of Parish and AFC Small Faith Sharing Groups* – Pastoral leaders are to cultivate and support these small communities, which are very powerful in their ability to enliven the faith of believers. The diocesan Office of Religious Education and Adult Faith Formation will help facilitate this effort.

KINGLY PRIORITIES SPECIFICALLY REGARDING HUMAN DIGNITY

1. *Understanding of the Social Doctrine of the Church in its Wholeness* – This is to be the goal of all Social Concerns Committees and all other groups within the diocese working to address the various ills in society. The diocese's Office of Ministries and Social Concerns will develop presentations and resources to foster this knowledge.
2. *Emphasis on the Importance of the Church's Teaching on Human Life* – The right to life is the most foundational of all rights that proceed from the dignity of the human person. Again, the diocese's Office of Ministries and Social Concerns and its Office of Family Life will develop presentations and resources to foster this knowledge at the parish and AFC levels.

3. *Underscoring the Importance of Freedom of Religion in Society* – This precious freedom, which was articulated so well by the Second Vatican Council, is increasingly under attack in our country. Our diocese must continue to help restore the rights of individuals and organizations in our society to act in accordance with their religious convictions and the dictates of their conscience.
4. *Strengthening Efforts to Reach Out to the Poor and Marginalized* – Continuing the efforts in this area that have been so successful in the past, pastoral leaders together with parishioners are called to discern the most efficacious ways to serve those most in need.
5. *Educating Catholics on Carrying Out Their Civic Responsibilities* – As faithful citizens, we must begin our analysis of political issues with reference to the social doctrine of the Church. While the Church generally does not endorse specific candidates or legislation, her members have a duty to bring their knowledge of the human person into the public square to promote genuine human flourishing. The diocese must continue to urge the faithful to carry out this obligation.

KINGLY PRIORITIES SPECIFICALLY REGARDING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

1. *Cultivating a Better Understanding of the Church's Teaching on Marriage and Family Life* – The role of marriage is also being subverted in our society. Our first step in restoring it to its rightful status is to offer sound catechesis in this area, which is based on several magisterial documents issued since the Council. Parishes, together with the Office of Family Life, are called to develop opportunities for the faithful to receive this teaching.
2. *Promotion of John Paul II's Teaching on the Theology of the Body* – The Office of Family Life will lay the groundwork for a comprehensive theology of the body initiative in the diocese. This will include integrating this teaching into current programs in the diocese, providing opportunities for chastity education, and developing comprehensive adult education.
3. *Enriching and Developing Programs to Foster Authentic Christian Marriage* – The Office of Family Life is to review and, if needed, to revise and expand the diocesan marriage and remarriage programs to ensure that they communicate the Church's teaching on marriage and family life in its fullness.
4. *Promoting the Practice of Natural Family Planning Among Christian Couples* – Another priority of this *Plan for Parishes* is to increase awareness and use of NFP among married couples in our diocese, so that they can regulate the births of their children in conformity with God's loving plan. The Office of Family Life will spearhead this effort, making NFP a major component of diocesan marriage programs and recruiting and educating NFP instructors.
5. *Energizing the Faithful to Work for Laws Supporting Marriage as Intended by God* – In addition to educating the faithful on the nature of marriage and family life, we must also point out concrete ways of promoting them in our state and in our nation. The Office of Family Life, together with pastoral leaders, is to continue to find ways to help the faithful so that marriage and family life are protected in the public sphere.

OTHER KINGLY PRIORITIES

1. *Continued Commitment to Catholic Charities' Core Services* – Catholic Charities will stay focused on the core services that they have offered clients since their re-establishment in 2007. Their four main areas of service are (1) individual, marriage, and family counseling; (2) pregnancy and adoption counseling; (3) crisis response for parishes and communities; and (4) transition and grief services.
2. *Continued Commitment to Providing Safe Environments for Children and Young People* – The diocese must constantly strive to remain in conformity with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This means taking every reasonable precaution to ensure that the youth in its care are protected from sexual abuse, assisting in the healing of those who have been injured, and restoring trust and harmony in our faith communities.

3. *Caring for Creation and Promoting the Dignity of Rural Life* – The diocese recognizes and fosters the dignity of rural life, the proper care of the land and farm animals, and the protection of the environment. This *Plan for Parishes* calls upon the diocesan Offices of Ministries and Social Concerns to identify and develop resources on these topics for distribution to parishes. Priests should also preach and teach on these topics, so that the faithful can better appreciate the great nobility of rural life.
4. *Stewardship of the Good Things Entrusted to Us* – As stewards of the many gifts that God has given us, all the faithful are called to use their time, talent, and treasure for the benefit of others. With the help of the diocesan Development Office, pastoral leaders are encouraged to identify and pursue strategies to help parishioners embrace stewardship as a way of life.

VOCATIONS PRIORITIES

1. *Pulpit Exchanges* – The director and assistant director of the Vocations Office are available to preside and/or preach on vocations at weekend Masses in parishes throughout the diocese, provided that the priests at these parishes can exchange duties with them. Priests are to determine how to make this practice work with their schedules on a regular basis.
2. *Prayer and Fasting for Vocations* – In the past, the bishop has encouraged prayer and fasting for vocations among the faithful, in addition to asking for prayers and petitions for vocations to be offered during every Mass and meeting. This practice needs to be resumed.
3. *Education About the Priest Shortage* – Pastoral leaders, parish leaders, and diocesan department directors should review the data found in Section Five, Chapter Two of this *Plan for Parishes* so that they can communicate it to others as needed. The diocese's Pastoral Planning Office will update the figures on a regular basis and make them available on the diocesan Web site.
4. *Recommitment to Current Activities* – Those parishes and/or schools that are not currently involved in the vocations activities offered by the Vocations Team need to make this a priority.

HISPANIC MINISTRY PRIORITIES

Present initiatives to be expanded and new initiatives to be undertaken in the area of Hispanic Ministry will be detailed in the forthcoming diocesan *Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry*, expected to be published in 2015.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PRIORITIES

The ten broad goals of the initial *Plan for Schools* were grounded in the concept of the area faith community. A revised *Plan for Schools*, anticipated in 2014, will provide a progress report on these initiatives. The current *Plan for Schools* also calls for setting annual goals, which reflect innovations taking place at the national level and newly identified local initiatives. Many of these initiatives will also be considered for inclusion in the updated *Plan for Schools*.

CHAPTER 2. CHRIST OUR LIFE

Christ is our life. He is the source of our being, and he continues to keep us in existence. Yet, much more than that, he is the source of the divine life within us. Through his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, he raises us up to a new level of existence so that we can know and love God. By sending us his Holy Spirit, we are incorporated into his Body, the Church, and receive his graces in abundance. The Holy Spirit guides the Church throughout the ages, helping her always to discern the truth about her founder and helping her to articulate it to humanity. This happens in a particularly dramatic way through the Church's great ecumenical councils. The most recent event of this kind was the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which Pope John Paul II called "the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century." To receive the great graces flowing from the Council, local churches such as the Diocese of New Ulm must work to understand its teachings correctly and work for their authentic implementation.

A. Christ, Giver of Life

In the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus tells a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob that if she asked, he could give her "living water." When she challenges him, saying that he has no bucket and the well is deep, he replies, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him, leaping up to provide eternal life" (Jn 4:13-14).

The living water that Jesus provides flows in abundance. It satisfies us not only in the here-and-now, but also into eternity. Further on, Jesus tells the crowd that he will feed them: "You should not be working for perishable food, but for food that remains unto life eternal, food which the Son of Man will give you; it is on him that God the Father has set his seal" (Jn 6:27). The food and drink that Christ gives us fortifies us on our journey, our Christian pilgrimage that begins at Baptism and ends with the passage from death to eternal life. We are nourished on the Word of God and on the Bread of Life so that his life within us grows and we are transformed into his likeness.

Christ is our life. He is not only responsible for our creation, but keeps us in existence. This comes out clearly in St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him, and for him. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being" (Col 1:15-17).

Yet Christ's love for us extends well beyond this. In God's plan, he also became the source of our redemption through his suffering, Death, and Resurrection. St. Paul continues, "It is he who is head of the Body, the Church; he who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, so that primacy may be his in everything. It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:18-20).

As Head of the Church, Christ wants to incorporate us into his Body, so that we might share his life and love. He sends us his Spirit, the Spirit of Life, so that we may receive his gifts in abundance.

When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and thus,

all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. He is the Spirit of Life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal. To men, dead in sin, the Father gives life through him, until, in Christ, he brings to life their mortal bodies. The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them he prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons. The Church, which the Spirit guides in the way of all truth and which he unifies in communion and in works of ministry, he both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with his fruits. (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 4)

The gifts of the Spirit are many. Through Baptism, we are first incorporated into the Body of Christ and participate in the life of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), no. 1997). The grace of Baptism justifies and sanctifies us, making us adopted sons and daughters of the Father and disposing us to eternal life. Other sacraments give us an increasing share in the life of Christ and enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Church (CCC, no. 2003). In particular, the Sacrament of Holy Orders gives bishops and priests the sacred power to imitate Christ, Head of the Church, in his three offices of priest, prophet, and king.

In addition to these sacramental graces, the Holy Spirit bestows special graces, or charisms, among his people. These include the gifts of teaching, healing, and various forms of service. They are given to specific people, according to God's will, and are intended for the common good of the Church (CCC, nos. 2003-2004).

B. The Great Gift of the Second Vatican Council

Just as the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers to infuse them with the life of Christ through his various gifts, so he also guides the whole Church to greater holiness through his gifts. With his assistance, the College of Cardinals selects a new pope, the Successor of Peter, to lead the Church after the previous pope has died or renounced his office (*Universi Dominici Gregis*, no. 50). Through his inspiration, the pope calls together the whole College of Bishops in an ecumenical council. At these councils, the bishops, in union with the Bishop of Rome and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, resolve the most pressing issues facing the Church (see *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22).

There have been twenty-one ecumenical councils in the history of the Church. The most recent council, the Second Vatican Council, took place from 1962 to 1965. Pope John Paul II, who attended the Council as a young bishop, called it "the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century." "There," he said, "we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings" in the century in which we are now living. Even many years later, he said, the Council documents "have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 57).

What did the Second Vatican Council attempt to accomplish? In his address to open the Council, Pope John XXIII gave a twofold purpose: "that the sacred heritage of Christian truth be safeguarded and expounded with greater efficacy." Regarding the first, he said that the intention of the Council was "to give the world the whole of that doctrine which, notwithstanding every difficulty and contradiction, has become the common heritage of mankind – to transmit it in all its purity, undiluted, undistorted." However, regarding the expression of the faith, he called for a fresh approach. "What is needed, and what everyone imbued with a truly Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit craves today, is that this doctrine shall be more widely known, more deeply understood, and more penetrating in its effects on men's moral lives. What is needed is that this certain and immutable doctrine, to which the faithful owe obedience, be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms."

C. Difficulties in the Implementation of the Council

In the years during and after Vatican II, many Catholics shared Pope John XXIII's yearning for a new enthusiasm, a new springtime in the Church. Now fifty years after the opening of the Council, it is clear that his vision has not yet been fully realized. Having now entered a new century, Pope John Paul II and his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, have asked us to evaluate the implementation of the Council. Have we really understood what the Council taught? Have we done our best to appropriate it and put it into practice? What can we say has been done well? Where have we not yet succeeded?

Pope Benedict XVI gave his own response to these important questions in his Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2005:

The question arises: Why has the implementation of the Council, in large parts of the Church, thus far been so difficult? Well, it all depends on the correct interpretation of the Council, or – as we would say today – on its proper hermeneutics, the correct key to its interpretation and application. The problems in its implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face to face and quarreled with each other. One caused confusion, the other, silently but more and more visibly, bore and is bearing fruit.

On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call “a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture”; it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the “hermeneutic of reform,” of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church, which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.

The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church. It asserts that the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council. It claims that they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless. However, the true spirit of the Council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts.

These innovations alone were supposed to represent the true spirit of the Council, and starting from and in conformity with them, it would be possible to move ahead. Precisely because the texts would only imperfectly reflect the true spirit of the Council and its newness, it would be necessary to go courageously beyond the texts and make room for the newness in which the Council's deepest intention would be expressed, even if it were still vague.

In a word: It would be necessary not to follow the texts of the Council but its spirit. In this way, obviously, a vast margin was left open for the question on how this spirit should subsequently be defined and room was consequently made for every whim.

The hermeneutic of discontinuity imagines almost two different Churches, the “pre-Vatican II” Church, which is conceived as dying away, and the “post-Vatican II” Church, to take its place. We see this exaggerated polarity being expressed in many areas of Church life, with newer ways always prevailing over the old. In our worship (priestly office), English is advanced to the exclusion of Latin, contemporary music to the exclusion of chant, and the Mass to other expressions of worship, including Eucharistic adoration. With respect to handing on the faith (prophetic office), “lived experience” triumphs over traditional catechesis, and the teachings of theologians over the Magisterium of the Church. In our moral

lives (kingly office), personal conscience wins out over the authority of the Church and the good motives of the acting person can outweigh the badness of intrinsically evil acts.

It is evident that these false dichotomies have weakened the identity and mission of our Church. Those who value tradition have been pitted against those who embrace change. The Church seems to be divided into two camps, with one emphasizing engagement with the world, and the other championing the enduring truth of the faith. Yet it was never supposed to be this way. As Pope Benedict points out, the Church maintains its identity throughout history, even if it increases and develops over time. After all, the Church is the Body of Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

There can be no fundamental divide between the Church and the truth of the faith before the Council and after the Council. For this reason, this *Plan for Parishes* places itself firmly on the side of the hermeneutic of reform. In every area of the Church's ministry, we need to rediscover what the Council Fathers had to say and apply it to the programs of the diocese and of our parishes. We need to reread the documents of the Council, as well as those of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, who have spent their entire pontificates working toward its authentic implementation. These texts will give us a proper understanding of the Council and provide ways to apply it to our Christian lives.

Like the Second Vatican Council, we seek an evolution in the Church, not a revolution. A greater appreciation of the truths of our faith will elicit in us a greater desire for conversion of heart. Participating more fully in the life of Christ, we will have a greater capacity to share our faith with others through the testimony of our words and the witness of our lives. Accordingly, we will reap the great graces of the Council in the Diocese of New Ulm.

D. Pastoral Priorities in the Diocese of New Ulm

This section of the *Plan for Parishes* presents a vision for the future of our diocese, a future in which we strive to understand and implement the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. On the next pages, several diocesan priorities are detailed. Ultimately, they express the bishop's favored means for helping us to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ, according to the designs of the Council. To the extent that we embrace them and try to live them out, they will ensure our salvation and foster our sanctification.

In the next three chapters, most of our pastoral priorities are grouped according to the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and king – functions that are carried out in different but complementary ways among his ordained ministers and lay faithful. There follows a brief chapter on vocations, which is concerned with identifying and cultivating candidates to the ministerial priesthood and to consecrated life. Two ministries – Hispanic Ministry and Catholic Schools – in important ways encompass all three of these areas of ministry and are each given separate treatment toward the end of this section.

Although specific objectives for achieving our pastoral goals are given in some cases, most of the priorities in this section are outlined in general terms. This gives pastoral leaders and the executive staff of the Pastoral Center some latitude in determining how they will be pursued in a particular place, at a particular time, and in particular circumstances.

Parishes and area faith communities are encouraged to review the new expression of the diocesan mission from the first chapter of the first section of this *Plan* and the pastoral priorities outlined in this section with a view to revising their own mission statements. These more specific statements would describe how the parish or area faith community views the diocesan mission being lived out and carried out in their respective areas.

It should be noted that the pastoral priorities in the 2013-2016 strategic plan of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops are reflected well in the pastoral goals of the Diocese of New Ulm. According to the USCCB Web site, “*The New Evangelization/Journey With Christ: Faith-Worship-Witness* has a natural progression that engages the work of the Church and the USCCB in a three-fold movement” in the lives of American Catholics over the time span of the plan. This work will provide opportunities for “a deepening of our faith” and “increasing our participation in the sacramental life of the Church,” both of which lead finally “to our destination of being Christian witnesses” (www.usccb.org/about/strategic-plan.cfm).

Goals spelled out in this section of the *Fourth Plan* answer to specific items under each of the strategic plan’s broad categories (see especially www.usccb.org/about/2013-2016-priority-plan-roadmap.cfm). For example, the bishops’ focus on faith calls on dioceses and parishes to help “Catholics deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ and increase their knowledge of the teaching of the Church.” The diocese’s prophetic goals are intended to accomplish these things. Again, the bishops’ focus on worship calls for “inviting people to rediscover the Sacrament of Penance and strengthen our participation in and understanding of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.” This *Plan*’s priestly priorities, whether directly or indirectly, are meant to do this. Finally, the bishops’ focus on witness makes the “promotion of the life and dignity of the human person” a priority, as well as “continuing to foster and support married couples and families as Christian witnesses.” Goals set forth among the *Plan*’s kingly priorities are intended to bring about these things.

It should be noted here, too, that the pastoral priorities discussed in this section are the goals on which the bishop desires to place special emphasis. This does not mean that the goals and objectives that the diocese and its parishes are already committed to are being deemphasized or are no longer important. For example, we still value youth ministry, the diocesan Tribunal, and social communications, even though they are not discussed in this *Plan*. This holds true also for the priorities outlined under the *Third Plan for Parishes*. Its four main diocesan priorities – stewardship, vocations, lay ministry, and evangelization – are all still essential to the work of the diocese, even though they are not all emphasized to the same degree in the current *Plan*.

CHAPTER 3. THE PRIESTLY OFFICE: EMBRACING A EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Christ revealed God's love for us through his every word and action – and especially on the cross. In imitation of its Savior, the Church fulfills her priestly mission by helping us to love God through our worship of him. This is accomplished principally through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is the “source and summit” of our lives as Christians, and therefore also of all the activities in the parish. This Plan for Parishes calls for a more profound and reflective understanding of the Holy Eucharist, so that we may more fully reap the many graces it makes available to us. It also calls for a renewed appreciation to those other forms of prayer through which we enter into an ever more intimate relationship with Christ, deepening our love for him and for one another.

A. The Universal Call to Holiness

The Church exists for the salvation of souls and to lead her members to growth in holiness. Leading a holy life is not just something that clergy and religious are called to do; rather, it is for everyone:

The Lord Jesus, the divine teacher and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of his disciples of every condition. He himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: “Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Indeed he sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that he might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength (Mk 12:30), and that they might love each other as Christ loves them (Jn 13:34; 15:12). (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 40)

Christ loved his Church so much that he laid down his life for her, his Bride, to make her holy. This gift of holiness is offered to every baptized person. Each member of the Church is invited to follow the path of radical transformation that Christ outlines in the Sermon on the Mount (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 30).

In his apostolic letter written to close the great jubilee year of 2000, Pope John Paul II affirms that “all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness.” But how can this be, if holiness is a gift? Can holiness be planned, or obtained, as if by our own efforts? First we must understand that perfection in the spiritual life is not something to be pursued now and then; we must desire it with our whole being, so that it permeates every aspect of our lives. “The whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction,” the pope explains (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, nos. 30-31).

B. The Centrality of the Holy Eucharist

1. The Source and Summit of our Catholic Lives

How, then, are we as Christians to become holy and lead the life that Christ calls us to lead? Our Savior himself gives us the answer when he tells the Jews that he is the Bread of Life:

Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the Father who has

life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so that man who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike you ancestors who ate and died nonetheless, the man who feeds on this bread shall live forever. (Jn 6:52-58)

Jesus gives us his body to eat under the appearance of bread and his blood to drink under the appearance of wine each time we celebrate the Mass. As Christians, our whole life must strain toward union with him – a union which is expressed and brought about in the Eucharist (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 3).

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught that the Holy Eucharist is both the “source and summit” of our lives as followers of Christ: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.” It is the summit, “for the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and Baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s supper.” It is the source, because “from the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10; see also *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5).

The end of this passage sets forth the two essential purposes of the liturgy. The first is to glorify God our Father and adore his divine Majesty (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 33). God is our creator. He gives us life and holds us in existence. We glorify God by praising him and thanking him for everything that we are and all the good things that he has given us. In gratitude we offer him the bread and wine, which he has first given to us. Then, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Christ, they become the body and blood of Christ, truly present on the altar (CCC, no. 1357). By participating in the Mass, and especially by receiving Christ in Holy Communion, we receive the graces to become more and more like him. Accordingly, the second purpose of the Eucharist is accomplished, our sanctification.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the many ways that we understand the Eucharist, inexhaustible in its meaning and in its power to save. It is the sacrificial memorial of Christ and of his Body, the Church (nos. 1362-1372). It is an encounter with the real presence of Christ by the power of his word and the Holy Spirit (nos. 1373-1381). It is also the Paschal Banquet, that feast in which we partake of the Lord’s body and blood. (nos. 1382-1390).

2. Our Sunday Obligation

Attending and actively participating in Sunday Mass is both a right and a duty for those who have been baptized (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14). Since the Mass is “the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice,” “the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor” (CCC, no. 2181). Failure to fulfill this duty is a serious (mortal) sin.

While it is appropriate to attend Sunday Mass out of a sense of obligation, there are other good reasons for assembling together on the Lord’s Day. In these ways, we express more ardently our love for Christ and his Church. We have already mentioned the desire to worship God and to become more holy. By participating in the Sunday Eucharist, we also rejoice in the Resurrection (Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, no. 82). We unite our joys and burdens with the sacrifice of Christ (*Dies Domini*, no. 43). Our participation strengthens our local community of faith as a “testimony of belonging and being faithful to Christ and to his Church” (CCC, no. 2182). Then, having been formed by the Scriptures and fed by the Eucharist, we are dismissed and sent on mission. We return to our everyday activities with a renewed commitment to spread the Good News and to offer our very selves as “spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1).

As a result of the pastoral planning discussions that parishes are called to enter into as part of this *Plan for Parishes* (see especially the chapter “Options for Small Parishes” in Section IV), some parishes will not be able to celebrate Sunday Mass every weekend. Other parishes could be merged, and this might eventually entail that Sunday Mass would no longer be celebrated at their church building. For some people, fewer opportunities for Mass will involve a greater effort to meet one’s Sunday obligation. Yet the reasons we must do so are compelling: We must worship God as he deserves; we must grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, our Savior; we must love one another in the parish family with the affection of brothers and sisters.

3. Full and Active Participation

In its reform of the Mass, the Council sought to lead all the faithful to a “fully conscious and active participation” in the liturgy:

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14)

No one disputes that the Church has made great strides in this area. However, our successes have been mixed with shortcomings. Misunderstandings as to the nature of the liturgy and a blurring between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized have led to abuses and polarization – the results of a hermeneutic of discontinuity.

The confusion even affected the proper understanding of the Council’s call for “active participation.” In his *ad limina* address to bishops of the United States on October 9, 1998, Pope John Paul II tried to set the record straight:

Full participation certainly means that every member of the community has a part to play in the liturgy, and in this respect a great deal has been achieved in parishes and communities across your land. But full participation does not mean that everyone does everything, since this would lead to a clericalizing of the laity and a laicizing of the priesthood; and this was not what the Council had in mind. The liturgy, like the Church, is intended to be hierarchical and polyphonic, respecting the different roles assigned by Christ and allowing all the different voices to blend in one great hymn of praise.

Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song, and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness, and listening: indeed, it demands it. Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active. In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty. (no. 3)

The pope goes on to say that “conscious participation” requires that the faithful be schooled in the mysteries of the liturgy, so that all can understand the various aspects of the Eucharistic celebration. While he praised the use of the vernacular for opening up the “treasures of the liturgy” to everyone, he encouraged the use of Latin “and especially the chants which are so superbly adapted to the genius of the Roman Rite.” (no. 3)

Nine years later, Pope Benedict XVI provided further clarification about the meaning of “active, full, and fruitful participation” of the People of God in the Eucharistic celebration. In his apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he writes,

It should be made clear that the word “participation” does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact, the active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life. The conciliar constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* encouraged the faithful to take part in the Eucharistic liturgy not “as strangers or silent spectators,” but as participants “in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, actively and devoutly” (no. 48). This exhortation has lost none of its force. (no. 52)

The pope continues to quote the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, emphasizing the vocation of the laity to imitate Christ in his priestly office. He says that the faithful “should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to make an offering of themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 52, quoting *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 48).

C. Pastoral Priorities as Christ’s Priestly People

1. Formation in the Liturgical Life

In the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the Council Fathers remind bishops of their duty to give their priests and the lay faithful adequate instruction on the liturgy. They are to help their priests “by every suitable means to understand ever more fully what it is that they are doing when they perform sacred rites” and ensure that the faithful “take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 11, 18).

In the months leading up to the implementation of the new translation of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, the Diocese of New Ulm undertook a concerted effort involving pastoral leaders and the faithful to discuss the new words of the Mass and to reflect upon their richer meaning. Initiatives such as these, which provide a deeper appreciation of and love for the Mass, should be carried out on a regular basis in our diocese.

Specifically, we need to rediscover the teaching of the Council Fathers as set forth in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* and work toward its authentic implementation. To accomplish this effectively, we must read and put into practice the teachings of that document, as well as the magisterial documents issued by the Holy See on the liturgy since the Council. These include *Musicam Sacram* (1967), *Dies Domini* (1998), *Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal* and its *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (2002), *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (2002), *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), *Spiritus et Sponsa* (2003), *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004), and *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007).

2. Promotion of Sacred Music

The purpose of sacred music in the liturgy is none other than that of the liturgy itself: “the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 112). Through the sung liturgy,

prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the

union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem. (*Musicam Sacram*, no. 5)

The Second Vatican Council attached great importance to the teaching and practice of music in schools and Catholic institutions, and to the instruction of teachers for this purpose (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 115). Pastors in our diocese should strive to find the best musicians to foster fitting worship in their parishes, and instruct them in the guidelines set forth by the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* and the other documents listed above. If at all possible, the musicians themselves should become familiar with these documents. For its part, the diocesan Worship Committee will renew its commitment to their study, so that more and more parish leaders will understand the teachings of the Council.

Parishes are strongly encouraged to make use of the organ. “In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church’s ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man’s mind to God and to higher things” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 120). To assist in these efforts, the diocese will continue to offer summer organ lessons to better equip parish musicians to play this beautiful instrument and to lead the assembly in sung prayer.

While expanding the use of the vernacular, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* sought to preserve the use of the Latin language in the liturgy (no. 36 §1). This applies especially to those parts of the Mass that do not vary: “Steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them” (no. 54). At the same time, it encouraged the use of chant in the liturgy: “The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy. Therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 116). To help parishes achieve this goal, the diocese will offer chant workshops to parish musicians in the years to come, so that they can become proficient in both English and Latin chant. Parishes will be especially encouraged to sponsor their musicians’ attendance at these workshops.

3. Renewed Commitment to Eucharistic Adoration

Pope John Paul II reminded us that Eucharistic adoration outside Mass is a natural extension of our worship and reception of the Blessed Sacrament during the Mass. Far from detracting from it, Eucharistic adoration increases our gratitude for it and our longing for the next time we receive it.

The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church. This worship is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The presence of Christ under the sacred species reserved after Mass – a presence which lasts as long as the species of bread and of wine remain – derives from the celebration of the sacrifice and is directed towards communion, both sacramental and spiritual. It is the responsibility of pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species. (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 25)

The Year of the Eucharist (2004-2005) witnessed a renewed commitment to the practice of Eucharistic adoration in the Diocese of New Ulm. The efforts made at this time must be continued and expanded. In every parish, or at least in every area faith community, pastoral leaders should set aside some time each week so that the faithful can adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The hours devoted to this activity should be generous, and priests should encourage parishioners to make it a regular habit by signing up for a specific time. If possible, area faith communities should have perpetual adoration. Forty Hours

devotions, perhaps with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament rotating among the churches in the AFC, are also encouraged.

4. Promotion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for all sinful members of his Church (CCC, no. 1446). As we learn from the Church's *Rite of Penance*,

To obtain the saving remedy of the Sacrament of Penance, according to the plan of our merciful God, the faithful must confess to a priest each and every grave sin which they remember upon examination of their conscience.

Moreover, frequent and careful celebration of this sacrament is also very useful as a remedy for venial sins. This is not a mere ritual repetition or psychological exercise, but a serious striving to perfect the grace of Baptism so that, as we bear in our body the death of Jesus Christ, his life may be seen in us ever more clearly (see 2 Cor 4:10). (7a-b)

Christ comes to reveal to us who we are – people with whom he wants to share the fullness of his life and love. He gives us the means to attain this lofty destiny through the forgiveness of our sins. The Divine Physician seeks a personal encounter with sinners to cure them, to raise them up, and to reintegrate them into fraternal communion with his Church. This is why “individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession” (*Rite of Penance*, no. 31, as found in CCC, no. 1484).

It is a great tragedy, then, that many Catholics do not reach out to their Lord and Savior to receive this reconciliation in their lives. In fact, with Pope John Paul II, it is fair to say that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is in crisis. As he explains in his apostolic exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance*,

The sacrament of confession is indeed being undermined, on the one hand by the obscuring of the moral and religious conscience, the lessening of a sense of sin, the distortion of the concept of repentance, and the lack of effort to live an authentically Christian life. And on the other hand, it is being undermined by the sometimes widespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God, even in a habitual way, without approaching the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 28 §3)

The loss of this “sense of sin” is particularly troubling. If people do not think that they need God’s mercy and forgiveness, then their felt need for a relationship with Jesus Christ is much diminished. Yet St. John tells us, “If we say, ‘We are without sin,’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). In the Lord’s Prayer, Christ teaches us to ask for the forgiveness of our sins, linking our request to our willingness to forgive others (CCC, no. 1425; cf. Lk 11:4; Mt 6:12).

In his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which marked the close of the great jubilee year of 2000, Pope John Paul II pointed to an encouraging sign. He said that more people, including many young people, were beginning to benefit from this sacrament. He exhorted pastors to “arm themselves with more confidence, creativity, and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it” (no. 37).

Under this *Plan for Parishes*, we must take this appeal to heart. Giving generously of their time, our priests must make themselves available to offer this sacrament at times convenient for the faithful. They must preach on the need to be reconciled to Christ and his Church, and the benefits for souls who approach the sacrament. At special times, such as during Advent, Lent, and Forty Hours devotions,

pastors should schedule additional priests to facilitate penance services for larger groups of people and to give them the opportunity to go to a priest of their choice. If we are able to demonstrate the value of sacramental reconciliation, more and more people will come.

5. Emphasis on the Importance of Prayer

A commitment to personal prayer is essential if we are to grow in the love of God and our neighbor. How can we say that we love someone if we are not willing to spend time with that person? Just as our relationships with other people require that we spend time with them, so does our relationship with God.

Simply put, prayer is communication with God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes St. John Damascene, saying that it is “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God, or the requesting of good things from God” (no. 2559). In prayer, we praise and adore God, recognizing his greatness; we thank him for the good things that he has given us; we ask him for those things we need; and we ask for the forgiveness of our sins.

Like all good things, prayer is a gift from God. In a beautiful reflection on the Samaritan woman at the well, the *Catechism* reveals that prayer is really the coming together of a twofold longing:

“If you knew the gift of God!” (Jn 4:10) The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: There, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. (no. 2560)

There are many reasons why prayer is important. First of all, in prayer we imitate Christ, who is the way to our salvation. Many times in the Gospels, Christ goes off to pray. Luke 6:12 is typical: “Then he went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God.” Secondly, God always listens to our prayers. He never fails to answer a sincere prayer, even if it is not the answer we want or expect. Thirdly, through prayer we gain knowledge of ourselves and of our sins. It enables us to see ourselves as we are, so that with God’s grace we can change. Fourthly, prayer helps us to stay away from sin. It gives us the grace to overcome present and future temptations. Lastly, prayer disposes us to receive the sacraments. Prayer especially prepares us to participate in the Mass more fully and receive the Eucharist worthily.

In his apostolic exhortation *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes how prayer, in addition to the Eucharist and the other sacraments, transforms the daily lives of the faithful into “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2:5). In this way they participate in the baptismal priesthood of Jesus Christ (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 59 §1). In the context of the family, the prayers of spouses, parents, and children find their proper subject in the good of the family. Family life

in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to his call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc. – all of these mark God’s loving intervention in the family’s history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven. (no. 59, §3)

The Christian family can only fulfill its responsibility, the pope adds, with God's help. He will surely grant it if family members humbly and trustingly ask for it in prayer (no. 59 §3).

Drawing on their own rich prayer life, the priests of our diocese must urge the faithful to deepen their commitment to prayer. Our focus must be both on personal prayer and communal prayer. Following Christ's example and his words (for example, Mt 6:6), every Catholic should set aside some time every day for personal prayer. Those who are already in this practice should consider what more they can do.

Among the communal forms of prayer outside of Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours (or "Divine Office") holds a special place, for it is "like an extension of the Eucharistic celebration" (CCC, no. 1178). Through the celebration of the Divine Office, the mystery of Christ, his Incarnation and Passover, which we celebrate in the Eucharist, permeates and transfigures the time of each day, so that "the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God" (CCC, no. 1174; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 84). The Council Fathers urged that this prayer become a regular part of parish life: "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" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 100). Following diocesan practice, parishes should also strongly consider praying the Liturgy of the Hours before meetings. Worship aids to support this practice are readily available online.

In connection with prayer, we must not forget the great value of the various devotions that animate our Christian lives and foster growth in holiness. Pope John Paul II saw them as "an opportunity for the faithful to encounter the living Christ," which when enriched by Catholic doctrine, "might lead to a sincere conversion and a practical exercise of charity" (*Ecclesia in America*, no. 16 §1). In this he echoed the Council Fathers, who said, "Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, [and] above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 13). One devotion especially "ordered by the Apostolic See" is that to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was promoted in three encyclical letters leading up to the Council: *Annum Sacrum* (1899), *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (1928), and *Haurietis Aquas* (1956).

Some parishes in the Diocese of New Ulm already promote an active devotional life; others could increase these practices. Under this *Plan for Parishes*, pastoral leaders in all parishes should re-examine the devotional practices to see what might be done to strengthen the fervor of the faithful in this way. In addition to Eucharistic adoration and the devotion to the Sacred Heart, devotions to Jesus that might be considered anew include the Stations of the Cross, Divine Mercy, and Eucharistic processions, especially on Corpus Christi. Among Marian devotions, the Rosary deserves special mention, for according to Pope John Paul II, to recite it "is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ." "The Rosary," he says, "goes to the very heart of Christian life; it offers a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the People of God, and the New Evangelization" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no. 3 §§1-2). Other practices honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary that we might consider for greater attention include devotions to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the scapular.

CHAPTER 4. THE PROPHETIC OFFICE: EVANGELIZING THE CHURCH TO EVANGELIZE THE WORLD

Faith is the door to our life in Christ. By way of faith, we hold fast to God and assent to the whole truth that he has revealed to us, primarily through Christ. Faith is a gift: We can only believe what has been revealed to us with God's grace and the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Through faith, we are incorporated into the life of the Trinity. Conversion of heart makes us better witnesses to the faith and more effective in proclaiming the gospel message. In our current situation, it is more and more important to direct our evangelizing efforts to members of our own Church who have lost a living sense of the faith. This is what Pope John Paul II calls the "New Evangelization." Pastoral priorities following upon Christ's prophetic witness will focus especially on evangelizing and catechizing the faithful, so that they, in turn, might be better witnesses to the faith before the world.

A. Rediscovering the Journey of Faith

In his apostolic letter announcing the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI said that he wanted to give the whole Church the opportunity for a reflection and rediscovery of the faith (*Porta Fidei*, no. 4). Why should we do this? The pope is concerned that many people either take the faith for granted (and therefore neglect it) or openly deny it (no. 2). Yet faith is the door to our life in Christ, a life that is the key to our happiness in this life and our fulfillment in the next. He explains:

The "door of faith" (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with Baptism (cf. Rom 6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. Jn 17:22). (*Porta Fidei*, no. 1)

What is this faith, through which we gain life in Christ and in his Church, and which is progressively deepened throughout our journey with him? According to the *Catechism*, "faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God" by which we are able to follow him in truth and love. At the same time, faith is "a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed" (no. 150). God reveals himself to us and gives himself to us. Faith in God is the appropriate response (no. 26). Faith itself is a supernatural gift, for without God's help, this response would be impossible. The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* puts it this way:

"The obedience of faith" (Rom 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals," and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it." (*Dei Verbum*, no. 5)

The "full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals" means that we must accept the faith in its entirety; it is not up to us to pick and choose what we want to believe and what we would prefer to leave behind. God the Father reveals himself primarily through his Son, Jesus Christ, who established his

Church on earth to safeguard this truth and to hand it down from generation to generation. The Tradition of the Church is firmly grounded in Sacred Scripture and authoritatively interpreted by her Magisterium.

This leads us to consider a third related meaning of the word “faith.” Just as faith can mean our mystical relationship with God and the human act by which we assent to the truth he has revealed, so it can also mean those truths to which we assent. This is the content of our faith, those truths that we confess in our “profession of faith.” These truths are expressed in the Apostle’s Creed, which is professed personally by each believer, principally at Baptism, and in the Nicene Creed, which is professed by the bishops assembled in council, or more generally by the liturgical assembly of believers (CCC, no. 167; see also *Porta Fidei*, no. 10).

B. Evangelization and Conversion of Heart

Our assent to the truths of the faith follows from a conviction about the person – Jesus Christ – who reveals these truths to us through his Church. Our faith, then, is not in a set of abstract ideas, but in the person of Jesus. He is the primary subject of our inquiry, the only Son of God, who leads us to the Father and builds up his Body, the Church, through the Holy Spirit.

Pope Benedict affirms that the renewal of the Church is achieved “through the witness offered by the lives of believers: By their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us” (*Porta Fidei*, no. 6). Yet this witness will attract others only insofar as it is authentic, or reflective of a truly Christian life. To accomplish this, we must experience a conversion of heart, so that we grow in the love of our Savior and imitate him more and more in our lives. This will give rise to a strong desire to spread the faith to others. As Pope Benedict describes it,

“*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2 Cor 5:14): It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. . . . Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself the people of every generation: In every age he convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new. Today too, there is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to New Evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith. In rediscovering his love day by day, the missionary commitment of believers attains force and vigor that can never fade away. Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples. (*Porta Fidei*, no. 7)

The connection between evangelization and conversion of heart is an essential one. On the one hand, conversion of heart is necessary for any thorough-going, effective effort to spread the Gospel. On the other hand, ongoing conversion is the very purpose of evangelization. As Pope Paul VI taught,

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: “Now I am making the whole of creation new” (Rev 21:5; cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism (cf. Rom 6:4) and by lives lived according to the Gospel (cf. Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:9-10). The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence, the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert (cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18, 2:4), solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and

collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18)

C. The New Evangelization

The impetus to evangelize proceeds from the Church's very nature. It is grounded in the fact that Christ came to save all people. He is the one who reveals God to us and is able to lead us back to him. In the Gospel of John, he tells us, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). As Pope John Paul II further explains in his encyclical letter *On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*,

In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind who he is. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself. (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 5)

Yet the pope also points out that evangelization, while seeking to extend the life of Christ to all peoples, always occurs at a particular time, in a particular place, and within a particular cultural milieu. The varied circumstances in which evangelization is carried out in the modern world call for different approaches. He identifies three fundamental situations:

First, there is the situation which the Church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission *ad gentes* ("to the nations") in the proper sense of the term.

Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care.

Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization." (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 33)

In the history of the Catholic faith in the Diocese of New Ulm, we can readily identify situations that correspond to each of these descriptions. Beginning with the first waves of immigration in the nineteenth century, our forbearers came to Minnesota and settled the land. Often with the assistance of missionary priests, they founded our parishes, built our churches, and made their Catholic faith a way of life. So well established was the faith by the time of the founding of our diocese that Bishop Alphonse J. Schladweiler was able to send diocesan priests to establish and develop the mission parish of San Lucas Tolimán in Guatemala. These efforts, through which our priests and dedicated lay volunteers strive for the integral human development of the Guatemalan people, continue even today.

At the same time, it is increasingly difficult to avoid the conclusion that our current situation corresponds most closely to the third description above. As will be discussed in the next section of this *Plan for*

Parishes, the diocese has lost over ten percent of its Catholic population in the last decade, while the population as a whole has remained stable. The percentage of registered parishioners in our parishes has also seen a significant decline during this period. At the same time, the number of people who are not affiliated with any religion has increased dramatically. Is there any doubt that many of them used to be practicing Catholics?

D. Catechesis, a Principal Part of Evangelization

How, then, are we to undertake a “New Evangelization” in our own diocese? Those who no longer espouse their Christian faith do not experience the love of Christ in their lives; perhaps they never experienced it. If they do not love Christ, then clearly they do not know him. To help them fall in love with him, we need to teach them about him – about his life, about his great love for them, and about how that love is extended to them in his Church. This is the role of catechesis. It begins with those already baptized – those who already are disposed to grow in the knowledge and love of their Redeemer – and especially those who still count themselves as members of the Church. Once our own members bear greater witness to the life of Christ within them, our initiatives to reach out to lapsed Catholics and those who have never embraced the faith will yield greater fruit (cf. *Porta Fidei*, no. 15).

What is catechesis? Following Pope John Paul II, the *Catechism* describes it as “an education of children, young people, and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (CCC, no. 5; *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18). Its aim is “to develop, with God’s help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 20). In other words, the goal of catechesis is none other than the goal of evangelization itself: conversion of heart and conformity to Christ.

If this is so, then what makes catechesis different? The pope explains it this way:

Within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his “mystery,” the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promises contained in his gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow him. (*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 20)

Far from being separated from or opposed to evangelization, catechesis constitutes a particular activity within it – indeed a principal activity. It is related to and interwoven with other evangelical activities, which contain aspects of it. These include “the initial proclamation of the Gospel or missionary preaching . . . to arouse faith, apologetics or examination of the reasons for belief, experience of Christian living, celebration of the sacraments, integration into the ecclesial community, and apostolic and missionary witness” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18).

As he wrote his apostolic exhortation on catechesis, Pope John Paul II was firmly convinced that it should be given a privileged place in the Church’s pastoral programs:

The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings, the results of which would be more spectacular, the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Church is bidden

by God and by events – each of them a call from him – to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. (*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 15)

What the pope held then is no less true for our diocese in the first years of the twenty-first century.

E. Who Should Be Evangelized and Catechized

Christ sent his apostles out to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). This is the mission of the Church, that everyone might hear the Good News and be saved. Yet the Church understands that in order to evangelize, she must first be evangelized.

She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the “mighty works of God” (cf. Acts 2:11; 1 Pt 2:9) which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by him and reunited. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigor, and strength, in order to proclaim the Gospel. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15 §3)

Consequently, the Church is especially solicitous that all her members, from the youngest to the most advanced in age, receive a proper catechesis. Parents must teach their very young children their first short prayers, telling them about “a good and provident Father in heaven” who loves them and listens to them. At home, in school, and in church, older children must be taught the mysteries of the faith in a basic way, especially as they prepare for the celebration of the sacraments. The deeper questioning and searching that comes with adolescence must be met with a catechesis in which the meaning of life is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (*Catechesi Tradendae*, nos. 36-38).

With the strong emphasis on Catholic schools in our country, it is easy to forget that the greater part of the Church’s catechetical efforts should be directed to adults. According to Pope John Paul II, the catechesis of adults “is the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form.” The faith of adults, he says, “should continually be enlightened, stimulated, and renewed, so that it may pervade the temporal realities in their charge” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 43).

This is all the more important because parents are the primary educators of their children. As the Second Vatican Council’s *Declaration on Christian Education* explains, “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 3 §1; see *Code of Canon Law*, c. 793 §1). How can they teach the fundamentals of their faith to their children unless they understand it themselves?

The transmission of the faith from parent to child is carried out in the context of family, which the Second Vatican Council calls the “domestic Church” following an ancient expression (CCC, no. 1656; see *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11 §2). The family provides a unique environment for witnessing to the faith. Within it, members model Christ for each other in an intimate communion of love. As the *Catechism* teaches, members of the family “exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way ‘by the reception of the sacraments, prayer, and thanksgiving; the witness of a holy life; and self-denial and active charity’” (no. 1657, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10). It is evident, then, that the initiatives below should focus

especially on teaching and evangelizing adults in the faith, for they are primarily responsible for carrying out these actions in the family.

F. Pastoral Priorities as Christ's Prophetic People

1. Understanding the Teachings of the Second Vatican Council

In his apostolic letter announcing the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI said that in timing the Year with the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, he wanted to give the faithful an opportunity to rediscover its teachings. Quoting his predecessor, he reiterated that the texts of the Council Fathers “have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition” (*Porta Fidei*, no. 5, quoting Pope John Paul II's *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 57). Then, quoting his 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia where he discussed the difficulties in implementing the Council, he emphasized that “if we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church” (*Porta Fidei*, no. 5).

During this Year of Faith, the diocese has planned several events that in some way try to illuminate the teachings of the Council. Efforts of this sort must continue, not only through the conclusion of the Year of Faith, but for years to come. Pastoral leaders, directors of departments at the Pastoral Center, and leaders in various parish ministries should become increasingly familiar with its teachings so that they can put them into practice. While all of the Council's documents are important, its four constitutions (*Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dei Verbum*, and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) especially need to be studied.

2. Renewed Emphasis on the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the same apostolic letter, Pope Benedict said that the start of the Year of Faith also marked the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This signal text, he said, illustrates “for all the faithful the power and beauty of the faith” (*Porta Fidei*, no. 4). Later in the letter, he expands on this notion:

In order to arrive at a systematic knowledge of the content of the faith, all can find in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* a precious and indispensable tool. It is one of the most important fruits of the Second Vatican Council. . . . Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded, and proposed in her two thousand years of history. From Sacred Scripture to the Fathers of the Church, from theological masters to the saints across the centuries, the *Catechism* provides a permanent record of the many ways in which the Church has meditated on the faith and made progress in doctrine so as to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith. (*Porta Fidei*, no. 11)

In the Diocese of New Ulm, we must heed Pope Benedict's call to make “a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*” (no. 11). These efforts must not only take place during the Year of Faith, but in subsequent years as well. Religion teachers and catechists in religious education programs must be given opportunities to learn the fundamentals of their faith in a systematic and comprehensive way, especially as it is organized and expressed in the *Catechism*. Parishes must also make these opportunities available to parents, who are the principal teachers of their children in the faith.

3. Parish and AFC Small Faith-Sharing Groups

Faith sharing in small groups is a very powerful way of enlivening the faith of believers. Members of the faithful come together to pray, read a passage from Sacred Scripture or some other document of the Church, share their reflections on it, and enjoy fellowship. Experience has shown that many people who take part in a group weave it into their faith lives with a view to continuing it their entire lives. Traditional forms of small faith-sharing communities have included Bible study and *Lectio Divina* groups.

Pope Benedict XVI has strongly recommended that Christians be nourished on the living Word of God, saying that “the Church knows well that Christ lives in the Sacred Scriptures” (Papal Address of September 16, 2005). He echoes the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, which commended the reading of Scripture to everyone:

Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word. This is to be done so that none of them will become “an empty preacher of the Word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly” (St. Augustine, *Sermons*, 179, 1), since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:8). “For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Prol.). Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine Word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for “we speak to him when we pray; we hear him when we read the divine saying” (St. Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers* I, 20, 88). (*Dei Verbum*, no. 25 §1)

In addition to these traditional ways in which small groups invite the Word of God into their lives, a number of resources have been developed specifically for faith-sharing groups. Generally, these programs include the elements of prayer, reflection, and fellowship. Some offer the additional advantage of incorporating a service component.

Under this *Plan for Parishes*, the diocese will encourage parishes and area faith communities to cultivate and support these small communities among their members. Help in facilitating this effort will be offered by the diocesan Office of Religious Education and Adult Faith Formation.

CHAPTER 5. THE KINGLY OFFICE: TRANSFORMING THE WORLD IN CHRIST'S LOVE

In fulfilling our priestly mission, we extend our hearts to Christ in worship. We learn to pray and thus to love God our Father by imitating Christ, his Son. In fulfilling our prophetic mission, we offer God our minds. We come to know the Father by coming to know his Son, who reveals to us his Father even as he reveals to us who we are. In fulfilling our kingly mission, we give to God our very selves: everything we have and are. With God's help, we learn to imitate Christ by gaining mastery over our own bodies. This permits us to love others as they should be loved, that is, as Christ loves them. The genuine love that we show others in our families and close relations is gradually translated into a love for those we do not know so well or perhaps at all. Yet we love them because we see Christ in them. In this way, the whole world is transformed in the love of Christ.

A. The Dignity of the Human Person: Created in the Image of God

Human beings enjoy a status unlike any of the other creatures of this world. We are the only creatures on earth that are intended by God for our own good, rather than the good of some other creature. We are able to know and love our Creator, and in this we find our good. In his overflowing generosity, God gave us a share of his own divine life. For this reason, we were created in the image of God and invested with an intrinsic dignity (CCC, no. 356). The Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* sums it up this way:

For Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created "to the image of God," is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God's glory. "What is man that you should care for him? You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet" (Ps 8:5-7). (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12 §3).

The human person is endowed not only with senses and passions, but also intellect and will. A person is therefore a someone, not just a something. As human persons, we are capable of knowing ourselves and reflecting on our actions. We make choices of what to do and what not to do. We order our own acts, pursuing our own good in view of our ultimate end, which is God himself. The pursuit of the human good requires that we give freely of ourselves and enter into communion with other persons. Human beings are by nature social beings, and unless we relate ourselves to others, we can neither live nor develop our potential (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC), nos. 108, 110; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12 §4).

The glorious depiction of human beings as we were created by God often appears far removed from the everyday experience of ourselves and our world. What happened to mar the image of God in us? The answer, of course, is sin. We know from Revelation that Adam, the first man, disobeyed God and lost the rectitude of soul in which he was made, a rectitude which he received not only for himself but for all of humanity.

By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected the *human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. (CSDC, no. 115; CCC, no. 404)

Original sin is not a sin that we committed. Nevertheless, we inherit it from our first parents. We experience its effects in manifold ways: We are subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death (CCC, no. 405). Worst of all, we are inclined to sin – to do those things that lead us away from our true ultimate end, God. As Vatican II teaches,

What Divine Revelation makes known to us agrees with experience. Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too, and is engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from his good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal, as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things.

Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains.

But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out that “prince of this world” (Jn 12:31) who held him in the bondage of sin. For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfillment. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 13)

The wound which is present in one’s inmost self gives rise to personal and social divisions. Insofar as it is an act of separation from God, sin leads to alienation, and in several ways. We are not only alienated from God, but also from ourselves, from other people, and from the world.

“Man’s rupture with God leads tragically to divisions between brothers. In the description of the ‘first sin,’ the rupture with Yahweh simultaneously breaks the bond of friendship that had united the human family. Thus the subsequent pages of Genesis show us the man and the woman as it were pointing an accusing finger at each other (cf. Gen 3:12). Later we have brother hating brother and finally taking his brother’s life (cf. Gen 4:2-16). According to the Babel story, the result of sin is the shattering of the human family, already begun with the first sin and now reaching its most extreme form on the social level.” (CSDC, no. 116, quoting John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 15)

Yet, amidst all this division and destruction, there is good news. Even when we abandoned God, he did not abandon us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us and to restore the brilliance of the image of God in us. Jesus accomplished this through his life, Death, and Resurrection.

The new reality – the life of grace – that Christ gives us by virtue of his redemption is a communion with God “to which men and women have always been oriented in the depths of their being, thanks to their creaturely likeness to God. But this is also a reality that people cannot attain by their own forces alone” (CSDC, no. 122). Rather, he makes his gifts available to us through his Church. Though we still must cope with the effects of sin and battle against our inclinations to evil, these gifts provide a tremendous and indispensable help in setting our path aright. We are now capable of living the life of Christ, in communion with God and with others.

B. Pastoral Priorities Regarding Human Dignity

1. Promote an Understanding of the Social Doctrine of the Church in its Wholeness

The truth about the human person is at the heart of all pastoral activity in the Church, both as its starting point and with respect to its ultimate goal (CSDC, no. 527). Foundationally, this truth includes our intrinsic dignity, our fall into sin, and our redemption in Christ. How else can we begin to discern the nature of the problems that affect our relationships with each other and propose realistic solutions, except by reference to these fundamental realities? Can issues regarding human life, justice, peace, work, economic development, and international relations be surmounted without reference to the Gospel and its imperative that we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves?

The social doctrine of the Church is a set of teachings, grounded in Sacred Scripture and illumined by faith, that treat the whole ensemble of human associations, relationships, and communities – those things that flow from our nature as social beings. It is part of the moral theology of the Church (CSDC, no. 72). In addition to the principle of the dignity of the human person, the Church proposes three other principles – the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity – as the absolutely fundamental points of departure in our reasoning about social realities. Taken together, they strike a careful balance between the needs of freedom and the demands of social responsibility. Without appreciating them in their interrelatedness, one quickly falls prey to the distortions of one ideology or another (cf. CSDC, no. 162).

For this reason, this *Plan for Parishes* urges that all Social Concerns Committees and all other groups within the diocese working to address various ills in society come to a deeper understanding of the social doctrine of the Church in its wholeness. It directs the diocese's Office of Ministries and Social Concerns to develop presentations and resources to foster this knowledge.

2. Emphasize the Importance of the Church's Teaching on Human Life

If the social doctrine of the Church is not understood as a coherent whole, it is not really understood at all. That, however, does not hinder us from emphasizing certain portions of it that are particularly relevant to our own particular situation. One of these areas is human life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that human life is sacred. "From its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: No one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being" (CCC, no. 2258, quoting *Donum Vitae*, Introduction 5).

Of all human rights, the right to life is foundational, since it is the condition for the exercise of all other rights (CSDC, no. 155). As Pope John Paul II explains,

The inviolability of the person, which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination. (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 38)

All forms of taking innocent human life are prohibited, as being serious (mortal) sins. These include intentional homicide, abortion, euthanasia, and embryonic stem-cell research. The Church now also teaches that capital punishment is to be avoided in modern society, where the government can render the offender incapable of doing harm without taking his life (CCC, 1997 edition, no. 2267; *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 56).

The diocese will profit from a deeper appreciation of the Church's teachings on life issues. This knowledge will strengthen our witness by crystallizing our reasons for our efforts in defense of life, and help us to evangelize those who are open to sharing our convictions. Our recent diocesan biomedical ethics conferences, organized by the Office of Family Life Education, have sought to convey this information, especially in areas where the medical techniques and practices involved have made it more difficult to discern how to act as followers of Christ.

At the same time, we must always be ready to suggest and facilitate life-affirming options to those in difficult situations, such as those experiencing an unplanned pregnancy or those whose family member is approaching the end of life. We must also stand ready to provide assistance to those dealing with the aftermath of a decision opposing life. Catholic Charities has been in the forefront of our efforts in these areas, offering counseling services to those affected by post-abortion trauma and empowering clients with an unplanned pregnancy to choose adoption. This work must continue.

3. Underscore the Importance of the Freedom of Religion in Society

In a certain way, one can say that the principle that gives rise to the right to life and all other human rights is religious freedom. In this sense, religious freedom is "the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person" (CSDC, no. 155, quoting Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 47). The Church's teaching on religious freedom received its first full expression at the Second Vatican Council. It said:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed, and thus it is to become a civil right. (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2 §§1-2)

Since we are created in the image of God and have God for our ultimate end, we seek God as a function of human nature. To the extent that we can discover the truth about God, we are obliged to act according to that truth. We are harmed insofar as our path to God is thwarted; our fulfillment as human persons is compromised. "Injury, therefore, is done to the human person and to the very order established by God for human life, if the free exercise of religion is denied in society, provided just public order is observed" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 3 §4).

From its founding, the United States has maintained a strong tradition of religious liberty. Indeed, religious liberty is our "first freedom," inscribed in the First Amendment to the Constitution. It states plainly, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Yet today we find this most precious freedom increasingly under attack. Most notably, in 2011 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a mandate that will force companies and religious institutions that do not meet a very narrow exemption to fund health insurance plans that include coverage for contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs. This mandate will force Catholic Church organizations to choose between violating their consciences or compromising their mission. Our Catholic

faith calls on us to provide food, education, health care, and social services to everyone in need – not just Catholics. This calling – ultimately, to lead the life of Christ – disqualifies us from the exemption.

Nor is the HHS mandate the only recent assault on our religious liberty in our country. Catholic Charities has been forced to discontinue its adoption and foster care services in several cities and in at least one state. This is because they refused, based on a religious conviction, to place children with same-sex couples and with unmarried opposite-sex couples who were living together. Additionally, the federal government disqualified a department of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops from administering contract services for victims of human trafficking because they declined to refer clients for contraception and abortion services. (For more information on this topic, see the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2012 Statement on Religious Liberty, *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*.)

This ominous trend, which has gathered momentum in recent years, must be reversed. We must restore the rights of individuals and organizations in our society to act in accordance with their religious convictions and the dictates of their conscience. Catholics must join in this effort. Under this *Plan for Parishes*, the diocese and parishes need to educate the faithful about this threat and to help them find ways to repel it.

4. Strengthen Efforts at the Parish Level to Reach Out to the Poor and Marginalized

The first words of the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* articulate the Church's special concern for the poor and marginalized: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1).

Our obligation to our brothers and sisters in need is anchored in the social nature of the human person. It flows from the second of Christ's Great Commandments, that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Mk 12:31). In other places, Sacred Scripture is more specific. In Luke's Gospel, Christ tells us, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise" (3:11).

The *Catechism* teaches that the Church's love for the poor "is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor" (no. 2444). By alleviating their suffering, we imitate Christ in his office of servant-king, using the goods of this world for the benefit of others. The *Catechism* also explains why this love is a *preferential* one:

In its various forms – material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death – human misery is the obvious sign of the inherited condition of frailty and need for salvation in which man finds himself as a consequence of original sin. This misery elicited the compassion of Christ the Savior, who willingly took it upon himself and identified himself with the least of his brethren. Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church . . . (no. 2448)

While "giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity" (CCC, no. 2447), our love for our brothers and sisters is expressed whenever we perform a work of mercy for someone in need. In our society, there are many poor and vulnerable people who require our attention: the unborn child, the hungry, the homeless, the imprisoned, victims of injustice, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and the terminally ill.

The Diocese of New Ulm has enjoyed a long history of reaching out to the poor and marginalized – as a diocese, in area faith communities, and in parishes. Often this work is carried out in cooperation with other local ecclesial communities, so that the work is truly ecumenical in character.

This *Plan for Parishes* calls for these efforts to help those in need to continue. Exercising their prudential judgment, pastoral leaders together with parishioners should discern the most efficacious ways to serve those most in need. In some areas, this can be accomplished best through the work of an area Social Concerns Committee. In other areas, pastoral leaders may prefer to work with other groups conducting this work, such as the Council of Catholic Women or the Knights of Columbus.

5. Educate Catholics on the Importance of Carrying Out Their Civic Responsibilities

Inherent in the dignity of the human person is the obligation to participate in social life. As individuals and in the various groups that we form, we must take responsibility for furthering the common good. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* counts among avenues of participation those actions by which “the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political, and social life of the civil community to which he belongs” (CSDC, no. 189; CCC, no. 1913; *Faithful Citizenship*, no. 13).

It emphasizes that in a democracy, participation among the citizens is especially urgent. “Democratic government, in fact, is defined first of all by the assignment of powers and functions on the part of the people, exercised in their name, in their regard and on their behalf. It is therefore clearly evident that every democracy must be participative” (no. 190).

The virtue by which we pursue the good of the political community is called citizenship. It can be practiced in many ways in a democracy such as ours. Some people, by virtue of their understanding of the issues that face our government and their ability to persuade people, might be called to run for elected office. Others might be called to work for a government organization. Still others may be called to lobby for specific legislation or to organize groups to pursue this activity. Many of us are capable of educating others about issues of importance in our society. Voting for those candidates who we are convinced will do the best job in promoting the common good is the least we can do.

Yet how do we know which candidates are preferable, which issues are most pressing, and, in the final analysis, which paths will lead to genuine human flourishing? As faithful citizens, we must begin our consideration of these matters with reference to the social doctrine of the Church. Priorities arise on several fronts: the defense of human life and other human rights, the necessity of avoiding war and promoting peace, the strengthening of families, the option for the poor and vulnerable, recognition of the dignity and rights of workers, and care for the environment (cf. *Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 40-54). Yet, as we have seen, the Church teaches that there is an order among these values: Human life must be defended with maximum determination. Our efforts as a diocese to educate the faithful on their civic responsibilities, then, will flow from our commitment to teach the social doctrine of the Church in its wholeness.

C. Marriage and Family Life: A Reflection of God’s Love

Our vocation as human persons can be summed up in a few simple words: We are called to love. Just as God created us out of love, so we also are called to love. The *Catechism* calls this “the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (CCC, no. 1604). This teaching is grounded in the words of Genesis, “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him” (1:27). Since God is love, the human person must also love in imitation of his Creator.

To love aright, we must seek the true good for ourselves and for others. Seeking these things will lead to our fulfillment as human persons. God did not leave it up to us to love in any way that we might see fit. Rather, he introduced a structure into our loves, an order corresponding to his divine law and his natural law. The existence of that order is revealed in the very next line from Genesis: “Male and female he created them” (1:27). Then we are told how this order is directed to our fulfillment: “God blessed them, saying: ‘Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’” (1:28).

Hence, from the time of our first parents, man and woman in every culture have come together to form an intimate union, following the designs that God has inscribed in their inmost being. This union we call marriage. As the *Catechism* explains, “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (no. 1601). Even on a natural level, husband and wife seek to love each other with an exclusive and permanent love. The mutual love expressed in their conjugal embrace helps them become one in mind and heart, facilitating their ability to love and educate the children that result from their union.

From the beginning, God not only intended that marriage have a natural dignity; he wanted to give it a supernatural meaning as well. The Father revealed this higher meaning through his Son, Jesus Christ, and enabled married couples to live out this new reality through the graces bestowed on them by his Church. The *Catechism* puts it succinctly: “This covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (no. 1601). By leading husband and wife to give themselves to each other and to their children, marriage already contributes greatly to the temporal good of family members. Now, transformed by Christ through his sacrament, the spouses are able to love each other and their children in a way that fosters their growth in holiness.

The Second Vatican Council’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* beautifully expresses the sacramental dignity of marriage. It says that through his grace, Christ comes into the lives of Christians in the Sacrament of Matrimony and remains with them so that they can love each other with the perpetual fidelity of self-giving love. In this way, they imitate their Lord and Savior, who gave himself completely to his Bride, the Church. The living out of their Christian vocation in marriage facilitates the sanctification of the whole family:

Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother. . . . 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.

As a result, with their parents leading the way by example and family prayer, children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation, and holiness. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48 §§3-4)

The love of husband and wife in marriage finds its ultimate meaning and its source of life in the cross of Christ. Christ died to cleanse us of our sins and to make us holy. His supreme love for his Bride, the Church, serves as a model for married couples. In his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul expresses this truth powerfully: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word ‘For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church” (5:25-26, 31-32). Marriage between baptized

persons is a sacrament because it both signifies and communicates Christ's grace (see CCC, nos. 1615-1617).

D. Pastoral Priorities Regarding Marriage and Family Life

1. Cultivate a Better Understanding of the Church's Teaching on Marriage and Family Life

In God's plan, marriage is invested with an importance that goes beyond the good of the spouses and the good of their children. The good of society and the entire human race is implicated. The Second Vatican Council teaches, "God himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48 §1).

More and more people seem to have forgotten that marriage is based on human nature for the good of the spouses, their children, and society as a whole. When raised to the level of a sacrament, it is an outstanding and noble way of pursuing Christian perfection. Instead, people increasingly think that it is merely conventional, a product of choice that can be altered according to the desires of individuals and their governments.

The need for the Marriage Protection Amendment in Minnesota and the debate surrounding it aptly demonstrate that marriage has come under attack in our society. At the root of this movement is, of course, sin. The *Catechism* says, "As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations; their mutual attraction, the Creator's own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust" (no. 1607). Power and pleasure begin to redefine our most intimate human relations. In our day and age, this is often manifested as a distorted appeal to freedom "conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being" (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 6).

In his apostolic exhortation *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, Pope John Paul II points to several practices prevalent in today's society that are signs of a refusal of God's love when he established marriage and family life. These include "the growing number of divorces, the scourge of abortion, the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization, [and] the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 6). Other problems are specifically associated with the sacrament: "the acceptance of purely civil marriage in contradiction to the vocation of the baptized to 'be married in the Lord,' [and] the celebration of the marriage sacrament without living faith, but for other motives" (no. 7). Still other behaviors oppose the human person's call to chastity, the successful integration of sexuality within the person. Prevalent examples of these are fornication, pornography, prostitution, homosexual relations, and adultery (see CCC, nos. 2337, 2353-2359, 2380-2381).

How can we combat these various defects in a truly human and Christ-centered vision of marriage if we do not know, first and foremost, what marriage is? How can husband and wife enrich their own love for each other and foster the good of their children unless they understand the beautiful way of life that they are called to live? Our first step to restore marriage to its rightful, exalted status must be to offer sound catechesis in this area. The teachings found in several magisterial documents from recent popes will form a solid foundation for this initiative. These include Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* (1968); Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995); and Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est* (2005).

2. Promote Pope John Paul II's Teaching on the Theology of the Body

Perhaps the most compelling new articulation of the Church's understanding of the human person has come in the form of Pope John Paul II's theology of the body. These teachings focus on the bodily dimension of the human person as revealed in the light of Christ. The pope gave these teachings at his regular Wednesday papal audiences between September 1979 and November 1984. Together, the audiences form a cohesive catechesis on human personhood, sexuality, marriage, sin, and redemption, especially as they concern the body – all from the perspective of biblical Revelation. (For more information, see John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, with a forward by John S. Grabowski, especially pages 16-18.)

An understanding of the theology of the body will be highly advantageous to the faithful of our diocese. The pope's biblical analysis sheds new light on several experiences of our first parents: Adam's ability to express his subjectivity and freedom through his body; his longing for another being like himself; his joy at being united to another person, different and yet complementary. The union of Adam and Eve shows that the body has a "nuptial" meaning, pointing the way toward the family and other forms of community. The pope then goes on to discuss sin as bringing about a situation where the body is no longer subordinated to the spirit and therefore is unable to express the person as it should. Christ's redemption of humanity changes this; he makes it possible for men and women to be united in a permanent, loving union as God intended from the beginning.

Under this *Plan for Parishes*, the Office of Family Life will lay the groundwork for a comprehensive theology of the body initiative in the diocese. This will include evaluating and implementing programs for all ages. For our youth, religious education programs and courses in Catholic schools will be assessed to see how the theology of the body might be integrated into the material that is already being taught. Opportunities for chastity education, which will provide age-appropriate programming involving children and their parents, will also be explored. For adults, the Office needs to offer programming that demonstrates the comprehensive nature of Pope John Paul II's profound reflection on the human person as revealed in the person of Christ. This will allow participants to appreciate more fully the Church's teaching on marriage and family life, as well as its whole social doctrine.

3. Enrich and Develop Programs to Foster Authentic Christian Marriage

Once the truth and beauty of God's call to marriage and family life is understood, it must then be lived in its integrity. Even in today's society, the Church assures us that this is possible: "Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy – heavier than the Law of Moses. By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God" (CCC, no. 1615). Everyone must bear a portion of the responsibility to help married couples live out their vocation. This includes public authority, individual Christians, those schooled in the sciences, priests, family associations, and the spouses themselves (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52 §§3-8).

This *Plan for Parishes* calls for the Office of Family Life to review the diocesan marriage and remarriage programs to ensure that they communicate the Church's teaching on marriage and family life in its fullness. Instruction offered by other dioceses and other organizations should be explored with a view to implementing them or integrating their most successful features into our programs. This will give couples in our parishes who are preparing for marriage access to the most effective formation possible. We also need to develop opportunities to provide continuing education for the mentor couples involved in our marriage programs.

In addition to forming our couples preparing for marriage, we also need to encourage and support those who are already married. In the past, parishes have sponsored various activities to celebrate marriage and to enhance spousal communication and intimacy. These efforts must continue. Under this *Plan for Parishes*, the Office of Family Life should implement a marriage enrichment program, which will be offered to couples at the area faith community or parish levels. It should also develop plans for an annual Mass (or Masses) with the bishop for married couples celebrating major wedding anniversaries.

4. Promote the Practice of Natural Family Planning Among Christian Couples

The *Catechism* reaffirms the constant teaching of the Church that recourse to artificial methods of contraception is objectively sinful. Quoting Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, it says that "each and every marriage act must remain open 'per se' to the transmission of life." The doctrine "is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act" (CCC, no. 2366; *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 11-12).

This does not mean that married couples are forbidden from spacing the births of their children. On the contrary, the regulation of births falls within their duty to exercise responsible parenthood, so long as it is done in a spirit of generosity and love (CCC, no. 2368). This can be accomplished by abstaining from the marital embrace during a woman's fertile periods. Again, the *Catechism* takes its teaching from *Humanae Vitae*:

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom. In contrast, "every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible" is intrinsically evil. (CCC, no. 2370; *Humanae Vitae*, 14, 16)

In other words, the nature of the conjugal act as established by God must be respected. Only then can the couple achieve "the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51 §3). Perhaps even more compelling is Pope John Paul II's expression of this truth in the language of the body. In the act of conjugal love, husband and wife express their total self-gift to one another through their bodies. Contraception introduces into the act "an objectively contradictory language, namely, of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 32 §4).

Natural Family Planning (NFP) encompasses a set of methods to discover a woman's signs of fertility so that married couples can achieve or avoid pregnancy. A priority of this *Plan for Parishes* is to increase awareness and use of NFP among married couples in our diocese, so that they can regulate the births of their children in conformity with God's loving plan. First off all, this means educating couples in the advantages of NFP – which are not only spiritual and moral, but psychological and physical as well. A well-rounded introduction to NFP must be a major component of diocesan marriage programs. Furthermore, in order to learn and practice these techniques successfully, couples need well qualified NFP teachers. An increase in the number of couples interested in practicing NFP will entail the need for more NFP instructors. Preferably, we will be able to cultivate instructors with expertise using different methods, so that couples will have a choice. In the end, a diocesan-wide approach to NFP will be most effective. This commitment will include continuing education for NFP instructors on an annual basis.

5. Energize the Faithful to Work for Laws Supporting Marriage as Intended by God

In the debate over the Minnesota Marriage Protection Amendment, some people questioned whether the Church should be involved in a political matter. To answer, we must remind ourselves what marriage is. In his apostolic exhortation *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, Pope John Paul II writes that marriage is a “covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself” (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 11). There is a special love required for marriage. It is different from the love between friends, or between parent and child, or between us and God. It is called marital love and is characterized by a man and a woman who give themselves to one another in faithfulness, permanence, and openness to the begetting and raising of children.

Our age seems preoccupied with maximizing the freedom and satisfaction of adults. In this climate, it is easy to forget that marriage, while fostering the good of the spouses, is also *for* children. Since they are made in the image of God and possess the intrinsic dignity of human persons, children have a right to be conceived through the total self-gift of the marital embrace. They also have a right to be nurtured and educated by a mother and a father who are husband and wife. At times, circumstances beyond the control of the spouses, such as death, cause these rights to remain unrealized. Yet the State must not encourage situations where these rights are neglected. Teaching on the welfare of marriage and the family, Vatican II taught, “Public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect, and promote their authentic nature, to shield public morality and to favor the prosperity of home life” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52 §3).

Children are the future of our nation. Every nation that values its future must take care to ensure that marriage and families are protected. In strong families, the next generation will be brought up to be virtuous, responsible citizens. The need to foster the good of families as God created them has important consequences in law and policy. For example, divorce should not be made easy. The evil of adultery should not be ignored. Pornography, due to its close connection with infidelity, should be prohibited to the maximum extent possible. Unmarried couples and same-sex couples should not be allowed to adopt children.

Under this *Plan for Parishes*, the excellent work of the sort that began to promote the Marriage Protection Amendment must continue. In addition to educating the faithful on the nature of marriage and family life, we must also point out concrete ways of promoting them in our state and in our nation. The flourishing of marriage and family life depends very much on whether public authority recognizes and follows through on its duty to protect it. It is incumbent on all citizens in a democracy to ensure that it does so.

E. Catholic Charities: The Gift of Ourselves as a Diocese to Those in Need

The Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* says that “Christ was sent by the Father ‘to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart’ (Lk 4:18), ‘to seek and to save what was lost’ (Lk 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering founder. It does all it can to relieve their need, and in them it strives to serve Christ” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 8). By attending to the needs of the poor and suffering, we utilize our gifts for the sake of others. This is one of the chief ways that we imitate Christ, the servant-king. In 2007, Catholic Charities was re-established in the Diocese of New Ulm to pursue this mission.

One of the stewardship goals under the diocesan priorities of the *Third Plan for Parishes* was to establish an annual diocesan appeal (p. 7). At the time it was drafted, then-Bishop John C. Nienstedt was concerned

that the counseling and mental health services provided by various public, private, and church-sponsored organizations in the region were declining. The idea that an annual appeal would provide the needed funding for the creation and ongoing support for a Catholic Charities program in the diocese received strong support among pastoral leaders. Proceeds from the first annual Diocesan Ministries Appeal (DMA) in 2006 permitted the diocese to lay the groundwork for a new department. In 2007, a Catholic Charities director was recruited, staff was hired, an advisory board was convened, policies were developed, and relationships with insurance companies were formalized.

Catholic Charities saw its first clients in November 2007. Counselors were made available and are now available at scheduled times in four offices strategically located throughout the diocese – in Willmar, Marshall, Hutchinson, and New Ulm. Throughout its short history, these locations have served clients well, ensuring access in most major population centers of the diocese. The DMA remains an indispensable source of funding for Catholic Charities services. As of the end of 2012, some 4,500 people have been served in response to crisis; about 650 individuals, couples, and families have received counseling services; and 6,100 people have enjoyed the benefit of hearing presentations or participating in workshops organized by Catholic Charities staff.

These are Catholic Charities' core services, as refined by their Advisory Committee and promoted in the parishes:

1. **Individual, Marriage, and Family Counseling** – Counselors address issues related to individual stress or family conflict, chemical dependency, communications breakdowns, domestic violence, parenting skills, and mental health needs. Mediation, group conflict resolution, and employee assistance counseling are also offered.
2. **Pregnancy and Adoption Counseling** – Pregnancy support services include assistance with future planning, finding resources, preparing for the birth of a child, and relationship counseling. Information on adoption and help in discerning an adoption plan are also offered, as well as resources for people interested in adopting a child.
3. **Crisis Response for Parishes and Communities** – Counselors and affiliated staff work with individuals, families, schools, and parishes to address needs, supply emergency resource materials, and/or develop emergency response services in the wake of a tragic death, accident, or natural disaster in or around the Diocese of New Ulm.
4. **Transition and Grief Services** – Counseling, support group referrals, volunteer outreach, and educational services are provided for individuals and families experiencing a loss from separation, death, or a similar tragedy.

In addition, Catholic Charities provides Project Rachel post-abortion counseling for those seeking healing, reconciliation, or spiritual direction following an abortion. They counsel and evaluate couples preparing for marriage and remarriage when difficulties are identified at the request of pastoral leaders, parish pastoral staff, or the diocesan marriage Tribunal. They make behavioral health presentations to parishes, schools, and communities. They provide spiritual direction and make referrals to others providing this service. Finally, they maintain collaborative relationships with other church and non-profit organizations offering specific services that Catholic Charities currently cannot afford to provide, so that clients' needs can be met in a timely way. Referrals are made regarding immigration services, financial counseling, and guardianship and conservator relationships.

Following the recommendation of Catholic Charities' advisors, the bishop has been clear about the organization's direction: They must stay focused on their core services. The advisory board meets with

the director and staff four times per year. Their spring planning meeting includes the bishop. It involves the approval of the budget for the upcoming fiscal year and consideration of adjustments in services. Changes that are approved by the bishop become part of the department's goals and initiatives in future years.

F. Maintaining Safe Environments for Children and Young People

Our obligation as a Church to protect children and young people and to prevent sexual abuse flows from the mission of Jesus Christ. As servant-king, Christ exercised dominion over his own body and used the goods of this world for the good of others. In seeing to the pastoral governance of the Church, the bishop and his priests have a special responsibility: They must make sure that the children and young people who come to worship, learn, and participate in various parish and diocesan programs can do so in a safe and secure environment. This responsibility is shared by religious and lay people who work for the Church and participate in their pastoral care.

In the preamble to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the bishops of the United States trace their commitment to preventing sexual abuse to the constant care that Jesus showed for the vulnerable. They quote the words from the prophet Isaiah, with which he inaugurated his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord (Lk 4:18-19)." Again, they remind us that in Matthew's Gospel, the Lord tells his disciples that whenever they show mercy and compassion to the least ones, they show it to him (Mt 25:40).

The Diocese of New Ulm has undertaken many initiatives to implement the *Charter* since it was first promulgated in 2002. We have instituted policies and procedures to respond promptly to any allegation where there is reason to believe that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred. The bishop has appointed Victim Assistance Coordinators to reach out to victims and their families, demonstrating a sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being. He has established a diocesan review board, which offers confidential advice regarding such allegations and the suitability of clerics for continued ministry. We have established clear standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy and other Church workers who have contact with children and young people. We are committed to follow the norms of the *Charter*.

In our efforts to implement the *Charter*, we have also developed a comprehensive safe environment program to educate clergy, teachers, catechists, parents, and students. It has been extended to include mandatory participation by all diocesan and parish employees, and all volunteers having contact with children and young adults. This program helps these people to identify instances of sexual misconduct and instructs them on how to prevent this behavior.

Under this *Plan for Parishes*, we must continue to improve on this program, complying with the increasingly high standards set for us by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. We must also stay committed to offer help and healing to those who have been victims of sexual misconduct. The diocese's Office of Safe Environment is primarily responsible for making sure that these initiatives are carried out. However, it can only do so with the ongoing cooperation and assistance of the other diocesan offices and pastoral leaders. Pastors and pastoral administrators must continue to work for the success of the diocesan safe environment program in their parishes.

G. Care for God's Creation and the Dignity of Rural Life

The Diocese of New Ulm is one of the most rural dioceses in the United States. In the middle of the summer, field after field of corn, wheat, sugar beets, and soybeans stand in testimony to its rural character, as do the farms on which are raised hogs, turkeys, sheep, beef and dairy cattle, and even alpacas.

Fr. John McRaith, a priest from our diocese who later became bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, was named executive director of The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) on January 1, 1972. Founded in 1923, this organization joined Catholics in a common effort to serve the rural Church, rural people, and their communities.

Fr. McRaith inspired many not to give up on the rural Church, insisting that food and land and other natural resources must be understood and treated as gifts from a loving Creator to meet the needs of all. In the mid-1970s, the NCRLC board of directors adopted major policy statements that reflected on land use, energy, and water.

In the late 1970s, Bishop Raymond A. Lucker collaborated with other bishops in the Midwest on a statement addressing land issues from a Catholic moral perspective. They were concerned that land ownership throughout America's agricultural heartland was becoming concentrated in fewer hands and that its management was being increasingly controlled by corporate interests. The resulting document, *Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland*, provides a history and analysis of land issues, discusses the moral principles of sound land stewardship, and challenges the Church to seek a better future for rural life through prayer, preaching, and public witness. In a poignant passage, it describes the central role of the family farm:

The family farm has helped to form the heartland's heritage. It has occupied most of the land in this region, and therefore is the focal point for most discussions of land ownership or use. It has played a key role as a way of life that preserves and promotes such values as faith, hope, perseverance, generosity, trustworthiness, honesty, and concern for neighbor. It has helped promote harmony among rural people and between rural people and the land which provides their livelihood. It has helped foster concern for the other people who depend on its production for their very sustenance. It has inspired care of the land as a limited natural resource. On the family farm have been celebrated and affirmed many rural Americans' identity as a people and their contribution to the wellbeing of all peoples. The values which people have derived from their vocation as family farmers have helped promote the stability, harmony, and prosperity of rural communities. (no. 24)

The principles of land stewardship enumerated in the document are grounded in Sacred Scripture and in the teaching tradition of the Church. They are:

1. The land is God's.
2. People are God's stewards on the land.
3. The land's benefits are for everyone.
4. The land should be distributed equitably.
5. The land should be conserved and restored.
6. Land-use planning must consider social and environmental impacts.
7. Land use should be appropriate to land quality.
8. The land should provide a moderate livelihood.
9. The land's workers should be able to become the land's owners.
10. The land's mineral wealth should be shared.

All these principles, according to the statement, are applicable to the heartland (no. 50) and therefore to the Diocese of New Ulm. Explanations of each principle can be found in the document (nos. 51-77) and on the NCRLC's Web site (www.ncrlc.com).

Today, the Diocese of New Ulm continues to apply the teachings of the Church related to rural life. Borrowing a line from the mission statement of the NCRLC, the diocese applies the teachings of Jesus Christ to the social, economic, and spiritual aspects of rural America, encouraging the care of God's creation and a sound respect for the dignity of the human person.

In the homily at his inauguration Mass, our new Holy Father, Pope Francis, explained the far-reaching implications of our responsibility to care for creation. Drawing from the example of St. Joseph as a protector of Mary, Jesus, and the Church, the pope said that our vocation of being a "protector" means to protect

all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis and St. Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. It means caring for one another in our families

Speaking specifically about the care of resources, Pope Benedict has said: "In the current economic situation, the temptation for the more dynamic economies is that of chasing after advantageous alliances that, nevertheless, can have harmful effects for poorer states, prolonging situations of extreme mass poverty of men and women and using up the earth's natural resources, entrusted to man by God the Creator – as Genesis says – that he might cultivate and protect it (cf. 2:15)."

"Moreover," the pope continues,

despite the crisis, in countries that have long been industrialized, lifestyles marked by unsustainable consumption – which have damaging effects for the environment and the poor – still continue. It is necessary, then, to point in a truly unified way to a new balance between agriculture, industry, and services, so that development be sustainable, and no one go without bread and work, and so that air and water and the other primary resources be preserved as universal goods (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 27). (Pope Benedict XVI, Weekly Angelus Address, November 14, 2010)

In addition, Pope Benedict has highlighted the importance of agricultural life in the formation of families, which are the living cells of culture. He states:

In the rural world, the traditional family nucleus is endeavoring to promote agricultural production through the wise transmission by parents to their children not only of systems of cultivation or of the preservation and distribution of food, but also of lifestyles, principles of education, culture, the religious sense, and the conception of the sacredness of the person in all the stages of his or her existence. The rural family is not only a work model, but a model of living and a concrete expression of solidarity, in which the essential role of women is confirmed." (Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Attendees of the Thirty-Seventh Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, July 1, 2011)

Bringing these fundamental points of Catholic teaching together, Dr. Christopher Thompson of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, explains:

The Church has a long tradition, going back decades, which speaks about the importance of agriculture, especially its dignity. The farmer was seen to cooperate with God's creative order, as a ... steward of the earth's resources. Animals were not mere things, and a farm was anything but a "factory." Instead, the farm was the ideal place to engage in the original vocation of the human person – to till and to keep the earth. The family farm, the Church argued, was the ideal circumstance in which to raise the next generation, because it united men and women, children and the aged, in the common and noble task of drawing forth the fruits of the earth for the good of man and the glory of God. ("NCRLC Board Member Presents at Vatican Conference: An Interview with Dr. Christopher Thompson," *Catholic Rural Life*, Fall 2011, as found on the NCRLC Web site)

The Diocese of New Ulm remains committed as always to the proper stewardship of the land and the dignity of rural life, especially on the family farm. It also promotes the protection of our environment, which includes not only our land, but also our surface and ground water and the air that we breathe. Accordingly, this *Plan for Parishes* calls upon the diocesan Offices of Ministries and Social Concerns to identify and develop resources on these topics for distribution to parishes. These resources should be presented or at least listed with links on the diocesan Web site. For their part, priests should preach and teach on these topics, so that the faithful come to a better appreciation of the great nobility of life that many of them still enjoy.

H. Stewardship: Making Good Use of the Things Entrusted to Us

The exercise of stewardship over creation and the material world is an exercise of the kingly office of Jesus. Jesus always used the things of this world for the benefit of others. For example, he multiplied the loaves and the fish to feed people, he changed water into wine for the benefit of those at the wedding feast, and so forth. When we imitate Christ by using material things for the benefit of others, we participate in his kingly office.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "In the beginning, God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race" (no. 2402). No one has an absolute right to the goods of the earth, especially when others lack the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

A good principle to remember comes from the *Catechism*: "In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself. The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family" (no. 2404). Everyone in the diocese is called to be aware of the true meaning of stewardship as stated in this principle.

Christ gives us further insight into the nature of stewardship in his parable of the talents (see Mt 25:14-30 and Lk 19:12-27). He compares the Kingdom of God to a man who goes away on a journey, leaving his wealth to be managed by three servants. Upon his return, he praises and rewards the two servants who invest their master's money wisely and produce a substantial return. However, he rebukes and punishes the servant who foolishly stores his money away and returns it without gain. In this parable, Christ teaches us that God expects us to render an account for the use of those resources that have been entrusted to our care. We use and develop them for our own good and share them for the good of others.

In their pastoral letter on stewardship, the United States bishops point out that the money in this parable does not stand just for our possessions. It represents all the goods entrusted to our care, since they are all gifts from God: “All temporal and spiritual goods are created by and come from God. That is true of everything human beings have: spiritual gifts like faith, hope, and love; talents of body and brain; cherished relationships with family and friends; material goods; the achievements of human genius and skill; the world itself” (*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, p. 20). At the end of our earthly lives, God will require us to account for all the gifts we have been given. He will want to see that they have been used and cultivated for his glory and the benefit of others.

Since we are called upon to share not only our belongings (our “treasure”), but our time and talent as well, it seems that stewardship is all-encompassing. What kind of activity could we possibly engage in that does not involve our aptitudes, or at least some of our time? It appears that everything we do to imitate Christ implicates stewardship in some way. While there is truth to this observation, it is better to maintain the distinctions among Christ’s three offices and continue to view stewardship as a practice of the kingly office. This approach respects the essential character of the actions by which we imitate Christ. For example, singing in the choir at Mass without a doubt involves use of the choir members’ time and talent. Yet a chant or a hymn is properly regarded as a prayer, and praying is an act of worship. As such, this activity is more correctly viewed as a participation in Christ’s priestly office.

The exercise of stewardship is especially important in the lives of Christians because it cultivates gratitude, trust, and love. In their pastoral letter, the bishops explain that good stewardship begins with gratitude: “We are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and for one another” (*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, p. 42). Our thankfulness to God for the many blessings that he has given us leads us to want to give in return. Just as God has blessed us with what we have, we trust that he will also grant the increase through our use of them. Yet trusting or having confidence in God is already an act of love, for we always love those who we think will bring about our happiness. God first loved us first by giving us everything we have and are. Then he gave us Christ, through whom we can attain perfect happiness. We offer a fitting return to God by giving ourselves and all that we have back to God, just as Jesus did.

Stewardship, then, is a powerful way of understanding and living out Christian discipleship. What are some practical ways we can encourage this practice in the Diocese of New Ulm? First of all, an AFC or parish could establish a stewardship committee to guide its members to appreciate stewardship as a way of life and to develop the resources necessary to support the pursuit of Christ’s mission. Secondly, such a committee and/or members of the AFC/parish staff could implement a stewardship program; such guides are available from the diocesan Development Office. Thirdly, an AFC or parish could host a stewardship fair to make members aware of the many opportunities available for them to contribute their time, talent, and treasure. Fourthly, an AFC or parish could send representatives to attend a stewardship day held periodically on a regional level to discover best practices that might be applicable to their organization. Whatever avenues pastoral leaders decide to pursue, the diocesan Development Office stands ready to support them with consultation and resources.

CHAPTER 6. VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND CONSECRATED LIFE

Without a doubt the call to the ministerial priesthood or the consecrated life is a great good for the person who receives it. Yet God bestows these gifts for the benefit of the entire Church. Each vocation has two fundamental aspects: God's call and the disciple's response. The Church enters into this "dialogue" by assisting the disciple to discern and respond to God's gift. As members of the Church, we all share in the responsibility of promoting vocations.

Since we have already discussed the call to the consecrated life in Section One of this Plan, the first part of this chapter will focus primarily on fostering vocations to the ministerial priesthood. This discussion takes on particular urgency in view of our treatment of the growing shortage of priests in our diocese, as outlined in Section Five, Chapter Two.

A. The Universal Call to Foster Vocations to the Ministerial Priesthood

The call to the priesthood is a beautiful gift from God. In being configured to Christ, Head of the Church, the priest experiences extraordinary challenges in his life but also extraordinary joys (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 11 §2). For the person who receives this call, it is a great good, a specific way of pursuing perfection in Christ. Yet it is also a gift to the whole Church, given so that she can accomplish her mission (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 41 §1).

The Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Mission and Life of Priests* explains the essential ecclesial dimension of the priestly vocation: "Priests are made in the likeness of Christ the Priest by the Sacrament of Orders, so that they may, in collaboration with their bishops, work for the building up and care of the Church which is the whole Body of Christ, acting as ministers of him who is the Head" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 12). In his apostolic exhortation *On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*, Pope John Paul II illuminates this teaching further: "Priestly ministry acquires its genuine meaning and attains to its fullest truth in serving and in fostering the growth of the Christian community and the common priesthood of the faithful" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 37 §3).

In this letter, the pope explains that there are two fundamental aspects of a vocation, one on the side of the caller, the other on the side of the recipient:

The history of every priestly vocation, as indeed of every Christian vocation, is the history of an inexpressible dialogue between God and human beings, between the love of God who calls and the freedom of individuals who respond lovingly to him. These two indivisible aspects of vocation, God's gratuitous gift and the responsible freedom of human beings, are reflected in a splendid and very effective way in the brief words with which the evangelist Mark presents the calling of the Twelve: Jesus "went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him" (Mk 3:13). On the one hand, we have the completely free decision of Jesus; on the other, the "coming" of the Twelve, their "following" Jesus. (no. 36 §1)

The vocation to the priesthood – or any vocation, for that matter – reveals God's gracious love for the individual being called and at the same time the freedom of the person in responding to God's call and entrusting him- or herself to him (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 36 §5).

If a vocation is the function of a relationship between God and an individual, where does the Church come in? How does the Church understand her own role in fostering vocations? It starts with a reflection on the role of the apostle Andrew in bringing his brother Simon to Christ:

In her service to the priestly vocation and its development, that is, in the birth, discernment, and care of each vocation, the Church can look for her model to Andrew, one of the first two disciples who set out to follow Jesus. Andrew himself told his brother what had happened to him: “‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ)” (Jn 1:41). His account of this “discovery” opened the way to a meeting: “He brought him to Jesus” (Jn 1:42). There can be no doubt about the absolutely free initiative nor about the sovereign decision of Jesus. It is Jesus who calls Simon and gives him a new name: “Jesus looked at him, and said, ‘So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter)” (Jn 1:42). But Andrew also acted with initiative: He arranged his brother’s meeting with Jesus. (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 38 §2)

Following the example of Andrew, we as a Church must take the initiative in bringing people to Christ. First, we must recognize the priesthood for what it is: a great gift of God to an individual for the building up of the Church. Then we must do those things that will help eligible men consider whether they are being called. Of course we cannot do anything to increase the number of those called; that is up to God. However, we can act to increase awareness of the call, and this does help individuals to respond.

How, then, do we promote vocations as a Church? Just like anything we do as members of his Body, we must imitate Christ in his threefold office of priest, prophet, and king: “The Church, as a priestly, prophetic, and kingly people, is committed to foster and to serve the birth and maturing of priestly vocations through her prayer and sacramental life, by her proclamation of the Word and by education in the faith, [and] by her example and witness of charity” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 38 §3). Some concrete ways that vocations can be promoted in each area are:

1. *Priest*: In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II points to the centrality of the Eucharist in the life and ministry of priests as foundational to promoting vocations. “It is in the Eucharist that prayer for vocations is most closely united to the prayer of Christ the Eternal High Priest. At the same time, the diligence of priests in carrying out their Eucharistic ministry, together with the conscious, active, and fruitful participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, provides young men with a powerful example and incentive for responding generously to God’s call” (no. 31). As a priestly people, we also promote vocations by praying for them outside of Mass, and by uniting our sufferings with those of Christ’s for the intention of vocations (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 38 §§5-6).
2. *Prophet*: The Church’s mission is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to all peoples, to invite them to experience his life and love, and to inspire them to greater holiness in union with him. This is the Church’s vocation, what it has been called to do by God. This vocation, in turn, is reflected in the vocation of every Christian. According to Pope John Paul II, the Word of God enlightens believers to appreciate life as a response to God’s call and leads them to embrace in faith the gift of a personal vocation (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 39 §1). In addition to instruction on vocations in general, the pope says that there must be particular catechesis on the value of the ministerial priesthood, an effort to dispel distorted ideas about it, and an invitation to those young people who demonstrate the necessary gifts and talents to consider it as a real possibility (no. 39 §2).
3. *King*: In his exhortation *On the Formation of Priests*, Pope John Paul II teaches that we first promote vocations in imitation of Christ the King when we encourage one another to live out our lives as his followers to the fullest: “The Church fulfills her mission when she guides every

member of the faithful to discover and live his or her own vocation in freedom and to bring it to fulfillment in charity” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 40 §1). For boys and young men, this involves cultivating in them a desire to follow Christ “in a total and attractive way.” It also involves encouraging them to take spiritual direction, and training them “to appreciate commitment, the meaning of free service, [and] the value of sacrifice and unconditional self-giving” (no. 40 §§2, 3, and 5). We should also not forget that “often it is the example of a priest’s fervent pastoral charity which the Lord uses to sow and to bring to fruition in a young man’s heart the seed of a priestly calling.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 31)

The pastoral work of promoting vocations to the ministerial priesthood is first and foremost the responsibility of the bishop with the cooperation of his priests. Yet all the faithful are charged with fostering a “culture of vocations.” The Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Priestly Training* says, “The duty of fostering vocations pertains to the whole Christian community, which should exercise it above all by a fully Christian life.” It especially exhorts “families which, animated by the spirit of faith and love and by the sense of duty, become a kind of initial seminary, and the parishes in whose rich life the young people take part” (*Optatam Totius*, no. 2 §1). Imbued with a spirit of self-giving and self-sacrifice, families can do much to inflame the spark of a vocation that God places in a young man’s soul. The parish, too, especially through its school, can inculcate the importance of a vocation as a valuable gift to a person, equipping him with an orientation toward his own fulfillment and serving the good of others.

B. Pastoral Priorities Regarding Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life

Vatican II mandated that “the entire pastoral activity of fostering vocations be methodically and coherently planned” (*Optatam Totius*, no. 2 §4). Pursuant to this directive, the Diocese of New Ulm has established an Office of Vocations, which coordinates the efforts of the bishop, priests, and lay faithful to encourage eligible men to consider a priestly vocation. This Office also coordinates the formation of seminarians. A director of Vocations Awareness is primarily responsible for promoting vocations to the consecrated life. The bishop, the director and associate director of the Office of Vocations, and the director of Vocations Awareness make up the diocesan Vocations Team.

At present, the Vocations Team and parishes coordinate the following initiatives and activities to promote vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life:

1. To fulfill Christ’s priestly mission:
 - a. **Petitions** – The Vocations Office has asked parishes to include petitions for vocations at every Mass and meeting.
 - b. **Holy Hours** – The Vocations Office has developed a resource for praying for vocations with adoration and Benediction, which is being used in some parishes.
 - c. **Traveling Holy Items** – Some parishes have items, such as a chalice, cross, icon, or basket, that are passed among families. The item comes with a set of prayers to promote vocations. While the family has the item, they are to pray for vocations more intensely.
2. To fulfill Christ’s prophetic mission:
 - a. **Young People’s Prayer Groups** – These have been established at several locations to gather for catechesis and *Lectio Divina*.
 - b. **Vocations Articles** – The Vocations Office and the Office of Communication strive to publish a vocations-themed article in several issues of *The Prairie Catholic* each year.

3. To fulfill Christ's kingly mission:
 - a. **Vocations Booth** – The Vocations Office has had a presence at the youth rallies and Council of Catholic Women gatherings, with a booth of prayer cards and other resources, in addition to being present to meet and greet.
 - b. **Vocation Awareness Days** – These have been held throughout the diocese. Members of the Vocations Team and others host the event for a school and religious education program in a particular parish. Since everyone is expected to attend, it raises the awareness of the goodness of discerning and presents healthy models of vocations.
 - c. **High School Vocations Trips** – Sophomores and juniors at Catholic high schools visit the college seminary (St. John Vianney College Seminary at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul) and motherhouses in the Twin Cities. All students are required to go, so no one gets singled out. They see firsthand that those who are discerning or responding to a vocation are normal people.
 - d. **Vocations Dinners** – Through Operation Andrew Dinners and Operation Miriam Dinners, young men and women, respectively, are invited to a meal hosted by the bishop. During these dinners, vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life are discussed.
 - e. **Discernment Retreats** – For those young men more intensely discerning, the Vocations Office has developed a discernment retreat where they gather for a day of prayer and interaction with the bishop and seminarians.
 - f. **Frassati Visits** – In conjunction with several vocations-themed events around the University of St. Thomas, young women and men are invited to attend a Theotokos or Team Vianney night respectively; a Cor Jesu Holy Hour with adoration, confessions, and music; and the Lifeline Mass at the NET center.
 - g. **Vianney Visits** – For the young men discerning entering seminary, the Vocations Office offers free transportation and assistance for them to attend a Vianney Visit at St. John Vianney College Seminary.
 - h. **Ongoing Communication** – The Vocations Office maintains communication with those expressing interest in discerning a call to the priesthood and assists them with the three-fold application process (diocese, seminary, and university).

As is evident from the list above, the diocese is already doing so much to foster vocations to the diocesan priesthood that it is difficult to see how we can do more. Yet it remains a top pastoral priority. To extend our efforts under this *Plan for Parishes*, we will also pursue the following:

1. **Pulpit Exchanges** – In the past, the director and assistant director of the Vocations Office have presided and/or preached on vocations at weekend Masses at parishes throughout the diocese. Because both have parish assignments with commitments on the weekend, this has ceased. This practice must be re-established, with the pastor or another priest at the parish exchanging duties with Vocations Office personnel for selected weekend Masses.
2. **Prayer and Fasting** – In the past, the bishop has encouraged prayer and fasting for vocations among the faithful. This practice needs to be resumed.
3. **Education About the Priest Shortage** – This *Plan for Parishes*, especially Section Five, Chapter Two, contains much information about the current numbers of priests in the diocese and the projected decline in these numbers over the next twenty-five years. Pastoral leaders, parish leaders, and diocesan department directors should review this analysis so that they can communicate it to others as needed. The diocese's Pastoral Planning Office will update the figures on a regular basis and make them available on the diocesan Web site.

4. **Recommitment to Current Activities** – Those parishes and/or schools that are not currently involved in the vocations activities offered by the Vocations Team need to make this a priority. The Vocations Team stands ready to assist them to determine which activities would be most effective in their circumstances.

Finally, we must also continue to recognize the importance of the work of our diocesan Office of Youth Ministry in fostering vocations to the ministerial priesthood and consecrated life. While the initiatives discussed thus far in this chapter are explicitly geared toward vocations, the efforts of those ministering to our youth and young adults are often more subtle. Nevertheless, they are crucial in inviting our young people to enter into the discernment process. Some of these activities are:

1. **Annual Youth Days** – The Office of Youth Ministry organizes and encourages participation in its annual Junior High Festival and Senior High Rally. These events always incorporate a vocations awareness theme, sometimes explicitly and always implicitly.
2. **Discipleship Camps** – Through the Youth Ministry Office, the diocese organizes and encourages attendance at its annual summer Discipleship Camps at the Center for Youth Ministry in Renville. Some of the young people participating in these events have discerned a vocation to priesthood and religious life. The programming provided has served to help.
3. **Diocesan Youth Council** – Each year the Youth Ministry Office invites high school youth to apply for a position on the Diocesan Youth Council. Significant personal and spiritual formation is provided to members. They also benefit from the opportunity to be of service to the diocesan Church. Some of the youth who have participated on the council are currently discerning a priestly or religious vocation.
4. **National Catholic Youth Conference** – The Office of Youth Ministry organizes a group of youth from the diocese to attend the biennial National Catholic Youth Conference. NCYC has a strong vocation culture.

CHAPTER 7. HISPANIC MINISTRY: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MUTUAL ENRICHMENT

The growing Hispanic/Latino presence in the Diocese of New Ulm is a blessing from God, and yet it presents challenges that call for creative pastoral responses. The diocese has a long history of serving the Hispanic community, which has now grown to over five percent of its total population. Hispanic ministry can be understood as the organized and ongoing response by the Church to welcome and accompany Hispanics in encountering and following Christ so that they may become full participants in the life of the Church and her evangelizing mission. While most ministries of the diocese focus on a single aspect of the Church's call to imitate Christ as priest, prophet, and king, Hispanic ministry must address all three. Its approach is therefore comprehensive, offering opportunities for worship, catechesis and evangelization, and the cultivation of charity.

A. Need for Hispanic Ministry in the Diocese

The Hispanic/Latino presence in the United States and in the Diocese of New Ulm is a blessing from God. It brings us great hope for the future but also presents challenges that require creative pastoral responses. As Pope John Paul II said in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*,

In its history, America has experienced many immigrations, as waves of men and women came to its various regions in the hope of a better future. The phenomenon continues even today, especially with many people and families from Latin American countries who have moved to the northern parts of the continent, to the point where in some cases they constitute a substantial part of the population. They often bring with them a cultural and religious heritage which is rich in Christian elements. The Church is well aware of the problems created by this situation and is committed to spare no effort in developing her own pastoral strategy among these immigrant people, in order to help them settle in their new land and to foster a welcoming attitude among the local population, in the belief that a mutual openness will bring enrichment to all. (no. 65 §1)

The diocese has a long history of ministering to the Hispanic community. From its beginning until recently, it provided ministry primarily to Hispanic seasonal migrant workers. Due to the changes in agricultural production, there has been a steep decline of migrant workers. Because of job opportunities in certain industries, there has been a steady increase in Hispanic people who have now made western Minnesota their permanent home. According to the 2010 decennial census, there are approximately 15,000 Hispanics/Latinos living within the fifteen-county area of the diocese, which is over five percent of its total population. An April 2012 study conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center found that 62 percent of Hispanics in the nation consider themselves Catholic.

B. Current Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry

In order to respond to the challenges associated with the ever-growing presence of the Hispanics/Latinos, as well as attend to their pastoral and sacramental needs, the *Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry 2006-2013* was developed. This plan is a pastoral response to the reality and needs of the Hispanic people in their efforts to achieve integration and participation in the life of our Church and in building up the Kingdom of God.

The plan employs the methodology of a *Pastoral de Conjunto* (Communion in Mission) where all the elements of pastoral ministry, all its structures, and all of the activities of pastoral agents – both Hispanic and non-Hispanic – are coordinated with a common vision. The diocesan plan emphasizes the responsibility of the parish and area faith community to respond to the needs of their Hispanic parishioners, with the Office of Hispanic Ministry as a strong resource. In the spirit of *Pastoral de Conjunto*, all diocesan offices collaborate with the parish and AFC to work together for the good of the whole.

Hispanic ministry can be defined as the organized and ongoing response by the Church to welcome and accompany Hispanics in encountering and following the living Jesus Christ, so that they may become full participants in the life of the Church and her evangelizing mission. By committing herself to this ministry, the Church fulfills her mission among Hispanics. They feel welcomed, affirm their Catholic identity, develop a sense of belonging to the faith community, and, over time, achieve a sense of ownership and stewardship in the local Church. Hispanics achieve full ecclesial integration when there is a commitment to the method of *Pastoral de Conjunto*, and a pastor and his staff take ownership of and become involved with the Hispanic community. *Pastoral de Conjunto* is a co-responsible, collaborative approach to ministry involving coordination among pastoral agents working with a common vision and goals.

From the inception of Hispanic ministry, the principle of ecclesial integration, as compared to cultural assimilation, has been foundational. Ecclesial integration means that the Hispanic people are welcomed in our Church institutions at all levels. They are served in their language when possible, and their cultural values and religious traditions are respected. Parish and AFC programs and processes are constructed in such a way that all people have an opportunity to participate. The unity of the parish and AFC arises from its mission, not its uniformity of language, cultural background, or outward expressions of piety.

Out of this ecclesial integration comes a second principle from the *Plan for Hispanic Ministry*, which states that Hispanic ministry's goal is to build a parish or AFC that respects and celebrates its diversity as it celebrates its unity in accomplishing the mission of Jesus Christ.

The plan indicates that Hispanic ministry requires a wide range of sacramental and pastoral ministry programs and opportunities in which parishioners imitate Christ in carrying out the priestly, prophetic, and kingly aspects of his mission. This demands that sacramental participation, catechetical programs, evangelization opportunities, and service to and in the Church are available and accessible to Spanish-speaking Catholics. Suggested strategies for encouraging participation in these areas can be found in the diocesan plan.

C. Toward a New Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry

Over the last several decades, much progress has been made in the area of Hispanic ministry in the United States and in the Diocese of New Ulm. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs has developed a tool with steps that parishes and AFCs can take in conjunction with the diocese to further develop Hispanic ministry in a more comprehensive way. The tool offers a developmental sequence of three phases and nine steps that bring Hispanic Catholic from guests to hosts, from newcomers to stewards of the parish and AFC. The first three steps emphasize the need for Hispanics to strengthen their Catholic identity. The second set of steps focuses on Hispanics developing a sense of belonging to the faith community. The last three steps bring Hispanics into achieving a sense of ownership and active stewardship in the parish and AFC. An ongoing pastoral planning process makes Hispanic ministry more focused, systematic, deliberate, and collaborative.

There continues to be many challenges as the diocese moves into the future. They will require that present initiatives be expanded and new initiatives be taken in Hispanic ministry. Hispanics must continue to be encouraged and trained to take leadership roles in their community and in the Church as a whole.

Llamados a Servir (Called to Serve), the diocesan Hispanic lay formation program, has an important role to play in this development. There is ongoing planning to welcome and support Hispanic youth and young adults through *Pastoral Juvenil* (Youth and Young Adult Ministry). A comprehensive ministry that responds to their cultural context and lived experience is being developed. This is essential if we are to effectively address the area of vocations, especially those to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life. These initiatives should find their place in the next *Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry*, expected to be published in 2015.

Pastoral plans are also instrumental for sustained growth and effectiveness in Hispanic ministry at the AFC level. In order to ensure that the pastoral needs of the Hispanic population are met, it is essential that specific goals and objectives are set by the area pastoral councils and committees. These goals and objectives must reflect the ways in which we are called to imitate Christ in his threefold office of priest, prophet, and king.

CHAPTER 8. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: A VITAL PART OF THE PROPHETIC MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The first Plan for Catholic Schools was approved in 2007 by Archbishop John C. Nienstedt, who was then the apostolic administrator of the diocese. The Plan, which was implemented beginning in 2008, followed the principles of the Third Plan for Parishes as they applied to Catholic schools and their needs. These needs included planning for the future given the demographics of the school-age population, promoting collaboration and cooperation between the schools and their sponsoring parishes and area faith community, and supporting a broader vision of community. This chapter provides an update on the implementation of the Plan for Schools. While Catholic schools primarily fulfill Christ's prophetic mission in evangelizing and catechizing the young, they integrate components of his priestly and kingly offices as well.

A. Mission and Purpose of Catholic Schools

The *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) tells us,

The sacred duty and joy of each succeeding generation of Christian believers has been to hand on the deposit of faith that was first entrusted to the Apostles by Christ himself. We have received this gift, the deposit of faith – we have not conceived it. It is the heritage of the whole Church. It is our privilege and our responsibility to preserve the memory of Christ's words and the words themselves and to teach future generations of believers to carry out all that Christ commanded his Apostles. (NDC, no. 26)

The NDC and statements made by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops make it clear that Catholic schools are a vital part of the teaching mission of the Church. Once more the NDC states,

The Catholic school affords a particularly favorable setting for catechesis with its daily opportunity for proclaiming and living the gospel message; for learning and appreciating the teachings of our Church; for acquiring a deep understanding, reverence, and love for the liturgy; for building community; for prayer; for proper formation of conscience; for the development of virtue; and for participating in Christian service. In addition, Catholic schools strive to relate all of the sciences to salvation and sanctification. Students are shown how Jesus illumines all of life – science, mathematics, history, business, biology, and so forth. For these reasons, whenever possible, parents should send their children to a Catholic school. (NDC, no. 54.B.9d)

Catholic schools assist the bishop and priests of the diocese in carrying out the prophetic office of the Church by proclaiming and teaching of God's Word. The students receive daily religious instruction and additional insights into the gospel message through the study of various disciplines. Students proclaim God's word in their actions and in their interactions with each other, as well as with other groups of people. Moreover, the staff, parents, and entire parish community benefit in the ongoing formation of their faith where there is a vibrant Catholic school community.

Catholic schools assist the bishop and priests in carrying out the priestly office of the Church by celebrating the sacred mysteries of the Church as a school community within the larger parish community. A weekly Eucharistic celebration is a significant celebration in the life of the school. Other prayer services are also incorporated throughout the school year, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has returned to many of our Catholic schools.

Catholic schools assist the bishop and priests in carrying out of the kingly office of the Church by forming the consciences of their students and planting the seeds of virtue in their souls. A Christian code of conduct with high, but reasonable expectations is the hallmark of every Catholic school. Catholic schools also act as Christ's kingly people when they share his life in the larger community with various service and outreach projects.

B. Implementation of the Current Plan for Catholic Schools

The ten broad goals of the initial *Plan for Schools* were grounded in the concept of an area approach following the *Third Plan for Parishes*. Most of the goals are highlighted in the following paragraphs with a brief summary of the progress made over the past five years as well as challenges that must be met.

1. Area Catholic Schools

A pivotal goal of the current *Plan for Schools* is for all Catholic schools to become area Catholic schools (ACS). Schools are to explore ways of collaborating and recruiting within and beyond their area faith communities. School leaders have been meeting regionally (that is, within the three school regions defined in the *Plan for Schools*), providing the opportunity for collaboration and the basis for a movement towards the area concept. Successful collaborative initiatives include joint purchasing, staff development, sharing of administrative personnel, student lyceums, and field trip transportation. Areas for future consideration include curriculum writing, instructional resource purchases, handbook updating, common pay scales, and shared personnel. Schools of the diocese have always been decentralized, so collaboration has been slow. School leaders need to gradually, yet continually, strive to collaborate. The establishment and implementation of best business practices for parishes and schools will assist with improved collaboration. Area business managers would be helpful in facilitating collaboration efforts.

The ACS concept will be further explored and defined in the writing of the next plan. Each ACS will look different depending upon the number of buildings and the grade levels offered. An ACS does not necessarily mean one building or one site. It is possible that an ACS may even cross AFC boundaries. When one or more schools are located within an AFC, there needs to be movement toward a corporate system. There are several areas within the diocese that do not have Catholic schools; in the future, several of these areas may be able to support a school. Furthermore, a few existing schools may be able to support additional grade levels. Professionally lead feasibility studies would need to be completed prior to moving forward.

2. Schools Planning Committee

The *Plan* established a permanent diocesan Schools Planning Committee (SPC) that functions as a subcommittee of the Committee for Parishes. The committee provides the director of the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) direction for the implementation of the *Plan* and goal revisions. This committee is only visionary and advisory to the director of the OCS; it has no authority of its own. It is important, as we move into the future, to consider changes to the membership of the SPC, that it might include business and non-parish-employed educational professionals.

3. Area Education Committees

Another goal of the *Plan* is for Area Education Committees to replace traditional education committees. Area Education Committees are to be representative of those parishes that support the school. Workshops and materials on best practices for committees have been offered. A variety of committee structures and committee effectiveness levels are present throughout the diocese. Some committees are not yet functioning effectively.

Research needs to be done to develop a more effective and consistent advisory and consensus model for these committees. The “womb to tomb” evangelization and catechesis committee model does not serve schools or the other programs effectively. In most locations, it has been found to be advantageous to have a school advisory committee. The area school committee concept will be a natural development as schools become area schools.

4. Catholic School Endowment Funds

The *Plan* called for the creation of Catholic school endowment funds for each ACS, which would provide scholarships to students who could not otherwise afford a Catholic school education. The director of the diocesan Office of Development works with schools requesting assistance with endowment funds. At least one school has moved forward in creating a new fund. Some of the previously existing endowments are providing an investment return for school operations or scholarships. Other funds continue to build principal prior to the disbursement of any funds.

Two endowments were created by the diocese within the past six years. The Archbishop Nienstedt Endowment supports student scholarships and The Bishop LeVoor Endowment supports the operation of schools. Both funds have been building principal. Also, a continuing effort is being made to lobby the Minnesota legislature to provide tax credits for corporate and individual donors choosing to contribute to foundations created to provide student scholarships.

5. Alternative Transportation for Students

Another goal established diocesan grants to help create alternative transportation systems for students who live outside of traditional busing routes. These grants have been made available by the diocese for the past five years. Two schools have been providing funded alternative transportation for students. The total amount of grants given out is currently less than 8 percent of the cost incurred by alternative transportation. More funding towards this goal will help, as more locations reach out with added services. Another facet of transportation funding support was educating principals on financial aid available from a student’s home district to out-of-district students if there is not a Catholic school choice in their home district.

6. Diocesan Marketing Strategy

A further goal describes the need for a diocesan marketing strategy to be developed to support the recruitment efforts of the Catholic schools. The director of the OCS shares and makes available marketing information with school leaders. Many workshops are available to assist in these efforts. Collaboration on this initiative must continue. Materials and ideas can and should be shared and disseminated freely, as the schools are not typically in competition with one another. A Web site for freely sharing resources has just been created and promoted.

7. True Cost – True Need Tuition Model

Another goal encourages all area Catholic schools to develop tuition guidelines that reflect the true cost of educating a student, while at the same time recognizing and supporting an individual family's ability to pay. A diocesan policy existed prior to the *Plan* with guidelines that recommended providing parents with information on the actual cost per student in relation to tuition (see Education – Catholic Schools 542.1). Principals were instructed by the director of the OCS to make this information available.

With schools having local control for setting tuition guidelines, there has been little-to-no success in moving to a true cost – true need tuition model. More education needs to be done with all school stakeholders to fully understand this tuition model, and then time needs to be given to progress towards this model. Tuition policies need to move towards giving scholarship funding and away from general parish subsidies. It does not preclude a parish from giving every student significant scholarship funding. The goal needs to be rewritten to clarify the intention and to provide for greater direction. If the state legislature was to pass voucher legislation, it would be important for the tuition to be set nearer the true cost of education.

8. Shared Financial Responsibility

The final goal of the *Plan* calls for guidelines to be written to assist Area Education Committees, Area Pastoral Councils, and parish Administrative Councils in establishing a policy that appropriately shares the burden of financing a school by all the parishes served by it. Efforts have been made at various local levels to do this, but they have had little success. Suggested changes have been discussed in regards to current diocesan policy (Education – Catholic Schools 513.1) regarding sharing the financial costs.

In 2011, Bishop John M. LeVoir initiated an annual diocesan second collection during Catholic Schools Week in an effort to give all the faithful of the diocese an opportunity to assist with the financing of Catholic schools within the diocese. Parishes without a school must continue to do more to support Catholic schools.

C. Benefit of Stronger Area Faith Communities for Catholic Schools

Area faith communities will be more effective with a one-pastor-per-AFC model, as discussed in Section I of this *Plan for Parishes*. AFCs with schools will be more effective once they have implemented the area school model, as discussed in the *Plan for Schools*, because this model will provide for greater viability of their schools. The hope for the future is to have a viable Catholic school choice in as many areas of the diocese as possible. The *Third Plan for Parishes* promoted the AFC as the pre-eminent collaborative organization by which the full complement of pastoral ministries was to be made available to the faithful. It follows, therefore, that a continued emphasis on the AFC will be advantageous for the continuation and enhancement of viable Catholic schools.

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops notes in its 2005 document *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, all parishes need to be responsible for supporting Catholic schools, including those without schools. Elevating the parish school to the status of an area Catholic school will strengthen the call for support to the entire Catholic community. Concerns are often heard about alumni support when consolidations or school name changes are being considered; however, experience in other areas of the country has shown that people do adapt and are still supportive of the Catholic school in place.

D. Updating the Current Plan for Schools

The director of the OCS seeks guidance and direction for proposed updates to the *Plan for Schools* document from the SPC and other sources. A general review and updating of the *Plan for Schools* has begun and will be completed following the promulgation of this *Plan for Parishes*, so as to incorporate its relevant principles. A new, revised *Plan for Schools* is anticipated in 2014.

The current *Plan for Schools* calls for setting annual goals that reflect innovations taking place at the national level and newly identified local initiatives. National changes impacting the annual goals have included the creation of national Catholic school standards (including standards regarding operational vitality) and a national depository for best marketing practices. A current national initiative is the development and dissemination of resources and guidelines to assist Catholic elementary and secondary schools in integrating elements of Catholic identity into curriculum and instruction.

Locally, schools are becoming aware of new immigrant populations in their communities and need guidance in reaching out to welcome them into the Catholic schools. Prayer and advocacy for Catholic schools is needed; a diocesan group for Catholic school advocacy is being initiated by the director of the OCS in the upcoming year. As these new initiatives are identified, they become incorporated into the specific annual goals called for by the current *Plan for Schools*. Many of these initiatives will also be considered for inclusion in the updated *Plan for Schools*.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION: LIVING HEROIC LIVES IN IMITATION OF CHRIST

Though the hardships that we face in this life are formidable, our reward in heaven will be great. By his cross, our Lord and Savior has made this supreme happiness possible for us. Now we must cooperate with his grace to become the people he has called us to be. Through our Baptism, we are all called to the heights of holiness – heights we may achieve if we strive earnestly to conform our lives to his. In this way, we will be his priests, prophets, and kings, heroically fulfilling his mission in the Church and in the world. Just as Christ offered himself completely on the cross to save us, so we must die to ourselves to allow his salvation to work in us. If we live in him, so also will we be glorified in him.

A. The Pearl of Great Price

Being a follower of Christ is not easy. We should not expect it to be. In this life, those things with the greatest value require the greatest effort. Christ himself teaches that “the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it” (Mt 13:45-46). The Kingdom of Heaven should not be just one of our many goals in this life; it should be our chief goal – worthy of all our efforts. St. Paul expresses this same idea by comparing our lives to the discipline of an athlete: “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one” (1 Cor 9:24-25).

While our toils on this earth may be difficult, the reward held in store for us will be great. In fact, it will surpass our wildest dreams. The *Catechism* says that “heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (no. 1024). Scripture tells us that we cannot even begin to understand how happy we will be when we get there: “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9, as quoted in CCC, no. 1027). We do know that we will see God as he is, in all his glory, and that we will be with Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels, and the blessed communion of the saints (see CCC, nos. 1024-1028).

In God’s plan, Christ made it possible for us to be with him in heaven. Through his suffering, Death, and Resurrection, he purchased eternal life for us when we had turned away from him. This gives great hope to us who have faith in him, even amidst all the difficulties of life.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:3-7)

All our trials add up to a hard battle. We must fight against the temptations of the devil, the negative influences of the sins of others, and our own inclination to evil resulting from original sin (see CCC, nos. 407-409). In a word, we must wage war against sin. This is the drama of each human life and the drama of the whole of human history.

A monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world and will continue until the last day, as the Lord has attested. Caught in this conflict, man is obliged to wrestle constantly if he is to cling to what is good, nor can he achieve his own integrity without great efforts and the help of God's grace. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 37 §2)

B. A Call to Heroism, a Call to Life

Many people think that victory over sin in their lives is impossible. They believe that Christ's appeal in the Sermon on the Mount – "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" – can only be achieved by special people, perhaps just by priests and consecrated persons. Yet nothing can be further from the truth. Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II says:

This ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few "uncommon heroes" of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life. The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 31 §3)

Life in Christ is a life of heroism; anyone can be a hero. To commit oneself to a life of Christian heroism is nothing other than to embark on the path to sainthood. In our diocese, we need heroes to help bring our worship of God in the celebration of the Eucharist into full conformity with the directives of the Council. We need heroes committed to learning the truth about Christ and his Church, and to proclaim it in its fullness through the witness of their lives and the words of their mouth. We need heroes to defend the dignity of the human person, to testify to the image of God in all people, especially the poor and vulnerable. We need heroes firmly committed to their marriages, husbands and wives who are willing to offer themselves totally to their spouses and make sacrifices for the true good of their children. Finally, we need heroes who, in response to God's call, are willing to make the great sacrifice of their entire lives, so that they can serve the Church as priests and consecrated religious.

Are these challenges too difficult to be met? Are these lives too sacrificial? Let us always remember that in the struggles we endure and in the hardships we face, we are simply imitating Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is how we work out our salvation.

All the members ought to be molded in the likeness of him, until Christ be formed in them. For this reason we, who have been made to conform with him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we will reign together with him. On earth, still as pilgrims in a strange land, tracing in trial and in oppression the paths he trod, we are made one with his sufferings like the Body is one with the Head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified (Rom 8:17). (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 7 §5)

He has already fought these battles and won. He stands ready to help us. Our sacrifices and sufferings will be profitable if we unite them to his. Since Christ has already risen from the dead and has been glorified in his Resurrection, the victory in some sense is already ours. Yet we must die to ourselves – let go of our sins, our attachments, our own ways of looking at the world – and put on Christ. If we live in him, we will also be glorified in him. As Scripture says,

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.
(Col 3:1-4)