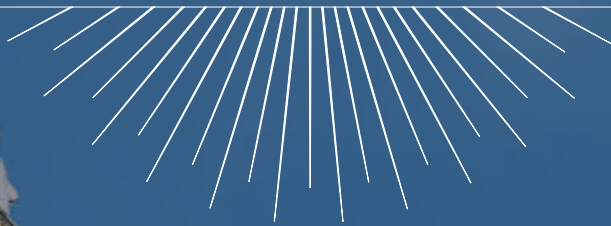


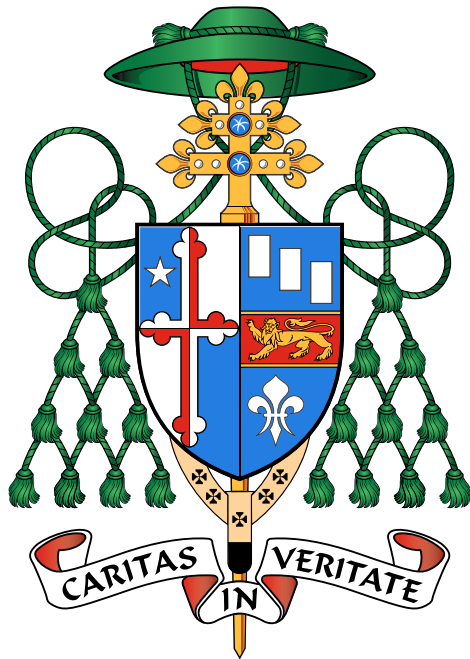
# A LIGHT BRIGHTLY VISIBLE 2.0

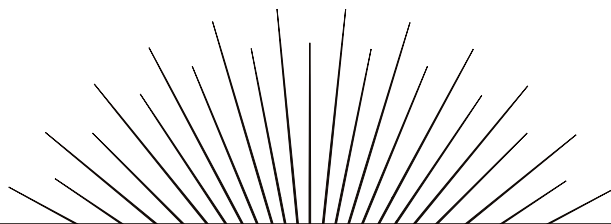
• *A Pastoral Letter* •

*Most Reverend William E. Lori, S.T.D., Archbishop of Baltimore*



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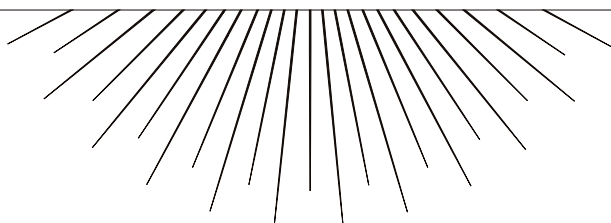




# A LIGHT BRIGHTLY VISIBLE 2.0

• *A Pastoral Letter* •

*Most Reverend William E. Lori, S.T.D., Archbishop of Baltimore*



JANUARY 2021



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# PREFACE

Last year was unlike any other in recent memory. The year 2020 was disorienting and discouraging. But as Christians, the urgency and joy of our mission remains unchanged. For this reason, I felt the need to “update” my first pastoral letter, *A Light Brightly Visible*. In this present letter, I hope to share with you the encouragement that is ours in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. At the same time, I hope to recast a shared vision of creating parish communities as neighborhood centers of evangelization, where Christ is proclaimed, taught, and celebrated, and where missionary disciples are formed and sent forth.

I situate these reflections on how Christ’s light burns brightly in each of us and in our families, and how we can nurture and share this light within our particular state of life and vocation. From there, I reflect on how the light of Christ shines in and through the life of our parishes and the Archdiocese as such, as I revisit six fundamental pastoral priorities for the renewal of parish life. Next, I explain the lessons that we have learned through the ongoing pastoral planning process. Then I focus on what new needs have emerged. I conclude with some ongoing challenges for the Church in the world and our need to refocus our gaze on the Eucharist, with the introduction of a Year of the Eucharist in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. It is my hope that these reflections will serve as a guide as we continue our most important work of making missionary disciples and renewing the spirit of the Gospel in this local Church.

Before proceeding, however, I want to offer a word of thanks to my Archdiocesan co-workers, a team that extends my ministry and supports pastorates in this important work.

Ms. Daphne Daly and her office have worked with a loving perseverance to advance the ongoing pastoral planning process. Similarly, I am grateful for Dr. Ximena DeBroeck, interim Director of Evangelization, and her department, which is launching workshops on Pope Francis’ newly issued *Directory for Catechesis* to deepen and renew our formation efforts across the Archdiocese. Mr. Bill Baird, formerly the Archdiocesan chief financial officer, and more recently

part of a project undertaken by Dynamic Catholic known as “Dynamic Parish,” has completed an extensive consultative process that will result in the formation of a more nimble evangelization team. Following Mr. Baird’s recommendations, I am creating an Institute for Evangelization and have asked Mr. Edward Herrera, who previously served as the Director for the Office of Marriage and Family Life, to serve as the Institute’s inaugural Executive Director. I will offer more reflections around this Institute later in this letter.

If we are to evangelize with integrity, then all of us as a community of faith must dedicate ourselves to the elimination of racism. With that imperative in mind, I assembled a Racial Justice Working Group, led by the highly capable Ms. Sherita Thomas, the interim Director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministry. With my approval, two consultants—two Catholic gentlemen whom I have known for years and whose faith and integrity are of the highest order—began to assist the Racial Justice Working Group

I also want to thank Bishop Bruce Lewandowski, C.Ss.R., our recently ordained Auxiliary Bishop and my Vicar for Hispanic Catholics, along with Ms. Lia Salinas, Director of the Office for Hispanic Catholics. Their commitment to the Hispanic community has been nothing short of inspiring, especially during a pandemic that has disproportionately affected the Hispanic community.

I am grateful to the tireless work of Mr. James Sellinger, the Chancellor of Catholic Education, and Superintendent Dr. Donna Hargens to strengthen our Catholic schools. Dr. Hargens often speaks about the mission of Catholic schools to provide “a Christ-centered education,” and I could not agree more.

Mission support often goes unnoticed but is *integral* to thriving pastorates. Here, I want to applaud the important work of the regional controllers, whom our Chief Financial Officer, Mr. John Matera, has put in place, as well as the diligent work of Ms. Ashley Conley, Director of Parish and School Finance. Working personally with a cohort of pastors, business managers, and parish finance councils, these regional controllers have helped parishes grapple with budgeting and staffing questions as well as other efforts to control costs without cutting back parish services. Added to that is the work of the Department of Development and a team of regional development directors, led by Mr. Patrick Madden, assisting parishes in sustaining and increasing offertory support, year over year. In 2021, more than 100 parishes will take part in an offertory enhancement program.



With the assistance of Partners for Sacred Places, Mr. Nolan McCoy and the Facilities Office have been working with Bishop Denis Madden in the Urban Vicariate to study some of our parish facilities, not only in a data-driven way, but also in a manner that is sensitive to the history and needs of parishioners. In these and other ways, Central Services and parishes work together toward the goal of sustainability for each of our pastorates.

Let me also offer a word of warmest thanks to Bishop Adam Parker, who works tirelessly and effectively to coordinate the work of staff at the Catholic Center and in his pastoral outreach to many parishes. So too, I am grateful to Bishop Madden for his ongoing and dedicated service as Urban Vicar; Msgr. Jay O'Connor, who brings abundant wisdom and experience to his generous service as Eastern Vicar; and to Deacon Christopher Yeung, who so thoughtfully and faithfully serves as my Delegate to the Western Vicariate.

All of this said, I am most grateful to each of you—clergy, lay-ecclesial ministers, business managers, and all the lay faithful—for your fidelity to Christ's call to go and make disciples.

# I. RENEWING THE MISSION

*“Christ is the light of nations ... this Sacred Synod ... eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.”*

(II VATICAN COUNCIL, LUMEN GENTIUM, No. 1)



Five years ago, after extensive listening sessions, I issued a pastoral letter titled *A Light Brightly Visible* (hereafter, LBV). My intent was to provide inspiration and guidance for our ongoing pastoral planning process. At first glance, it may have seemed as if parish planning was little more than an administrative process leading to the closures and consolidations of parishes, largely for financial reasons. I do not discount our need to face such difficult realities in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, but neither do I want to follow a mere administrative process, one that is likely to leave lasting pastoral scars. Rather, as I took counsel with the clergy and laity, I learned of your desire for a process that is rooted in the missionary impetus of the Second Vatican Council, a renewed call to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to do so with new vigor, new methods, and with renewed holiness. This is what successive popes have called “the new evangelization.”

## II. THE LIGHT OF CHRIST SHINING BRIGHTLY WITHIN EACH OF US

*“Live as children born of the light.  
Light produces every kind of goodness  
and justice and truth.”*

(EPH 5:8-9)



The fundamentals of LBV are disarmingly simple. It avoids the complex and sometimes numbing language of an overly corporate type of strategic planning. It does not seek to proceed by way of “shiny objects,” such as mere external changes that engender enthusiasm for a while but then disappoint and fade away. Rather, LBV is built on the bedrock of our faith in Jesus Christ. At the heart of our faith is not a mere idea, however noble or inspired, but rather an encounter with Jesus Christ, our Savior. And by the word “encounter,” I do not mean merely a chance meeting or a casual relationship, but something more akin to a meeting of minds and hearts. An encounter with Christ is that moment when, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we truly open our hearts to our Savior, understand the depth and beauty of his love for us, and find ourselves forever changed and transformed by Him. Once we have done so, we view the Scriptures and the Church’s teaching, the liturgy, our life of prayer, and our moral life in a new way. Far from being burdensome, these things become beautiful and precious, and move from the periphery of our lives to the center. For when we have fallen in love with Christ, our lives acquire a new horizon of hope that enables us, even now, to live differently, and to strive eagerly for holiness, that is, an ever-deeper participation in God’s Triune glory and self-giving love.

Let me dwell on this point a little more. A few years ago, Catholic Charities of Baltimore titled its annual report “The Power of One,” meaning the capacity of each person to do a world of good. This pastoral planning process hinges on the power of one—the power of God to work in and through each one of us. Indeed, we may find the term “missionary discipleship” baffling and off-putting until we realize what the Lord, the Bridegroom of our souls, truly offers us. He does not merely love us generically but loves each of us personally, with a merciful, pervasive, and persistent love that seeks to make each one of us a unique reflection of his divine love. This, indeed, is what Jesus Christ is seeking to do, right in the midst of the chaos of our lives. The Lord is seeking to create in each of us, at the core of our existence, “a light brightly visible,” a light that shines distinctively, from the inside out. Jesus wants nothing more than for us to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Mt 5:13-16). Put another way, Jesus wants to create in each of us a pure heart (cf. Ps 51), so that our sinful guile would not impede his light from shining brightly from the depth of our hearts.

Here, a word about moral transformation might be helpful. For many people, the Church’s moral teaching represents a roadblock, not a path to faith.

Sometimes, we think the bar is set too high, that living according to the Church's teachings in all their dimensions is all but impossible. This is especially true when the Church's moral teaching comes across solely as a duty for us to carry out "with a stiff upper lip" or else it is neglected or modified to suit the tenor of the times. Then again, moral scandal, especially on the part of the Church's leaders, discourages many from embracing and living the faith, including its moral teachings.

Yet, a godly way of life is not really our doing. Rather, it is Christ at work in us through the Holy Spirit, strengthening us in our weakness, offering us forgiveness, patiently helping us to overcome every vice and to embrace, in love, every virtue. For most of us (myself included), this is arduous work, but it becomes a labor of love once we realize that a morally upright life is, at base, a response of love to the God who loved us first. Christian morality is all about our becoming unrepeatable reflections of divine love. Just to be clear, love is primary. Loveless virtue gives virtue itself a bad name. But when our virtue is infused with love, then it becomes attractive, even luminous.

As the light and love of Jesus overtakes our souls, then, we can hardly help but be missionary disciples, followers of Jesus whose lives have become a loving invitation to others to encounter Christ. As St. John Henry Newman put it, "Make me preach you without preaching, not by words but by my example, and by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you."<sup>1</sup>

The point I wish to highlight is this. The Lord calls every member of the Archdiocese to holiness and missionary discipleship. Every member of the Archdiocese has a role to play in revitalizing the Church's life and mission. This ongoing work, outlined in the Archdiocesan pastoral planning process, does not belong to "the experts" alone, nor to clergy alone, and still less is it a matter of clinging to buildings that have outlived their purpose. Rather, the Lord calls each of us to be his followers and to attract others to himself, and to his Gospel, and to the Church by a life of radiant love. Thus, the first place where the light of Christ must brightly shine is in our hearts.

<sup>1</sup>John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*, "Jesus the Light of Soul," London: Longmans, Gree, and Co. (1953), p. 279.



# III. THE LIGHT OF CHRIST SHINING BRIGHTLY IN FAMILIES

*“Every home is a lampstand.”*

(POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA, NO. 8).



A second place where the light of Christ must shine brightly is in our families. The family occupies a central place in God's loving plan for humanity. Indeed, the Lord invites married couples to love one another in a manner that resembles the divine love of the Persons of the Trinity. The mutual and fruitful love of husband and wife for one another, their gift of self, one to the other, is the way in which God intended for children to come into the world, to be cared for and nurtured, and to grow toward maturity and holiness. Not coincidentally, Scripture opens with the story of the first couple, Adam and Eve, and closes with the great wedding feast of heaven. Not coincidentally, Jesus was born into a loving family where He prepared to fulfill the mission for which his heavenly Father had sent him.

In God's loving plan, families are where the faith is to be taught, modeled, and transmitted. Just as parents are to see to the physical and emotional well-being of their children, so too they are to be especially diligent in looking after their spiritual well-being. It is in the home that the stage is set for young people to encounter the Lord, to develop a relationship of love and friendship with him, hear the call to holiness, and discover their true vocation in the life of the Church. In the family, the young develop the virtues of faith, hope, and love—virtues that put our lives in a living relationship with God. The home is where young people acquire the pivotal moral virtues that lead to true happiness and distinguish them as disciples of the Lord.

It is, of course, all too easy to wax idyllic about family life when one does not experience its daily strains and stresses. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that Scripture presents beautiful portraits of family life. Our Holy Father also reminds us that the Bible does not shrink from portraying the suffering and desolation that families undergo when torn apart by war, exile, and injustice.

I do not need to tell you that today families are under great stress and experience a good deal of brokenness. Far too many families in the Archdiocese of Baltimore face the economic strain of unemployment or minimal employment. The fast pace of life tears at the fabric of the family, leaving very little time for family members to form deep and lasting relationships of love. Sadly, our culture encourages sinful and self-centered behaviors that are the polar opposite of self-giving love. Fidelity, commitment, and perseverance seem in short supply in a



rapidly changing world where temporary, transactional relationships are in vogue. Add to that the stresses that the coronavirus has placed on families that now find themselves trying to stay well, work at home, educate their children at home, and cope with being together in close quarters every waking hour.

In addition, due to personal choices, circumstances, and a variety of other societal factors, the structure of family life varies. For example, there are blended families and single-parent families. Such families can be places of faith, love, stability, and security. Many single parents are heroic in raising their children in the faith. Yet, as Pope Francis reminds us, we must never relax our efforts to promote sacramental marriages as taught by Christ and understood by the Church. Rightly does he urge us to find appropriate language and to employ effective approaches in helping young people open themselves to sacramental marriage and stable family life—not as an abstract ideal but concretely, as vocation that is both attainable and life-giving.<sup>2</sup>

For all its challenges, however, the family is the only way forward for the human race and for the Church’s mission. When the light of Christ is brightly burning in our families, they become a source of light and love for the Church and the wider society. When the light of Christ glows in the heart of our families, they become domestic churches where Christ is at the center. Years ago, Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., famously said, “The family that prays together stays together.” His words are still true. Families that take time to pray together, that grow together in faith, and live the Gospel joyfully and generously—such families by no means avoid hardship and suffering—but often in those moments their faith and love glows even more brightly.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Cf. Nos. 35-37 and No. 45. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, one such practical response to Pope Francis’ call has been to pilot a mentor model for marriage preparation called “Witness to Love,” which has been expanded to a civil marriage initiative that encourages and forms civilly married couples to enter into a sacramental union. [www.archbalt.org/marriageprep](http://www.archbalt.org/marriageprep)

# IV. THE LIGHT OF CHRIST SHINING BRIGHTLY IN PARISHES AND PARISH LEADERSHIP

*“You are the light of the world.”*  
(MT 5:14)



A third and primary place where the light of Christ must shine brightly is our parishes. Pope Francis refers to the parish as “a family of families,” thus instructing us that the stronger and more vibrant our Catholic families are, the stronger and more vibrant our parishes will be. To be sure, parishes are “families” in an analogous sense; it means that parishioners should experience in our parish communities the characteristics of a loving family. Loving pastoral leadership can and should foster a sense of belonging and participation among parishioners, allowing the bonds of faith and charity to blossom in a wide range of ministries and outreach to those who are in need. Such a familial atmosphere helps to create unity rooted in the encounter with Jesus Christ, in reverent worship, and faith sharing. It helps to break down the fears and anxieties of those who wish to return to the practice of the faith, creates a favorable climate for dialogue and understanding, and encourages a missionary spirit. By contrast, when a parish has an “institutional” feel, it can be cold and off-putting, prompting parishioners to look elsewhere for spiritual nourishment or, sadly, to head for the exit, perhaps never to return.

### *Ordained Leadership*

Leadership is crucial in forming warm and vibrant parish communities. I am deeply grateful to my fellow bishops, priests, and deacons who have committed themselves to the mission of evangelization in this Archdiocese. I am also aware, however, that the mission entrusted to us sometimes seems overwhelming, beyond our reach, especially in challenging times such as these. It is all too easy to grow discouraged by administrative burdens, by economic headwinds, as well as by the trenchant criticisms and the seeming indifference of many people to the Gospel message that we so urgently wish to convey. At other times, we feel as if we are alone, unsupported, either by our fellow clergy or our people. Yet, as those ordained to proclaim the Gospel, the light of Christ must shine brightly in us, and through us, onto the parish families the Church has called us to serve.

How can we ensure that the darkness of weakness and discouragement will not overcome the light of Christ planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation and renewed in us through the Sacrament of Holy Orders? The Gospel answer to that question is that we must prefer to everything else “the one thing necessary” (Lk 10:38-42), namely, daily sustained prayer in which we listen to the voice of the Lord. As you recall, when Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary, Martha busied herself about the details of hospitality,

while Mary sat with Jesus and listened to “the words of spirit and life” he spoke (Jn 6:63). Often, those of us in ordained ministry can be more like Martha than Mary. We can busy ourselves with the details of parish ministry until we grow tired and discouraged and find ourselves “out of steam.” The only way to keep ourselves young and vibrant in ministry is daily prayer in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. If we want to preach convincingly, exhibit pastoral love, and experience support and friendship, then we must spend an hour a day adoring the Eucharistic Lord, allowing his heart to speak to ours, making reparation for our sins, and allowing Jesus to deepen his divine friendship with us. When we spend this quiet time—away from every other distraction—we experience more profoundly Christ’s priestly love for us. The more we pray, the more the Scriptures and our Catholic Tradition come alive for us, and the more we become witnesses, not just teachers of the faith. Only if our Eucharistic faith is alive and well can we convince non-practicing Catholics to return to Holy Mass on Sunday.

Integral to the daily prayer of the ordained is the Liturgy of the Hours. We pledged to pray the Divine Office at ordination, yet sometimes this daily prayer of the Church all too readily goes by the board. Yet, what a consolation it is when we pray the Psalms attentively, allowing them to reflect Christ’s truth and love, experiencing them as a sounding board for our many moods and concerns. What a consolation it is to read and study the Scriptures continuously and to benefit from the wisdom of the great spiritual writers of the Church. Few resources enrich our ministry more than the Liturgy of the Hours.

Just as “Scripture is the soul of theology,”<sup>3</sup> so too Scripture is the soul of preaching, evangelization, and catechesis. If we would “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5), then we must immerse ourselves in Sacred Scripture by carefully studying the texts on which we preach, by engaging in *lectio divina*, and by learning how to hear the voice of Christ throughout Scripture. Let us never underestimate the power of the inspired Word of God itself to move and open minds and hearts to the glad tidings of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

So too, as pilgrims on the road to salvation, we sometimes slip and fall. Sound spiritual direction and the fruitful reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are crucial. In these moments of grace, the Holy Spirit works overtime, so to speak, to “create in us a clean heart” (Ps 51), a heart that more

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, No. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nos. 145 ff. where he discusses preaching and preparations for preaching.

perfectly reflects the light and love of Christ that should shine in and through us as we preach the Word, celebrate the Sacraments, and guide our parish communities in love. For many of our people, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the gateway for their return to the practice of the faith. Our own dependence upon this Sacrament of Mercy will enable us to speak personally of its benefits in our spiritual lives, and prompt us to be as generous and as merciful as possible in administering it.

Similarly, prayer groups play an important role in supporting us in ministry. I think of the many Jesu Caritas groups in the Archdiocese and of other less formal gatherings of prayer. The Holy Father's encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, underlined the solidarity, the fraternity that is ours in Christ Jesus, as human beings, as disciples, and indeed as deacons, priests, and bishops. We need to help one another grow in holiness and in the courage and strength needed for our mission.

Indispensable in our lives is devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She accompanies us whenever we pray, for she seeks to bring forth Christ in us. She “who heard the word of God and kept it” (Lk 11:28), prays that we too will hear and abide by the Word we are to preach. Just as from the Cross Jesus entrusted his Mother Mary to John the Beloved, so too Jesus entrusts Mary to us as our spiritual Mother. May she, who witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, pray for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit upon us and our co-workers.

As our prayer life grows apace, some things previously shrouded become clear. One of them is our tendency—yours and mine—to overthink and overcomplicate evangelization. Perhaps we spill too much ink in describing what it is and how it should be done. As a result, evangelization may loom so large that we mistakenly conclude that it is out of reach, or is best left to younger clergy, or put solely in the hands of lay staff. However, as we grow in friendship with Jesus and as we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit, we may discern a call to use our time and energy differently, devoting less time to internal meetings and the details of administration while devoting more time to person-to-person contact with parishioners.<sup>5</sup> This includes those who practice regularly and those who come only periodically as well as those who seem to have left forever.

<sup>5</sup>As simple as these principles are, all of us, myself included, experience a need for ongoing formation so that we might be equipped for the ministry of evangelization. Many resources are available, but I would like to point out a newly developed resource that I believe will be especially helpful. In recent days, Notre Dame University has released its long-awaited “Bishop John D’Arcy Program in Priestly Renewal,” a high quality, online resource for the spiritual and professional development and renewal of parish priests and their co-workers. This program is free and is designed for individual use or in small groups. In the near future, I will offer more information on this important resource.

For example, during this pandemic, some parishes set up phone trees with the goal of contacting each parishioner personally. In most instances, it was a joint project of parish priest, staff, and lay volunteers. The content of those conversations was simple: “How are you? What can we do to help? Anything you’d like to share?” When I was growing up, the pastor or associate pastor visited the homes of parishioners every year. Those visits lasted perhaps half an hour, but they made a deep impression on me. More than once, the parish priests asked me if I wanted to become a priest. Mom and Dad felt supported in their responsibility to care for my older brother with special needs. They used to talk about how blessed they were to have priests who knew them personally and cared for them.

Somewhere along the way, the practice of visiting the homes of parishioners seems to have largely fallen out of favor, perhaps because it is hard to find people at home or because there are fewer clergy than previously was the case. Yet, would it not be a wonderful thing if, every year, every parishioner—active or inactive—received a personal call or perhaps an invitation to a Zoom meeting? Indeed, the more we stay in touch with parishioners and communicate with them personally, the more likely it is that they remain or become active in the life and mission of the parish. True enough, in making personal contacts, some may give us an earful or otherwise rebuff our efforts. That is why we need a healthy life of prayer and that is why we need to support one another.

## Four Scriptural Qualities of An Evangelist

### **Boldness (*parresia*)**

is a confidence born of the Holy Spirit in the message we are to proclaim, a confidence that makes us fearless in our proclamation, whether it is in season or out, convenient or inconvenient (cf. 2 Tim 4:2; Acts 4:29; 9:28; 13:46; 14:3).

### **Urgency**

is a deep spiritual awareness that we are responding to the Lord’s mandate to preach the Gospel, a Gospel that is urgently needed by people today. As St. Paul said, “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2 Cor 5:14).

### **Communion with the Church**

is a deep and abiding awareness that we do not minister as independent agents but rather as those charged with building up the Body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

### **Joy**

is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that flows from our faith and confidence in the Risen Lord and the message he has entrusted to us. Recall how the first followers of Christ rejoiced to suffer for the Name (Acts 5:41). Recall also St. Paul’s encouragement, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice” (Phil 4:4).



One of the chief responsibilities of a pastor is to form a cohesive, mission-driven team of co-workers. I am very grateful to you, the dedicated women and men, members of the laity and those in consecrated life, who serve on parish staffs as evangelizers, catechists, educators, ministers of charity and justice, and so much more. Whether your parish team is large or small, paid or volunteer, you play a critical role in the fulfillment of the parish mission. This reality was especially evident over the last ten months, when so many of you developed virtual ministry opportunities and quickly learned new skills to livestream Masses for parishioners under stay-at-home orders.

As you know, one hallmark of parish renewal is a healthy and functioning leadership team. Under the direction of the pastor, these teams collaborate in the never-ending work of helping to create vibrant parish communities of faith, worship, and service. In such teams, collaboration must be the byword. There is no room for “silos” or exclusive competencies. Instead of a “team of rivals,”<sup>6</sup> we need to be “a team of missionary disciples,” animated by a shared love of Christ Jesus, a love which in turn we share with each individual parishioner. That same love expresses itself in a shared and passionate desire to create parish communities that are both evangelized and evangelizing. In this way, the ongoing pastoral planning process bears the good and lasting fruit of the Gospel (cf. Jn 15:16). I know many parishes have already embraced this collaborative model of parish ministry and are working toward forming and strengthening these teams.

The glue that holds these teams together and gives strength for mission is also prayer, both on the part of individuals and on the part of the team itself. What I have said about priestly prayer and spirituality applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to you, dear friends, the religious and laypersons who are an essential part of parish leadership. Through daily and sustained prayer and the sacraments, the light of the Gospel shines in and through you, my co-workers in the vineyard, as you bear united witness to the truth and love of Jesus in our midst. I earnestly urge you, as I must daily urge myself, to set aside critical time for prayer, Scripture reading, Eucharistic adoration, and Marian devotions. Your prayerfulness has a tremendous impact on how you fulfill your ministry and influences the many

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, (2005) New York: Simon & Schuster. This interesting book describes Lincoln’s leadership style. In short, Lincoln brought into his cabinet those who were formerly his political rivals.

people you so generously serve. And, to paraphrase Father Peyton, “A parish team that prays together, stays together!”

Readily available tools exist to help both the Archdiocese and its parishes to be formed for the ministry of evangelization. Among them is the new *Directory for Catechesis*, prepared by the Pontifical Council for Evangelization. It seeks to close the gap between evangelization and catechesis (cf. *infra*, footnote 7) and helps parish leaders to grasp more profoundly the vision of evangelization in Pope Francis’ seminal encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*, upon which LBV was based. Indeed, this new *Directory* takes up many of the themes found in LBV, including evangelization as the basis for all ministry, the need to move beyond “business as usual,” the art of accompaniment, missionary conversion, and the crucial role of the RCIA process.

## The Three C’s of Pastoral Planning



### **Communication**

The need to communicate continuously and effectively with the people we serve is crucial. Communication is, of course, a two-way street. Lack of communication breeds misunderstanding and ill will.



### **Consultation**

We need to consult the people we serve, ask their opinions, survey them, and “take their temperature”—even if it is not possible to meet every expectation.



### **Collaboration**

The more we work together in harmony and with a shared sense of purpose, the more effectively the Lord’s mission will be fulfilled.



As I mentioned earlier, too often, the task of evangelization is left to the so-called experts, but the authentic renewal of our parishes demands the engagement of every layperson. In 2012, building on the theology of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI made an extraordinary statement: “Co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. They should not be regarded as “collaborators” of the clergy, but, rather, as people who are really “co-responsible” for the Church’s being and acting.”<sup>7</sup> Much can be made of this point, both practically and theologically,<sup>8</sup> but the central point is that the laity, precisely as the laity, play a unique and irreplaceable role in the life and mission of the Church. Far from passive recipients of the sacraments, the laity are baptized and sent into the world as priests, prophets, and kings.<sup>9</sup> Thus, every member of the Church is to welcome the light of Christ and to radiate that light in every circumstance.<sup>10</sup>

What is more, an honest assessment of the Church today will find that some of the most effective evangelization efforts are lay-led and operate beyond officially sponsored church ministries. Such ministries, however, do not operate in a vacuum, but rather seek to engage parish communities to help them become more vibrant by cherishing and making use of the specific gifts of each layperson.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not any given parish participates in such efforts, every parish should create an environment of support that invites parishioners to discern their gifts and to put them generously at the service of the Church. So too, we should be tireless in encouraging person-to-person, evangelization efforts.<sup>12</sup> In these ways, we become co-responsible for the Church’s mission of evangelization.

<sup>7</sup> Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120810\\_fiac.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120810_fiac.html)

<sup>8</sup> The McGrath Institute at the University of Notre Dame offered an excellent series of lectures pondering this phrase and the meaning for the “Co-Responsibility” for the Church today. It is well worth reviewing: <https://mcgrath.nd.edu/conferences/academic-pastoral/called-co-responsible-summer-seminars-for-church-life-renewal>

<sup>9</sup> This triad—prophet, priest, and king—describes the common priesthood of the faithful bestowed through Baptism. As priests, we, the members of the Church are to offer our lives to God as a sacrifice of praise, to foster holiness, and build bridges of faith, hope, and love. As prophets, we are to listen attentively to the Word of God and then to bear witness to it in our daily lives. As kings, we are, through God’s grace to attain a royal self-mastery that frees us for a life of service to others.

<sup>10</sup> Recall that Pope Francis teaches: “The whole community proclaims the Gospel.” Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nos. 111 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Though not exclusively for the laity, the Catherine of Siena Institute has done a good deal of work on facilitating discernment of gifts through its “Called & Gifted” Discernment Process. [www.siena.org/called-gifted](http://www.siena.org/called-gifted)

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nos. 127, ff.

A concrete example of such co-responsibility is the recently re-established Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, with representatives from around the Archdiocese, and upon whom I rely for continued guidance. Further, as I travel around the Archdiocese, it is clear to me that the Holy Spirit is generous in distributing spiritual gifts among our parishioners. At the same time, we need to have the boldness to beg the Spirit for a continued outpouring of gifts and for the wisdom to employ them well and wisely. Much work remains to be done but let us be clear: it is only in the communion with Christ and one another (*koinonia*) that the work of evangelizing is accomplished.

### *Further Dimensions of Parish Ministry*

As we enter more deeply into this pastoral planning process, newly emerging imperatives in our mission have come more clearly into focus. Among these are: 1) the importance of sound evangelization and catechesis; 2) the need to combat racism; 3) the growth of the Latino community in our midst; 4) the need to evangelize younger Catholics and disaffected Catholics; 5) the practice of a charity that bears witness to Christ.

First, I want to highlight the importance of sound evangelization and catechesis. In light of the new *Directory for Catechesis* and other documents from the magisterium of Pope Francis, it is time we take a good look at our parish programs of faith formation, including preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation, and other forms of evangelization and catechesis. Despite our best efforts, in many instances, we have catechized but not effectively evangelized the faithful. Evangelization and catechesis are both essential and interconnected but distinct.<sup>13</sup> We should not hesitate to ask which approaches are effective and which are not. Instead of watering down our message and our teaching, let us consider how we can present a more ample picture of the truth and beauty of the Church's faith, worship, and service to our young people, to their parents, and to young adults. We need to ask how many of those who receive First Penance and First Holy Communion and Confirmation actually continue to practice their faith. Relying on God's grace poured out upon us in prayer, we need to tap into the best practices and resources available to help us minister as effectively as possible to the families and young people entrusted to our care.

<sup>13</sup> Evangelization is the proclamation of the *kerygma*, the initial proclamation of Christ—his life, teaching, death, and resurrection—by word and by the testimony of one's life, just as Christ commanded us (CCC, No. 905). Catechesis is educating children, young people, and adults in the faith, especially through the teaching of Christian doctrine, usually in a systematic way. The goal is to help them embrace the faith in its fullness (CCC, No. 5). In a sense, evangelization and catechesis are two sides of one coin.

In this connection, let me add a word about the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Each year, a goodly number of adults enter the Church. Some are catechumens, unbaptized men and women seeking to become one with Christ and one with the Church. Others are already baptized but are seeking full communion with the Church. While we rejoice that they present themselves for initiation, we are also concerned that many, seemingly, do not persevere in the faith. This raises the question of whether they are truly evangelized and catechized, and what sort of follow up (mystagogy) is provided for them. We have only to think of the lengths to which companies go to keep their newfound customers to get some idea of how challenging it is to retain those whom we have initiated.

While we are on the subject of Christian formation, I would like to add a word about the role our Catholic schools play in evangelizing and catechizing young people and their families. Our Catholic schools play an indispensable role in helping parents to bring their children up in the faith; indeed, our schools serve as partners with parents in fulfilling their responsibility as “the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith” (Rite of Baptism). Yet, the schools face ever-greater challenges in this regard. Some parents send their children to Catholic schools but do not bring them to Mass on Sunday, nor do they reinforce at home the faith that is taught in school. Further, a goodly number of the children whom we educate are not Catholic, and while we ought not proselytize, they too should have an opportunity to encounter the light of Christ during their education. There is also a need for an ever-stronger partnership of parishes and schools to reach out to all the school parents. Together, we need to do our best to evangelize and catechize them, to help them see that it is in their best interests and the best interests of their children, to make their homes sanctuaries of love and life, places of prayer. As noted earlier, it is in our homes where young people are formed in the faith and in the virtues that will shape their futures, in this world and in the next.



## Mystagogy

is the fourth period of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) where the newly baptized reflect on the ritual process and all that they have seen, heard, and experienced. Given that RCIA is the model of all catechesis, mystagogy should be a part of all Christian formation (cf. New Directory for Catechesis, 61-74 and Instruction on Pastoral Conversion, 23).

Second, if we truly hope to evangelize, that is, to extend the Gospel message to every person within our parishes, then we must cleanse our communities of every vestige of racism. This is something we must do, not because it is in vogue or because there has been unrest in our streets, but rather, because Jesus Christ has revealed the inviolable dignity of each person and he calls us to foster the common good both in our Church and in the wider society.

The Archdiocese has taken a number of steps in this regard. Two years ago, I issued a pastoral letter titled *Journey to Racial Justice*. That letter outlined steps which we, as an Archdiocese, need to take in coming to terms with the Church's involvement in slavery and Jim Crow, and with the latent racism that persists in our midst even to this day. Often, racist attitudes lodge themselves in our minds and hearts without our being fully aware of them. Now is the time for us to dislodge those attitudes so that we might reflect more fully the light and love of our Savior and exemplify the racial justice we wish to see in the civic community.

With that in mind, I assembled a Racial Justice Working Group that is developing a strategic plan to root out racism, a plan that hinges on the authentic conversion of our hearts as individuals and as a Church community. Currently, the Working Group is making proposals to the Archdiocese and to our parish communities concerning changes in policies and practices that will enable the Church better to reflect its teaching on human dignity and the common good. I wish to offer a word of thanks to the members of the Working Group and also to Black Catholics throughout the Archdiocese for sharing your gifts, your culture, and indeed, for challenging this local church to do better.



## READ

### THE JOURNEY TO RACIAL JUSTICE

— *Repentance, Healing, and Action* —

[www.archbalt.org/racismpastoral19](http://www.archbalt.org/racismpastoral19)

Gray, Peter Wm. 2018. *The Risen Christ with the Children of the World*.

Among the many lessons already learned is this: even though our parish communities tend to be diverse, we should not take it for granted that everyone feels welcome. In the next section of this pastoral letter, I will revisit the core mission priority of hospitality. If a parish takes radical hospitality seriously, then it will leave no room for any form of racial discrimination and will make it abundantly clear that people of every race and ethnic origin are truly welcome and invited to participate fully in parish activities and ministries.

A third phenomenon is the rapid growth of Latino communities. The Archdiocese of Baltimore has a rich history of different cultural expressions of Catholicism, and our Hispanic sisters and brothers are no exception. In almost every sector of the Archdiocese, the number of Latino Catholics is increasing rapidly. Parishes that historically did not have substantial numbers of Latinos could well find that this has changed. Accordingly, more and more parishes will need to welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ as a part of the community by providing, to the extent possible, a robust Hispanic ministry. This is more than offering Holy Mass in Spanish. It also entails offering other services and ministries in Spanish and in a manner that respects the unique gifts that the Hispanic cultures bring to our local Church. Here I want to offer a special word of encouragement and thanks to my Latino brothers and sisters in the faith. Your increasing presence and your spiritual gifts are a great blessing that strengthens the life of the whole Archdiocese.

A fourth and very important dimension of parish missionary activity is outreach to disaffected Catholics, as well as to Millennials and Gen Z Catholics. Sadly, a majority of baptized Catholics no longer practice the faith with regularity. Indeed, numerous studies published by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and the Pew Research Center make for depressing reading. Mention has already been made of reasons for disaffection among many Catholics, including scandalous behavior on the part of Church leaders and confusion about the Church's teachings and mission. Other Catholics stopped practicing because their faith was not deeply rooted or because of the pull of the culture or because of simple ennui. Surprisingly, however, more than a few of these Catholics are simply waiting for an invitation to return, to "come and see" (Jn 1:39). Others may find the personal witness of fellow lay Catholics convincing. Still others may simply want a friendly, non-defensive hearing of their difficulties and complaints. This is hard work, and it requires teamwork on the part of clergy and laity, coupled with persevering prayer.

There is much to say about attracting Millennials and Gen Z Catholics to the faith. Many of these Catholics grew up in households where the practice of the faith was tenuous at best. Yet I also speak with many parents who certainly did their best and anxiously pray for and await their child's return to Church. Unfortunately, many young people came of age in a culture and a secular educational system that sometimes ignores or misrepresents the Church's history, teaching, and cultural contributions. Further, younger generations came of age in a culture that, in many respects, is not open to the value of religious faith. That said, however, it would be a mistake to underestimate the openness of young people to authenticity or their search for meaning or their desire to make a difference in society. Put another way, there is more common ground between the Church and today's youth than often may be thought. We need to find and establish this common ground and tap into the gifts God has entrusted to younger generations.<sup>14</sup>

This requires that we pay close attention to the young people who still frequent our parishes. As Pope Francis said, "A Church always on the defensive, which loses her humility and stops listening to others, which leaves no room for questions, loses her youth and turns into a museum."<sup>15</sup> We need to build up bonds of trust and offer faith-formation opportunities, coupled with outlets to serve the poor and vulnerable. Along the way, we need to facilitate ongoing conversion and moments to encounter the Lord Jesus. We also need to equip young adults to bear witness to other young people to Christ, "the power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24) and to the truth and goodness of the faith. Put simply, my young adult readers, we are listening and desire to walk together on this path toward the full beauty of the Church's life of worship.

Let me mention a further imperative, namely, the engagement of each parish community in various forms of hands-on charitable ministry to the sick, the impoverished, and the vulnerable.<sup>16</sup> Many, if not most, parishes already engage in such ministries of love and service. Others collaborate with Catholic Charities of Baltimore in its extensive programs of charitable and social services. During the current pandemic, various parishes have found ways to step up such ministries. For a moment, however, let us focus on their significance. In Matthew 25, Jesus

<sup>14</sup>The Catholic Apostolate Center has created "Apostles on Mission," a fine resource for enacting Pope Francis' call to accompaniment and it is particularly well suited for ministry with young adults. [www.apostlesonmission.org](http://www.apostlesonmission.org).

<sup>15</sup>Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, No. 41.

<sup>16</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, No. 25: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the Word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)."



reminds us that what we do for “the least of these,” we do for him. Jesus has identified himself with those whom the world so often disregards. Further, Pope Francis has lifted up for the whole Church the figure of the Good Samaritan.<sup>17</sup> He has taught us to see Jesus as *the* Good Samaritan who stops on the road of life to tend to those in need. From these two vantage points, we can thus see that as parish communities perform ministries of charity and service on behalf of those in need, these communities are indeed bearing witness to Christ. Thus did St. John Paul II speak of “a charity that evangelizes,” a charity that bears witness to our belief in Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Before I conclude this section, let me add a further observation. If a parish is “a family of families” (as observed above), then the Archdiocese is a family of parishes. The point I want to emphasize here is the same one that the Second Vatican Council stressed, namely, the Church is a communion.<sup>19</sup> In the rough and tumble of parish life, it can be easy for a parish team to become competitive – *vis à vis* neighboring parishes and indeed the Archdiocese as such and vice-versa. Yet, only when we work together as a local church does the mission of evangelization truly succeed. For the very nature of the Church is to be a communion of persons rooted in the communion that is the Trinity.<sup>20</sup> This means that we need to eliminate, as much as God’s grace makes possible, the “us-against-them” mentality that saps so much energy that, otherwise, we should use for mission. Especially in these challenging days, we need constantly to beseech the Holy Spirit to make us “one body, one spirit in Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer III)—a communion of life and love through which the light of Christ shines brightly, not just here or there, but throughout the City of Baltimore and the nine counties of Maryland that comprise the Archdiocese. What’s more, as the light of Christ shines brightly in our Archdiocese, we strengthen the Church universal of which the Archdiocese is a uniquely local incarnation.<sup>21</sup>

### *New Evangelization Institute*

It is for all these dimensions and more that I have decided to create an Institute for Evangelization. Far from a collection of ministries – as important as they all may be – this Institute will exist fundamentally to enliven the evangelizing

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Chapter Two, “A Stranger on the Road”; *Samaritanus Bonus*, (On the Care of the Critically and Terminally Ill), Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (July 2020).

<sup>18</sup> St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, No. 83. Archbishop William Lori, Homily on the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, 2014: “Service to others, sincere and generous charity, a personal touch, affirming the dignity of those who suffer—this is a powerful way of saying, ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Letter to The Bishops of The Catholic Church on Some Aspects of The Church Understood as Communion*, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 23.

work of the local Church. Evangelization is about relationships and relationship-building will be precisely the Institute's work. To this end, the Institute will consist of four components: Emmaus Teams; the Office of Family, Youth, and Young Adult Ministry; the Office of Divine Worship; and the Office of Life, Justice and Peace. The concept of the "Emmaus Teams" is quite novel but not without Biblical foundations. The episode of the disciples on the road to Emmaus has for many become the model of accompaniment and with good reason.

# Institute for Evangelization





The Lord comes into their midst and walks together with them (cf. Lk 24:13-35), and the Lord doesn't send us out to do this work alone, he sends us two-by-two. (Cf. Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1) This "team" will then operate as a team of teams, each one consisting of a coach who specializes in organizational health and another who will have a great expertise in the art of evangelization. Each pastorate will have an Emmaus Team readily available to support its evangelizing efforts and strengthen their leadership team. The other offices will work closely with the Emmaus Teams to ensure their work and offerings are always at the support of the pastorates. The Family Ministry Office will identify the best manner to support all families, especially working to close any perceived or real gaps between parishes and schools that operate on the same campuses. The Office of Divine Worship will reinforce our continued commitment to the priority of vibrant liturgies. Lastly, the Office of Life, Justice and Peace will bring together ministries that support the Church's efforts to realize the common good. Specifically, this office will focus on efforts that are best supported Archdiocesan-wide, everything from post-abortion healing retreats, to ministry to those imprisoned, to Camp GLOW, all the while working in close collaboration with Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services and the Maryland Catholic Conference to engage parishioners and pastorates in these efforts.

# V. THE CORE MISSION PRIORITIES REVISITED

*“He has won us for himself ... and you must proclaim what he has done for you. He has called you out of darkness into his own wonderful light.”*

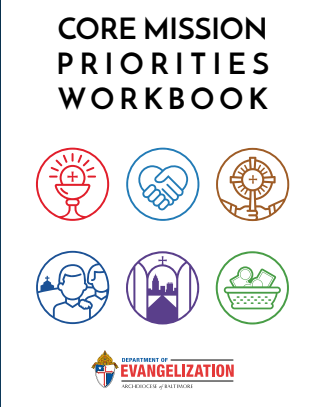
(CF. I PT 2:9)



These foregoing considerations lead me now to consider anew the core mission priorities. While these priorities flowed from LBV, they actually took shape as the pastoral planning process got underway. They offer a vision for what a pastorate is like that is undergoing an authentic “missionary conversion.”<sup>22</sup> To some, these priorities may seem to be just a selection of random qualities that some people would like to see in their parishes. Others may see them as abstract and difficult to put into practice. Actually, they are guideposts to help parishes create that familial atmosphere that is so conducive to a faith and worship that issue forth in service to those in need and in missionary activity. Here, too, we should not overthink these priorities or make them more complicated than they really are. They are simply characteristics of a parish that is alive and well. They describe pastoral goals that, in some cases, transform how any given parish might conduct its various ministries. These priorities require clergy and laity together to engage in ongoing discernment as to how they might shine forth in the diverse parish communities of this Archdiocese.

First is the *celebration of the liturgy*, especially the Eucharistic liturgy. The Eucharist is the heart of every parish. In proclaiming the Word, in entering into Jesus’ sacrifice of love, his death and resurrection, and in receiving the Body and Blood of the Savior, given for us, parish communities are bound together in mutual and self-giving love. Elsewhere the liturgy is described as “the sun in the sky” without which the vine, that is, the Church, “cannot take root, grow, or bear fruit.” How the liturgy is celebrated in our parishes matters a great deal. For most Catholics, Sunday Mass is *the* point of contact with the Church. Thoughtful preaching, beautiful liturgical music, reverence for the Body and Blood of the Lord, and reverence for one another attract and impact God’s People. Each parish

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nos. 25-33.



**CORE MISSION  
PRIORITIES  
WORKBOOK**

Reflect on the core mission priorities and how to more fully embrace them in your local pastorate.

[www.bemissionarydisciples.org/planning/core-mission-priorities](http://www.bemissionarydisciples.org/planning/core-mission-priorities)

needs to undergo a liturgical examination of conscience, understanding that what may have seemed contemporary or relevant years ago, may now have become threadbare or even meaningless to people today. Does our celebration of the liturgy help to form, make, and send forth missionary disciples? Does it help our people to live the Christian life? Does it lift them up from the concerns of daily life and help them participate in the timeless liturgy of heaven? Does it make people want to return week after week?

The second priority is *welcome or hospitality*. Those who come to our parishes should receive a very warm welcome. Not only should parishes be warm and friendly places, but they should also nurture a culture of hospitality that welcomes newcomers and established parishioners alike. Parish hospitality might begin with a simple handshake at the door of the church or a cup of coffee in the hall but must extend to knowing the names of parishioners, knowing something about them, and an openness to their pastoral gifts and needs. Every “closed circle” in parish life needs to be opened; that is, those who perform various ministries and functions and those in leadership should be open to fellow parishioners or new parishioners who wish to become involved. The culture of hospitality should also extend to those who are finding their way back to church. Just as Jesus “came to call sinners,” we also need to welcome one another in the reconciling love that he has lavished upon us. Indeed, we should not underestimate how hard it is for those who have been away to return. Some think that they will be scolded, when and if they show up, while others believe that, when they left, no one missed them. Thus, the importance of contacting all parishioners, active and inactive, simply as an outreach, simply to let them know that they are welcome, simply to ask them what they may need. We must ensure that every person is welcome, giving special care to our sisters and brothers with disabilities and special needs. Furthermore, a truly hospitable parish seeks to eliminate racism and xenophobia, even in their most subtle forms. Hospitality demands that we recognize that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. Through genuine hospitality, then, the light of Christ will shine more brightly in and through the parish community.

The third pastoral priority is *encounter*. Pope Benedict XVI once said, “... (B)eing a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a definitive direction.”<sup>23</sup> More than

<sup>23</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, No. 1.

once, Pope Francis has repeated this seminal truth as he urges you and me to open our hearts in loving encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Put another way, Christ cannot remain for us a distant figure of history. Rather, he is alive, he is present to us, and he is the lover of our souls, the light shining brightly at the core of our being. Through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, our parishes must be those graced venues of encounter. Every facet of parish life must aim toward enabling every member of the parish to open their hearts to the Savior and to becoming deeply aware of the Savior's personal love for them and for their families. Once we have encountered the living presence of the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, everything about our faith comes alive—God's Word, the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments, the Church's moral teaching, the art of praying well, and loving service to those in need. When a critical mass of parishioners has encountered Christ and are renewed in his love, then the parish is transformed, as it were, from the inside out.

Fourth is *accompaniment*, a word that comes from the “pastoral lexicon” of Pope Francis. It is not hard to understand. If you have ever had to go to a difficult meeting, you surely appreciate it when a friend offers to accompany you. Or if you find yourself in the hospital, what a comfort it is when a friend comes to be with you, not to talk all day or to conduct business, but just to be with you. We are on a difficult journey these days, exacerbated by COVID-19, but also by a host of societal factors, such as economic stresses, challenges in rearing children, violence in neighborhoods, and so forth. As a church community, we should make sure that we are walking with one another, helping one another along the bumpy road of life, making sure that we leave no neighbor behind. Thus, accompaniment means that, as missionary disciples, we help one another—peer to peer—to grow spiritually and to live the Gospel more fully, through prayer, sacrament, faith formation<sup>24</sup>, and friendship. One important way to do this is by participating in small faith-sharing groups. Companions on the journey build up trust and support one another as they pray together, reflect on the Scriptures, and speak about the graces and challenges they experience as the Lord's disciples and as members of his Church.

Fifth is *sending forth*. Pope Francis reminds us that parishes should be centers of intense missionary activity. Far from being self-contained and self-satisfied communities, parishes should constantly be reaching out not only to

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis*, No. 59; *Directory for Catechesis*, No. 77: “Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it.”

parishioners who currently practice the faith but also to those who, for whatever reason, stay away. So too (as noted above), the parish needs to be involved in the social and charitable needs of the broader community. Yet, good intentions are insufficient. Parishioners must be *convinced of and committed to* the missionary impulse of the Church and our need to go out to “the ends of the Earth” (Acts 1:8). This means that a parish must be comprised of “missionary disciples”—followers of Christ and members of His Body, the Church, who are equipped to engage in personal witness, service, friendship, and invitations to “come and see” (Jn 1:39).

Lastly is *mission support*. Elsewhere, mission support is described as the “trellis” which supports the fruitful vine that every parish should be. It refers to everything necessary to support the mission of the parish—finances, human resources, development, buildings, communications, and more. Unfortunately, in times of economic stress, mission support can become consuming, as if it were an end in itself. Experience teaches, however, that when the mission proceeds well, wisely, and generously, parish support often increases. One of the more difficult duties of parish leadership is to ask parishioners to sustain and increase their support. Yet, when such requests relate directly and accountably to the mission and vitality of the parish community, the response tends to be more generous.



# VI. LESSONS LEARNED THUS FAR

*“Jesus spoke to them again, saying,  
‘I am the light of the world. Whoever  
follows me will not walk in darkness  
but will have the light of life.’”*

(JN 8:12)



Since the publication of LBV, I can report that a lot of hard work and a goodly measure of progress have taken place. It was decided that the pastoral planning process would unfold in three phases. Parishes were grouped in each phase according to their readiness and, in some cases, in view of clergy retirements and other personnel changes. After careful study, determinations were made of which parish communities would be joined together with others in pastorates under the leadership of one pastor and which would remain as “stand-alone” parishes. A cohort of pilot parishes was selected and gradually a process for helping pastors and parish leadership undergo the pastorate planning process was developed, largely with input from the pastors and parishes themselves. It was admittedly a process of trial and error and there is still much to learn.

Among the lessons learned is the value of cohorts of pastors and diverse pastorates coming together for prayer, reflection, and dialogue. At the outset, it may have seemed as if pastorate planning is a controversial and lonely exercise, an endless and thankless work for a pastor and his co-workers. However, as pastors and their teams began to discuss among themselves both their challenges and prospects, they experienced mutual support and gained insight from one another. While our parish communities are diverse, there is, nonetheless, plenty of common ground. Thus, the shape and content of these sessions developed and improved over time, due to experience and the feedback of the participants. While still a work in progress, these sessions are an important resource for pastorate planning in the years ahead.

Another lesson learned from our experience thus far is the importance of facilitated discussions in each of the pastorates. Understandably, pastoral planning is the source of some anxiety in parish communities, particularly if two heretofore separate parishes merge or if a parish worship site is closed. Facilitation enables parish leadership, both clerical and lay, as well as parishioners to express their views in a calm and orderly way. It also sets the conditions for taking in new information and insights about the present condition of parishes and about prospects for the future. Furthermore, these discussions help to ease the challenge of bringing together diverse parish communities that, in the years ahead, will be worshipping and working as one.



At the same time, it has become apparent that there needs to be greater engagement between parishes and the services offered by the Department of Evangelization, specifically in those component parts of parish life that relate to the six core mission priorities. Perhaps even more importantly, the need for ongoing formation and closer accompaniment in the pastorate planning process has emerged. Already I have mentioned a number of newly available resources, but more than resources are necessary. Rather, both pastorates and the newly forming evangelization teams must walk together, sharing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, being confirmed in the kerygma, and renewed in missionary zeal.

Another—and very important—factor in parish planning relates to priest-personnel issues. Understandably, some pastors who are of retirement age may be reluctant to begin the pastoral planning process. At other times, pastorate planning becomes urgent, especially when a priest unexpectedly dies or experiences a decline in health. While we are blessed with a goodly number of seminarians (54 as of this writing) and an increased presence of religious congregations in the parishes of the Archdiocese, nonetheless, our capacity to staff parishes with priests is stretched thin and many of our priests are doing double or even triple duty. I wish to acknowledge and thank my brother priests for their generosity and goodness, including many retired priests who continue to assist in parishes throughout the Archdiocese.

Yet another facet of pastoral planning is the importance of good data. This includes overall demographic information about the area covered by each pastorate as well as accurate parish census, financial, and facilities data. Permit me a word about each of these.

- **Demographic data:** Sadly, some areas of the Archdiocese have depopulated, usually due to deteriorating neighborhoods or the lack of economic and employment opportunities. Nonetheless, people continue to live in such neighborhoods and it is important that we endeavor to leave no one behind. Other areas of the Archdiocese are growing rapidly as new homes spring up in the counties and as areas of the City of Baltimore experience sustained growth. It is important that, where such growth has occurred, parishes make inroads with residents as they move into these newly developed or re-developed neighborhoods.

- **Parish census data:** It is vital that we not only know how many parishioners there are but we need to know *who* they are.<sup>25</sup>
- **Sound financial data:** This must be coupled with a realistic sense of each parish's capacity to meet its obligations.
- **The condition of parish buildings:** While the pastoral planning process is not *per se* about buildings, nonetheless, we cannot fail to take into account that some structures have outlived their usefulness and in fact have become something of a financial liability for parishes.

In addition to the pilot cohorts, three other cohorts of parishes have entered into the parish planning process. Progress has thus been slow but steady. As noted above, priest personnel issues and other factors have occasioned some delays, but now is the time for us to reinvigorate pastoral planning with renewed purpose. I would very much like to see more parishes enter into the process and I am confident that the new Institute for Evangelization will continue to improve and support this process for parishes.

<sup>25</sup>Until now, most parishes have used an older platform known as ParishSOFT. After consultation, however, and after a trial period involving some 10 parishes, the Archdiocese is moving to a new platform known as Ministry Platform, a contemporary, cloud-based software that enables parishes better to track registered families, to update records more easily, and to record donations more accurately. What's more, Ministry Platform "communicates" with other parish systems, notably with QuickBooks as well as with other parish communications systems, such as email and text messaging.

# VII. SHADOWS AND LIGHTS

*“For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to bring to light the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ.”*

*(2 Cor 4:6)*



**A**s parish communities diligently undertake this work of pastoral planning, we are also contending with the lingering and deepening shadows—internal and external challenges that impede the Church’s mission. Yet, even amid these challenges, we perceive with the eyes of faith “the first streaks of dawn” (2 Pt 1:20) as the light of Christ dawns upon us anew. For as Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). In that spirit of faith, then, let us consider some of the shadows and lights the Church is experiencing in these days.

First, the COVID-19 crisis has cast a long and lingering shadow over the whole world and upon each of our local communities. This global pandemic has taken a heavy toll of human life, left many others seriously ill, and has radically disrupted how we live, work, and worship. By now, we are all very familiar with the restrictions on the number of people who can attend Mass and the safety precautions that are in place. As a result, Mass attendance—already declining prior to the pandemic—has suffered a further decline. Nonetheless, the light of Christ continues to shine in our midst. For, in spite of severe challenges, parish leadership has stepped up to the plate. Across the Archdiocese, parishes implemented safety directives and found new ways to reach out to parishioners, especially through the livestreaming of Masses, convening parish meetings and listening sessions on Zoom, phone trees, outreach to the sick and dying, Confessions in parking lots, even “drive-by” Eucharistic adoration, and much more. I take this opportunity to thank my co-workers in the vineyard for your arduous labors throughout the challenging year of 2020 and beyond.

Echoing Pope Francis, I would add that this pandemic, terrible as it is, nonetheless represents a unique opportunity to re-evaluate our “customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language, and structures,” so that “they can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, we must be wary of our inclination to get back to the way things were prior to the pandemic. Rather, we must recognize that some parish activities and programs are no longer evangelizing or fruitful. Thus, we must use this opportunity as a moment of “pastoral conversion”—to use the language of Pope Francis—moving beyond “mere repetitive action that fails to have an impact upon people’s concrete lives [and that] remains a sterile attempt at survival, which is usually welcomed by general indifference.”<sup>27</sup> This, therefore, is not a time for nostalgia, a longing for

<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 27.

<sup>27</sup> *Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, Congregation for the Clergy (July 2020), No. 17.

the “good old days,” but rather a time for courageous outreach to everyone in our parish boundaries and those who have joined us online. Further, giving people hope in times of crisis is fundamental to our identity as Church. This is what Jesus offers us and this is what we, in turn, must offer to others in faithful witness to what we have received. As witnesses of the hope afforded us by the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, we must recognize that the world has changed, and we must discern among ourselves the evangelizing opportunities that this challenging moment presents to us. Already we have discovered new ways to connect with our people and already we recognize that many people have experienced a renewed Eucharistic hunger and a desire for community. Later on, I will describe ways we can do this through a further initiative, “Encountering Christ’s Presence: A Year of the Eucharist,” (cf., *infra*, “Where Do We Go from Here?”) which aims to focus our evangelization ministries on the Eucharist, “the source and summit” of the Church’s life.<sup>28</sup>

Second, over the past few decades, scandal has seriously beset the Church. Recently, the Vatican issued the “McCarrick Report” which detailed how an abusive priest climbed to the pinnacle of power in the Church before his fall from grace. The sexual abuse crisis has taken an immense toll on the Church’s mission, including loss of trust and loss of membership and the widespread rejection of the Church’s teaching on sexual morality. Yet, even in this most difficult matter, we must not fail to see in Christ’s light and love the promise of a better day, especially for those who have been harmed by abusive clergy and by the inattention of Church leaders to their plight. Many efforts are underway to combat abuse and to reach out to victim-survivors. Here we must ask for the grace of perseverance. The Church must continue to do all in its power to prevent abuse, to address it effectively no matter when it occurred, and to reach out in compassion to all who suffer as the result of it. We must not shy away from talking about this issue honestly and we must be ready to explain how, for many decades, the Church has sought to address it.

Third is the need for Church reform, which is connected to the second point but far broader. As we move into the future, the Church must continue to combat clericalism and develop and implement new structures of accountability, whether for the behaviors of its representatives, or the use of resources, or the soundness of the formation offered to those who represent her, whether clergy or

<sup>28</sup> II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 11.

laity. This is an ongoing challenge the Church must continually address for the sake of mission. With the help of God's grace, we need to remove all the obstacles that hinder Catholics and people of good will from embracing and living the faith.

Fourth, the Church finds itself in an increasingly secular cultural atmosphere that is indifferent or hostile to religious faith. An increasing number of people no longer believe in God or live as if God did not exist. As unbelief and antagonism to belief exert an ever-greater influence on the culture, the contributions of the Church's social teaching to law and policies and to the needs of society are less and less welcome. As a result, not only is the Church's influence on public life and opinion eroding, but also the Church's mission becomes more difficult. Let us, however, be of good cheer. The Apostles ministered in the pagan Roman Empire. Even when their efforts did not appear successful or they met up with persecution, they rejoiced and pressed forward, full of joy and enthusiasm. We need "to take a page out of their book," and the book I have in mind is the Acts of the Apostles!

Fifth, profound changes in how information and opinion are shared and processed sometimes seem to eclipse our efforts to evangelize. Technology is changing the categories in which people think and how they process information. For many, especially the young, the vocabulary of Scripture, Church teaching, and the Sacraments may now seem almost like a foreign language. Confident that no darkness can extinguish the light of Christ, we must continue to discern how best to evangelize. In doing so, we must not tear down the structure of the Church's teaching but rather build bridges to it, to help people of today to grasp its essential meaning. We must also appeal to the underlying humanity of those we evangelize, for amid the profound changes now underway, the need to love and to be loved remains constant, as is the need to believe in someone or something. Witness the yard signs that one often sees, signs that proclaim a kind of secular "credo." The point I want to make here is that, by nature, people have a need to believe, a need into which we must tap.

Sixth, the Church ministers in a deeply polarized society, a fact that was painfully clear in the last election. Such divisiveness, sadly, has found its way into the Church itself, as many people are more comfortable with their political views than the authentic teaching of the Church. Here too, however, we must perceive the light of Christ as we search for common ground wherever possible. As Pope



Francis wrote in *Fratelli Tutti*, "... (M)en and women are capable of coming up with shared goals that transcend their differences and can thus engage in a common endeavor."<sup>29</sup> With respect for people of good will, Church leadership must continually strive to engage in dialogue and to share the wisdom and love embodied in the Church's social teaching, a teaching that spans the political spectrum in the United States. Nor can we confine such efforts only to election cycles. Rather, we need to hand on and advocate for the Church's social teaching and its four foundational principles all the time, so that all God's People can absorb them and put them into practice. After all, it is principally the role of the laity to help create a society that is just, compassionate, and tranquil.

Thus, the whole Church has an important role to play in healing the divisions in society. To repeat, the Church's social teaching offers a coherent, non-partisan vision of public life that respects the dignity of each person and promotes the common good. The Church plays an important role in defending vulnerable human life and our fundamental freedoms. While we must acknowledge defects in our governmental structures and failures of our society to live up to its highest ideals, we should also be concerned to protect our God-given and constitutionally guaranteed freedoms such as religious freedom, freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression. We should not hesitate to allow the light of faith and reason to shine through us onto the larger society.

Let us not imagine, however, that there will ever come a time when all the answers to these and other challenges will be perfectly set in place. The barque of Peter will always experience the turbulence of the seas of culture and history, and there will always be a provisional quality to our efforts of reform and renewal. *As a result, we cannot wait until conditions are ideal before we put our shoulder to the wheel and give ourselves wholeheartedly to the mission of evangelization. Let me re-emphasize that none of these "shadows," nor all of them taken together, constitute a good reason for us to delay or postpone the Church's mission of evangelization.* The mission is Christ's and it remains valid and urgent. One of the most frequent words in Scripture and in early Christian writers is "today." Today, now, is the time for us to carry out the Lord's mandate to spread the Gospel as widely and deeply as possible. While we rightly speak of the Kingdom of God as "already" inaugurated but "not yet" fulfilled, nowhere does the Church's Tradition speak of a "not now!" Rather, "*This is the acceptable time; this is the day of salvation*" (2 Cor 6:2).

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, No. 157.

Surely, when the Apostles preached the Good News post-Pentecost, their message was countercultural, especially as the faith spread beyond Jerusalem into the heart of the Roman Empire. The faith was countercultural when our forebears preached it in a society that was dominated by the Know-Nothings and by a general prejudice against Catholics and immigrants. Not surprisingly, modern culture has served up its share of challenges to us. We owe it to the Lord and to God's People not to shrink away from those challenges but rather to address them with a deep and living faith in the Person of Christ and with trust in the soundness of the Church's teaching, and with a love to which none of our opponents can take exception.

Finally, let me mention a very deep shadow that will always be a part of our lives as followers of Christ. St. Paul identifies it in his letter to the Ephesians: "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, and with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Eph 6:12). Our adversaries are not all earthly. Satan and his minions continue to wage war on Christ's followers and on his Church, and this "struggle" is not simply one shadow among many, but rather is intimately connected with each of the others. Not for nothing does the Easter Sequence speak of "a battle stupendous" between "Life's Captain"—the Christ—and Satan. Jesus Christ conquers sin, death, and Satan, which is at the heart of the *kerygma* we proclaim. It is for this reason that every disciple must possess an earnest recognition of the reality of Satan and sin. We should not be surprised if our witness to the faith is costly, if we encounter opposition and resistance, and if we have to endure suffering for the sake of the Gospel. After all, the Lord told us that unless we are willing "to take up our cross and follow after him" we are unworthy to be his disciples (Mt 10:38). St. Paul urges us "to bear our share of the hardship that the Gospel entails" (2 Tim 2:3). Like the first Christians, we must rejoice to suffer "for the sake of the Name" (Acts 5:41), convinced as we are, that "Through [Christ] was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:4-5).



# VIII. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

*“Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light for my path.”*

(Ps 119:105)



**A**s we bear all that has gone before and reflect on the Church's situation in the world, the inevitable question emerges, "Where do we go from here?" I have engaged in conversation around that very question with the priests and deacons of the Archdiocese as well as the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. There is, for example, widespread concern among parish leadership that, post-COVID, Mass attendance will not bounce back and that many parishioners will be content to watch the Mass online instead of attending in person. After all, it is much more convenient to stay home and watch Holy Mass on one's sofa having a cup of coffee, than it is to dress up on a Sunday morning and pack the family off to church. As shopping and doing business become more and more an online reality, so too there is concern that parishioners may come to regard their parish churches the way they regard "big box stores"—nice that they are there but usually not frequented. It is true that livestreamed Masses offer us new opportunities to reach those not coming to church; nonetheless, we also have to acknowledge that far too many do not see the difference between a virtual Mass as opposed to taking part at Mass with a worshipping assembly and receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion.

How well founded such concerns actually are remains for us to see. However, long before the current pandemic, Mass attendance was in decline. Furthermore, as a recent survey by the Pew Research Center shows, belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist has declined.<sup>30</sup> This unhappy phenomenon is, in part, the result of faulty catechesis and failures to evangelize. Sometimes false choices were posed between the Mass as the living re-presentation of the Lord's Paschal Sacrifice on the one hand and the Mass as a sacred meal on the other. Some saw Eucharistic adoration as a detraction from the celebration of the Eucharist, not as an aid to belief, devotion and participation in the Eucharistic liturgy. Instead of putting all the components of Eucharistic doctrine together in an integral whole, those components sometimes were set against one another, to the detriment of the Church's mission of evangelization and catechesis.

At the same time, this challenge is more than a question of faulty catechesis. As noted above (cf. *supra*, "Shadows and Lights"), the advent of cyberspace and the substitution of the virtual for the real is changing the categories in which people think, how they absorb and process information, and what they regard as real vs. un-real. This poses a further challenge to those who would evangelize and catechize.

<sup>30</sup> Pew Research Center Survey, August 2019. Only about one-third of all Catholics believe in the Real Presence. The percentage of those who believe in the Real Presence is higher (63%) among those who attend Holy Mass weekly.

It is important to understand this developing cultural phenomenon and to try to bridge it in preaching, evangelizing, and instruction. It is also true, however, that no amount of bridging substitutes for our own vibrant faith in the intensely personal and utterly real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. At the end of the day, no human categories fully express this mystery. Rather, we must bear witness to our Eucharistic faith by how we pray and live.

As my brother priests and I reflected on these and other challenges, the proposal emerged that the Archdiocese of Baltimore engage in a year dedicated to evangelizing and catechizing about the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Titled, “Encounter Christ’s Presence: A Year of the Eucharist,” that proposal gained widespread and enthusiastic approval. Yet, as work proceeded to organize the activities of the proposed Eucharistic year, it soon became evident that more preparation, more groundwork was needed. Just as it is necessary to do site work before constructing a home or a commercial building, so too it is deemed necessary to spend a year doing some “site work” in preparing for what will be a multiyear effort to evangelize and catechize about the Eucharist.

What is the “site work” that needs to be done?

- **First** are ongoing efforts to restore the trust that has been shattered by clerical sexual abuse and to continue the work of ongoing reform.
- **Second** are concerted efforts to reach out to all of our parishioners, active and inactive, simply to renew and strengthen as many relationships of trust as possible.
- **Third** is the need to help people, perhaps through a simple invitation to develop the habit of daily personal prayer, to discern the true hungers of their hearts—above all, their hunger and thirst for God’s love, a longing that the Eucharist satisfies.
- **Fourth** is to help people eliminate in their lives, to the extent possible, the obstacles to the Lord’s love and to their full and active membership in the Church; this is rather like removing the boulders one might find on a construction site.
- **Fifth** is bearing witness convincingly to the Lord’s mercy, to his deeply personal love for each of us, and to his hunger and thirst for our love, leading those we serve toward sacramental reconciliation and freedom from sin.
- **Sixth** is sharing with others our own Eucharistic joy and amazement as we go about our daily life.

Such are the kinds of activities each parish should undertake in the year 2021, in preparation for what some are calling the “Eucharistic Revival Project.”

Already my co-workers have given a lot of thought and prayer as to how this would play out in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Among other things, a proposal is afoot to study, to reflect on, and to preach and teach about the multiple ways Christ is present in the Eucharist: in the Word proclaimed; in the minister-celebrant; in the worshipping assembly; and, above all, in the Eucharistic species, the bread and wine totally changed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ.

As we move into 2021, there will likely be continued restrictions on the number of the faithful who can attend Mass. Nonetheless, we can begin doing the aforementioned “site work” now. To that end, suggestions and resources for this preparatory year will be forthcoming, all of which will be designed for adaptation by each parish.

And we are not alone. Other bishops and dioceses all around the United States share our concern about the Church’s “Eucharistic future.” As a result, Bishop Robert Barron, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, has proposed that the United States Bishops take part in a multiyear “Eucharistic Revival Project.” Here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and dioceses across the United States, we would unite in working together to revive and renew the Eucharistic faith of our people. This would include a sharing of resources for Eucharistic evangelization and catechesis in parishes and dioceses. It would also culminate in something not unlike local Eucharistic congresses and a national Eucharistic congress.



# IX. A LIGHT SHINING EVER MORE BRIGHTLY

*“I have come into the world to be its light.”*

(JN 12:46)



In the sanctuaries of our churches and chapels, a sanctuary lamp perpetually burns, a flickering flame that signals the reserved presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Let it be our united hope and prayer that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will “fan into flame” (2 Tim 1:6) our Eucharistic faith, such that it will shine brightly in every pastorate, in every neighborhood, and in every corner of this, the Premier See.

The Second Letter of St. Peter teaches us that “the prophetic message” of the Gospel is “something altogether reliable” and it instructs us to “keep [our] attention closely focused on it, as [we] would on a lamp shining in a dark place, until the first streaks of dawn appear and the morning star rises in [our] hearts” (2 Pt 1:19-20). That darkness takes many forms, including the sin, scandal, crises, and divisions that mark contemporary life. As Catholic Christians and as members of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, I invite you, as indeed I urge myself, to refocus the eyes of our souls on “the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world” (Jn 1:19). Christ is the only light that guides us, not only in our journey through life, but indeed, in our journey from time to eternity.

In his Treatise on John, St. Augustine bids the people of Hippo in Northern Africa, “... (L)ove with me and, by believing, run with me; let us long for our heavenly country, let us sigh for our heavenly home. ...” St. Augustine bids us to live as a people of hope who look forward to that day when we shall gaze upon the Word, that happy day “when [we] will see the light itself in all its purity and brightness.” He adds, “It is to see and experience this light that [we] are now being cleansed.”<sup>31</sup>

I make my own the appeal of the holy bishop of Hippo, St. Augustine. For he really describes the mission that lies open before us. That mission is to catch hold of the light of the Gospel as encapsulated in the Eucharist, and then, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, to allow that light to radiate in us and through us to those around us. Our mission is to be cleansed and enlightened, even as we walk with others who are being cleansed, enlightened and prepared to gaze with inexpressible joy upon him who is “God from God and light from light.”

<sup>31</sup>Augustine, Tract. 35, 8-9, CCL 36, 321-323, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV., p. 591.

Dear brothers and sisters, the time is short, and my appeal is urgent.  
Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! (Is 2:5).

Mary, Star of Evangelization, pray for us!

Baltimore Maryland, the Solemnity of the Epiphany, January 3, 2021.



*+William E. Lori*

MOST REVEREND WILLIAM E. LORI, S.T.D.  
ARCHBISHOP OF BALTIMORE





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