

***“Go, therefore,
and make disciples
of all nations. . .”***

A PASTORAL RESPONSE FROM

Bishop Donald J. Hying

to the faithful of the Diocese of Gary

08 September 2017

Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary





DIOCESE OF GARY SYNOD 2017

A Pastoral Response

Missionary discipleship has become the organizing focus in the Catholic Church recently, the prism through which believers discuss evangelization, catechesis, prayer, service and virtue. In his final words of the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations!” (Matt. 28:19-20), Jesus calls all of the baptized to embrace a life of faith put into action, going out to form others in the liberating and saving power of the Gospel.

The entire process of our first synod here in the Diocese of Gary has been both a reflection on and an experience of this dynamic mission, which our Lord handed on to the Church.

In this post-synodal letter, I offer reflection on the nature and urgency of missionary discipleship, the gift, fruit and challenge of our synod process, the significance and consequences of the top pastoral priorities in each of the eight mission areas and the details of how we propose to implement the synod on the level of the diocese, the parish, other Catholic institutions and organizations and each individual Catholic disciple.

First of all, I give thanks and praise to God and all of our priests, religious, deacons, ecclesial lay ministers, parishioners, as well as the synod commission members, our parish liaisons, facilitators, delegates and staff, whose mighty efforts made this whole experience of grace and love possible. For me and for thousands of our people, the synod was a deep moment of communion, prayer, dialogue, imagining, discerning and prioritizing that has created a solid framework for us to jointly continue the Gospel mission of Jesus Christ for years to come.

We truly experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit in this Upper Room encounter and we are increasingly transformed into the image of Jesus Christ in the beauty and mystery of the Church.



MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP: ITS METHOD AND URGENCY

Time and again in these past months, the same questions arose: How can I live my Catholic faith with authenticity and joy? How do I develop an authentic relationship with God that truly centers my life? How do we, together, pass on the faith to our beloved young people? How do we transform the poverty and suffering of the world and truly change society for the better? How can my parish move from maintenance to mission, becoming more welcoming, energized, active and participative? How do we reach all of the people who have simply checked out of Church and religion all together?

For some years now, the Holy Spirit has been stirring the hearts of believers throughout our country and world to ask these fundamental questions. The emerging answer is the reality of missionary discipleship which coalesces the multiple facets of the Church's faith and life into a coherent response to Christ's personal invitation to follow him.

So we raise the essential question: What is missionary discipleship?

We find the answer in the pages of the Gospel as we study the lives and experiences of those first followers of Jesus who appropriately served as the primary models of what this discipleship looks like. The Twelve Apostles, especially Peter, James and John, the Seventy-Two disciples, the women who followed Jesus and



ministered to his needs, especially Mary Magdalene and ultimately the Blessed Virgin herself, show us this path of relationship, holiness, service and witness that we seek to emulate today.

Whether they were fishing, such as Peter, collecting taxes, like Matthew, or plotting the downfall of Rome, like Simon of the Zealot party, Jesus encountered his apostles in the ordinary activities of life and boldly called them to follow him. The astonishing fact that they immediately did so points to the charisma and attractiveness of Jesus' loving personality, the divine authority of his words and the impulse of active grace.

This following of Christ unfolded over the course of years, as this motley collection of mostly illiterate, lower class folk traveled and ate with the Master, listened to his preaching and parables, experienced the wondrous power of his miracles, watched him cast out demons and came to an initial grasp of the Father's mercy and the nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus called them to himself, and this relationship with the Son of God became the fundamental meaning of their existence.

Coupled with Jesus' call to, "Follow me!" is the other imperative, "Go forth!" Jesus sends both the Twelve, and then the Seventy-Two, on missionary journeys, commanding them to preach the Good News of God's merciful love, to heal the sick, raise the dead and be witnesses of the Kingdom, while stressing the need for conversion and change. They are to take nothing for the journey, trusting in God's providence and the integrity of their purpose.

In this going forth, we see the second part of missionary discipleship. Even as we are deeply formed in our identity as followers of Christ, we must take the Gospel forth, inviting others to become disciples through our loving witness and joyous service.

This going forth reaches its culmination in the Pentecost event, in which the Holy Spirit propels the early Church into the public



square to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ as the new meaning of human existence, to preach and baptize, heal and bless, live the new communion of love and thanksgiving in the formative power of the Eucharist.

Tradition tells us that Peter went to Rome, Thomas to India, James to Spain and Mary Magdalene to France. These spiritual giants were called by the Lord, formed in Christ, anointed in the Holy Spirit and sent to make other disciples. This dynamic process of vocation is the essence of missionary discipleship.

Over the centuries, Catholics have, at least partially, lost the intrinsic linkage of call, formation, anointing and sending. Most of us were baptized as infants, catechized in the faith, made the sacraments and embraced Catholic belief and practice. Few of us experienced a dynamic evangelization when we heard a bracing proclamation of God's love and the truth of our personal call by the Lord.

Many times, Christian formation was either all head knowledge, such as the sole memorization of a catechism, but with little integration, or all heart knowledge, based on feelings or experiences, but

celebrating sacraments, but sometimes without a context of relationship with Jesus Christ or a sense of the mission of discipleship. We relied for decades on a thriving Catholic culture to form new members of the Church, but not always felt that urgently personal call to witness the faith ourselves.

Lack of true evangelization, an often disjointed Christian formation, a celebration of the sacraments

without an understanding of consequent call to mission, a faith often privatized and hidden, and significant cultural shifts, which have challenged religious practice and morality, are some of the reasons why the Church has experienced institutional decline in the West. We can no longer rely on a Catholic culture, unquestioning obedience, loyalty to the organization and a fear of hell to hold people in the Church. By using the example and experience of those first followers of Jesus as missionary disciples, we can

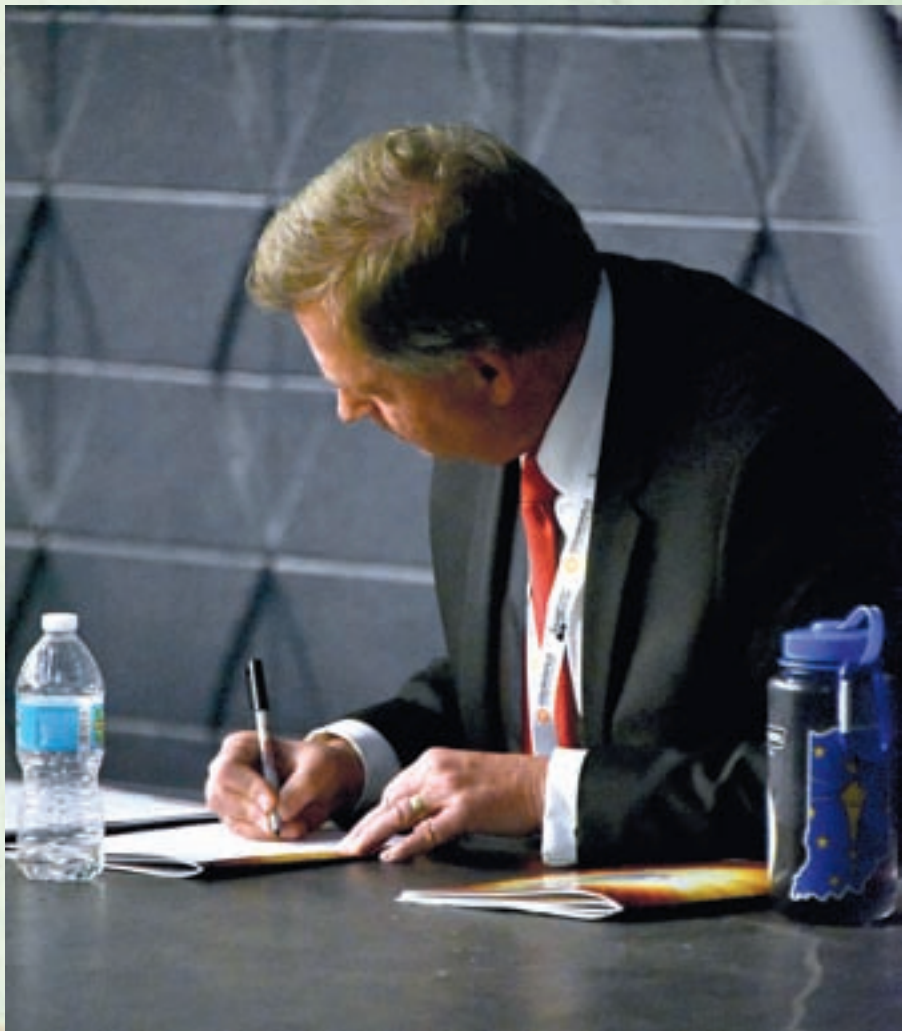
rediscover the original and necessary connection between hearing the Lord calling us, embracing a life-changing spiritual formation, surrendering to the graced anointing of the Holy Spirit and understanding our baptismal call to witness the love, truth, beauty and goodness of Jesus Christ to every person we meet.

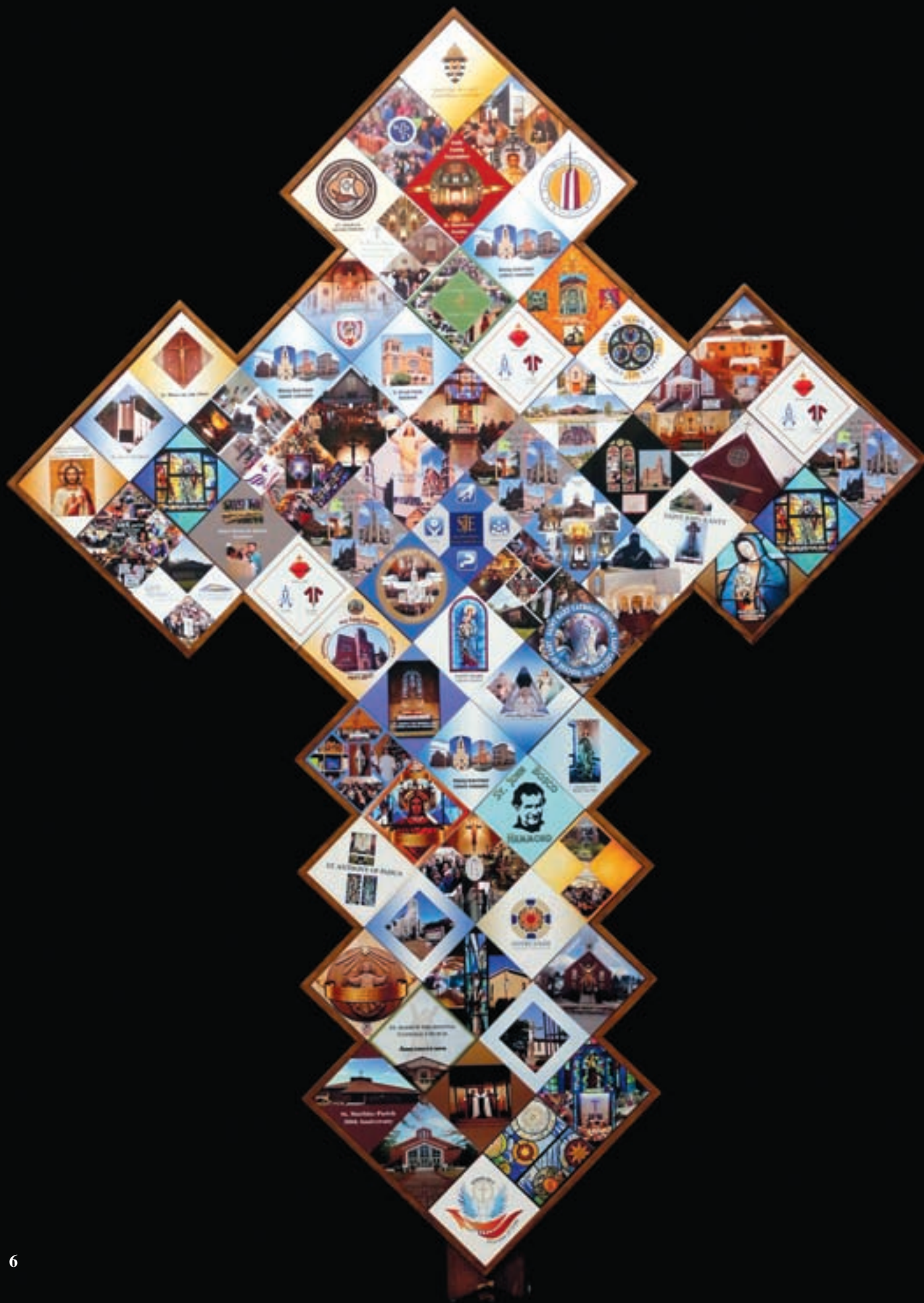
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Disciples make other disciples. Faith shared is faith increased.

What does such an abundant life in Christ look like today? What are its principal components? How does it serve the mission of the Church now? If we look at missionary discipleship through the first lens of “Follow me,” we grasp the primary need to be consistently open to ongoing evangelization ourselves. Letting others love and witness Jesus to us, pondering the many gifts and blessings that flow from our identity as beloved children of God, thinking often about the joy and meaning given to us through faith, seeing our relationship with God as a divine romance of adventure and purpose, all help us to reclaim and refresh our original call and keep us fired up in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ongoing Christian formation is the second component of missionary discipleship, beginning in childhood, continuing in adolescence and reaching all the way from maturity to old age. As life-long learners, we need solid and age-appropriate catechesis all the way through, a formation that is intellectually robust, morally clear, emotionally powerful and deeply loving. In other words, God wants to form our heads, hearts, will, soul and actions to put the good news of the Gospel into constant motion. With the Bible, the Catechism, the lives and writings of the saints and the profound knowledge contained in our whole Catholic tradition, we have the needed tools to be solidly formed in the life and revelation of God. Every Catholic needs to be striving to know the faith more broadly, understand it more deeply, and be able to articulate more effectively the beautiful love of Christ and our magnificent religious history and heritage. I liken Catholicism to a 500-room palace, full of treasures, surprises and graces. The need for excellence in our schools, religious education programs and adult faith formation is a constant challenge and goal for all of us.







In prayer, worship and the sacraments, we experience the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the depths of God's presence and love. A missionary disciple consistently prays every day, spending time with the Scriptures in meditation, offering praise, thanksgiving and petition to the Lord, perhaps praying the Rosary or another devotion, spending time in silence and solitude, reading a spiritual book reflectively and taking the time to boldly pray with others, especially family members and friends.

This prayer reaches its culmination in the celebration of the sacraments, which make us adopted children of God, bearers of the indwelling of the Trinity, and recipients of God's mercy, forgiveness and salvation. A missionary disciple finds the center of life in the Eucharist, faithfully participating in this fundamental experience of the Paschal mystery at least every Sunday and holy day, if not more often, and discovers the depths of God's mercy and forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation.

The second lens of missionary discipleship is Jesus' command to go forth and proclaim the Gospel. Christian disciples call and form other disciples. This evangelizing task is urgent today, as we see more

people, especially the young, disengage from the Church and question the utility of religion for their lives. A fundamental need for us, as committed disciples, is to engage and listen to those who have drifted away, ceased joining the Sunday assembly or are even hostile to what Catholicism offers.

Too often we speak to each other within the Church, but do not truly go out to those beyond the boundaries of practicing faith. My hope is that this sort of dialogue and listening will be a fundamental fruit of the synod. We have much to offer and to learn in that sort of engagement.

We will be most effective in proclaiming the Gospel to others by living a joyful, generous and faith-filled life. The most powerful tool of evangelization is the authenticity of true witness. We want others to say, "I don't know what that person has, but I want it for me!"

Holiness is perennially attractive because it offers us purpose, love, joy, generosity, peace, consolation, challenge and ultimately eternal salvation! Deep down, who does not want these gifts? When we dynamically live our faith at home, school, and work, we will deeply impact others and stir their hearts to ask the fundamental questions.



Missionary disciples are both competent and confident to boldly pray with others, explain particular teachings of the Church, articulate their personal relationship with God, recommend good spiritual books and resources, generously serve the poor and sick, work for a more just and peaceful world and be joyful, invitational witnesses of the Gospel. Imagine if every practicing Catholic was busy cultivating three or four people they know – a family member, co-worker, fellow student, friend or neighbor – moving them toward a deeper discipleship in the Lord!

Each of us has grown in faith because of the transformative witness of certain individuals in our lives. Today, we all need to more intentionally become that radiant presence of Jesus for others so that we can set the world on fire!

If we do not energetically embrace this fundamental evangelizing call of missionary discipleship, we will painfully watch the continued decline of the Church - fewer engaged parishioners, fewer resources, more closed parishes and schools, fewer dynamic leaders, greater irrelevance to the surrounding society. God has placed us here in the dawn of 21st century America to boldly and passionately live our faith in Jesus Christ and transform the world.

This hour is our moment; we have the chance to change the course of our country, diocese and communities, touching thousands of precious lives with the gentle love of God.

THE GIFT OF OUR DIOCESAN SYNOD

Our synod process has been a true gift of the Holy Spirit, calling all to fall in love with God, renew our own faith in Jesus Christ, share our hopes, dreams and fears, boldly strategize pastoral priorities, celebrate the outpouring of grace through the Pentecost event and implement transformative change. The goal of the synod is spiritual and structural renewal on all levels and in every member of our diocese, so that we better live the task of missionary discipleship, which is to Go proclaim the Gospel to every creature and make disciples! Again, I offer joyful praise and gratitude to God and everyone who helped in this mighty endeavor.

Let me briefly refresh your memory of the fundamental touchstones in our synod process.

I issued a pastoral letter, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” on February 25 in 2016. This document is my reflection on the task of missionary discipleship, focused on eight fundamental mission areas of the Church’s life: Evangelization; Sacraments, Prayer and Worship; Discipleship and Formation; Social Teaching; Marriage and Family; Young Catholics; Stewardship; Vocations and Formation of Leaders.

I had been here in the Diocese a little over a year at that point. In each of these areas, I offered observations of the great good I saw here in the local Church, the needs for growth and change, and some reflection questions. People of the diocese, especially our leaders, were invited to read and pray over the letter.

In October 2016, every parish in our diocese held a synod session, to which all parishioners were invited. A combination of prayer, reflection and discussion about the eight mission areas, these gatherings yielded over 12,000 data points - priorities, suggestions, needs, best practices and concerns - from over 4,000 of our leaders and people. Emerging pastoral themes and important questions began to converge.

A team of many dedicated people, including youth from our high schools, collated this voluminous data into summarized priorities, which served as the points of discussion for the deanery synod sessions held in February of this year. On four consecutive sunny and warm Saturdays in winter, parish delegates gathered by deanery to pray, discuss and discern the emerging pastoral data in order to refine content, prioritize possibilities, and clarify

ambiguities. Again, every single parish sent competent, well-prepared and dynamic delegates who moved the synod task significantly forward.

The fourth touchstone in this exciting process was the actual diocesan synod, held on Pentecost weekend this past June. Beginning with an opening Mass on June 2 at Notre Dame in Michigan City, delegates from each parish processed in, bearing their community’s symbolic tile, all of which assembled together formed our beautiful synod cross. We prayed for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit to aid us in the important work of the synod.

The next day, June 3, well over 300 delegates, including our priests, deacons and religious, along with those representing every parish, school, and Catholic hospital, gathered at Bishop Noll Institute in Hammond to pray, reflect, discuss and vote on top priorities for each of the distinct eight mission areas. The energy, enthusiasm and joy of that day will always remain with me, as the Holy Spirit filled our hearts to accomplish this important work.

The electronic voting allowed everyone to immediately see the results. This diocesan prioritization of pastoral proposals will serve as the substantive content of our synod implementation. Our highly successful working day of the synod was truly a fruit of much prayer and effort!

The following afternoon, Pentecost Sunday, we celebrated the synod closing Mass at the Genesis Convention Center in Gary. With well over 2,000 people in attendance, the Mass was prayerful; the music was inspiring and everyone was radiantly joyous, a true Eucharistic gathering of this local Church – the Diocese of Gary. Just as the apostles went forth from the Upper Room, anointed in the Holy Spirit to renew the work of missionary



discipleship, so too with us that day.

After the Mass, we processed with the Eucharist to Holy Angels Cathedral for Benediction. Along the way, passing through the streets of Gary, we prayed the Rosary and sang our faith and love. We laid the work of the synod before the Lord and asked him to breathe the Holy Spirit upon our efforts.

The weekend of our diocesan synod will always abide in my heart as a life-giving encounter with the Spirit of Jesus as we gathered in the Upper Room!

The ultimate touchstone of the synod process and its lasting fruit will be its implementation throughout our diocese in the years to come. This pastoral letter serves as a marker on our pilgrim way, but the most important reality will be how each of us embraces the gifts of the Spirit which the synod offers us. I will lay out the method of the implementation process towards the end of this pastoral reflection, but first I want to comment briefly on the top pastoral priorities of each of the eight mission areas."

EVANGELIZATION

In the evangelization priorities, we see a great desire to invite everyone into a more dynamic experience of Jesus in the context of our Catholic faith, especially young people and those who are marginalized or disengaged. An overlap of evangelization and formation is clearly evident in some of the priorities, pointing out that we cannot evangelize others without being well-formed ourselves in the truth and life of the Gospel.

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Small groups within parishes, where people can truly share faith and life in a loving and personal encounter with each other and the Lord, is an effective method to form missionary disciples. Adult

formation, on both the diocesan and parish level, is also greatly needed, so that our people are growing in their own understanding of God's beautiful revelation to us in Christ, and also are confidently able to explain and express their beliefs and faith to others.

Some parishes visit homes door-to-door, others offer evenings of invitation to disengaged Catholics, and some have study groups or even committees to enable our people to go and reach out to those who have drifted away from the Church or have never really heard the Gospel in the first place. Clearly, an evangelizing parish seeks innovative and inspiring ways to engage, dialogue and invite others to the faith community.

While we can embrace particular programs, events and practices which enhance our evangelization efforts, this missionary call to proclaim the Gospel must be threaded through everything we do. How do we make our catechizing, preaching, youth activities, outreach to the poor, and even our meetings more intentionally and dynamically evangelizing? Evangelization is so necessary, urgent and primary that I ask each parish to include it in their synod plan in some fashion.



Evangelization Key Initiatives and Strategies:

(1) Educate and develop small faith-sharing communities at the parish level to provide opportunities for people to share their faith stories, develop relationships, and make their parish a more vital faith home.

(2) Make the Catholic faith more relevant for youth by creating engaging faith activities and contemporary events in which they can participate.

(3a) Provide apologetics formation in order to intelligently promote and explain Catholic teachings and beliefs.

(3b) Intentionally reconnect with and provide support for marginalized and disengaged Catholics.

(3c) Provide energizing adult formation opportunities in the diocese.

(3d) Enhance evangelization through strong inter-parish communication and networking, celebrating that we are all dynamic parts of the Church of the Diocese of Gary.



SACRAMENTS, PRAYER AND WORSHIP

In these priorities, we see, again, a deep recognition of the need for robust and effective formation. We want to help all parents come to know and practice the faith in such a radiant way that their children naturally become missionary disciples of the Lord, loving and serving Jesus Christ. Many Catholics deeply desire to grow in their prayer life, but do not know how. Helping everyone to understand the theology, spirituality and beauty of the Eucharist needs to be an ongoing priority, since greater insight will lead naturally to full, conscious and active participation. The Eucharist is the central activity of the Church, our participation in the redemptive gift of self, which Jesus offers both to the Father and to us in the Paschal Mystery.

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The priorities also express the need to help separated and divorced Catholics feel they are an essential part of the community of faith. Their painful experiences may lead to a separation from the community, or cast doubts as to if they are still welcome to participate.

How do we help these brothers and sisters to find authentic healing, lasting closure and inner peace?

We certainly need sacramental policies and procedures, but we must be as welcoming and accommodating as we can when people approach us for the sacraments, especially baptisms, marriages and funerals. How do we help people who have perhaps lived on the margins of the Church to experience a warm and loving invitation to embrace a life of faith in the community?

So often, those sacramental moments are precious opportunities of encounter if we approach them as such. How can we make the sacraments more accessible and inviting to our people?

Sacraments, Prayer and Worship Key Initiatives and Strategies:

(1a) Responding to their baptismal call, parents are called upon to be primary teachers of the faith to their children. They have the principal duty and responsibility of bringing up their children in the Catholic faith. Emphasize the role of parents in their children's formation and growth in the faith by instilling in them that faith formation is a family affair.

(1b) Encourage a stronger connection between faith and prayer by providing opportunities to teach the fundamentals of prayer, and offer a variety of prayer experiences across the diocese that awaken the full potential of a Christian prayer life.

(2a) In light of their baptismal calling, encourage youth and adults toward full, conscious and active participation in the Mass.

(2b) Realizing Pope Francis' expression to “meet people wherever they are,” extend a heartfelt welcome to divorced Catholics in order to embrace and support them, reminding them, as well as ourselves, that they are still a meaningful part of their faith community.



DISCIPLESHIP/FORMATION

As outlined above, formation is a key pivot in the life of a missionary disciple. If we are not formed in the Good News of Jesus and the teachings of our faith, we cannot adequately fulfill our mission. The important unity of faith and action is evident in these priorities.

Service projects, formation offerings, and apostolic opportunities for post-confirmation young people help to blend head and heart knowledge into an integrated response to Jesus Christ and his invitation to live abundantly.

As expressed in so many other contexts, our Catholic schools, religious education programs, and adult formation offerings need to consistently strive for excellence, integration and a sense of mission, i.e. how do we live out what we have come to learn and this Jesus we have come to know? Ongoing formation for our teachers, catechists and presenters must be a high priority.

The question must be asked. Do the young people graduating from our schools, being formed in our catechetical programs, and ultimately receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation know, understand and live their faith as children of God? Many do, but we can never complacently accept the status quo. We must creatively develop ways to keep them dynamically engaged as they move into young adulthood.

Discipleship/Formation Key Initiatives and Strategies:

(1) Establish opportunities for families, adolescents and young adults to get involved in service projects that fulfill their missions as disciples, but also benefit others and our communities.

(2) Create post-confirmation opportunities for teens and young adults to continue their faith journey and remain active in the Catholic Church.

(3) Develop comprehensive and inclusive diocesan and parish adult formation opportunities, featuring expert speakers addressing a wide variety of faith and social justice topics helpful to individuals, members of traditional families and members of non-traditional (non-nuclear) families.



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SOCIAL TEACHING

The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church has often been called “a best-kept secret” because so few people know these fundamental principles for building a just, peaceful and human social order which affirms and serves the dignity and flourishing of every person. During the synod voting, we were all struck by the significant votes the first priority received: the need to form our own people.

When I view the works of charity, justice and peace lived out within our parishes, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Charities, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, the Knights of Columbus and so many other groups and individuals, I am inspired and awed. As a diocese, we are committed to this integral expression of the Kingdom of God in action.

As fruits of the synod, we are building Tabor House in Gary, a partnership of Habitat for Humanity of Northwest Indiana,

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Catholic Charities and the diocese to allow struggling families to find a home and needed resources to reach self-sufficiency and transformation.

We are also establishing a new Women’s Care Center in Merrillville to serve the needs of women in crisis pregnancy and their children. The enthusiastic response to these projects shows me that we can continue to grow our social outreach exponentially. This passion in our diocese is truly a blessing for us and the wider communities that we seek to serve.





Social Teaching Initiatives and Strategies:

(1) Educate and evangelize people on Catholic social teaching as a “constitutive” part of the Church’s mission to the world in order for them to better understand their role in proclaiming, preserving and protecting the moral vision for our society as a people of God. Actively committing to peace and justice is essential to living our faith life with authenticity and fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus.

(2) Develop and implement a strategic

communication plan among all parishes within the Diocese of Gary that focuses on building awareness related to charitable organizations, parish ministries and social causes, as well as educates parishioners on various programs and services available to those in need.

(3) Engage families, adults and youth to be active parishioners within each parish community by providing programs for them to join that align their passions and make a positive impact on their neighbors.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

As the domestic Church and the icon of Trinitarian life, marriage and family are top priorities for the Church. All of us have parents and were born into a family; most of us would say that we first experienced the stirrings of God's love and the beginning of faith within our families. Clearly, marriage and family are experiencing profound cultural shifts and challenges. Fewer young people get married at all, for a variety of reasons. Marital separation and divorce are continuing sources of pain for many couples and for our communities. Many children live in single parent families and the legalization of same-sex marriage raises many questions.

In light of all of this, our synod priorities are calling us to foster Catholic marriage and family life

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through support, communication and formation. Preparing engaged couples for the sacrament of marriage is imperative, but so is the more remote preparation of forming all of our young people in the beautiful truth of human sexuality, procreation and

marital love. In a society that has reduced sexuality in many ways to individual choices of pleasure-seeking, which are not open to committed love and new life, how do we proclaim the Good News of love, marriage and family, as God has revealed and as the Catholic Church articulates it? Secondly, how do we minister to and with the people that do not "fit" the model of traditional

marriage and family?

We are trying to restructure marriage preparation for those parishes that lack the resources to do it well on their own. Can we embrace a joint creative effort to make all of our programs even more effective?





Marriage and Family Initiatives and Strategies:

- (1) Foster a community of Catholic families throughout the diocese and equip these families to live Christ-centered lives through events, programming and online resources.
- (2) Develop diocesan and parish programs, as well as online resources, to prepare men and women for the sacrament of marriage.
- (3) Provide pastoral support and resources for those navigating troubled marriages, separation and divorce.

YOUNG CATHOLICS

A top priority for most engaged Catholics today is our young people. We are concerned about their participation in the life of the Church, the social pressures of promiscuity, materialism and drug use that pull many lives under. We worry about their safety, health and salvation in a world that is confusing, violent and misguided in many ways. How do we really help them to mature in Christ and take their rightful place in the Church?

I know many young Catholics who are deeply committed to their faith, participate generously in the



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life of the parish and help with service projects. The young are not simply the object of our ministry, but truly collaborators with us who can reach their peers with great effectiveness. How does the Church help them to do that even better?

Our diocese offers much for our youth on the bigger level, but youth ministry on the parish level is a challenge. We need to call, train and support more youth leaders to help serve in our parishes. If confirmation remains in eighth grade, how do we continue to catechize and form our public high school students in the faith? How do we make youth ministry an integrated reality in all aspects of parish life, not a parallel track that is somehow separate? How do we change the disturbing truth that almost 80 percent of Catholic young adults disengage from the Church by their mid-20s? In what way can we keep connected with our college students, especially those who move away from home? Our chosen

priorities speak to all of these concerns and questions.

Young Catholics Initiatives and Strategies:

(1) Provide young Catholics with opportunities to gather and experience the richness of the Catholic Church and her teachings at the parish, regional and diocesan levels.

(2) Develop collaborative strategies for youth and young adult ministries that allow youth to experience the faith beyond the parish boundaries, including events and ministries that are shared – parish, deanery, regional, diocesan, national or international.

(3) Develop intentional ministry strategies that animate and inspire confirmed high school teens and young adults in their 20s and 30s.

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is an integral part of being a missionary disciple who evangelizes. As we fall more deeply in love with God and discover all we possess is a generous gift from his Heart, we readily use our time, talents and treasure to build the Kingdom of God. Our priorities in this area reflect the need to inculcate that sense of discipleship, which readily gives without measure for the sake of the mission. People in our diocese give most generously in a multitude of ways. How can we expand the circle of service in which every Catholic feels fully fired up to contribute to the mission of Jesus Christ? How do we help every member of the Church to discover, value and share their gifts? How can a pervading spirit of gratitude to God transform our minds and hearts in a revolution of self-giving?

Stewardship Initiatives and Strategies:

(1) Form and train parishioners in stewardship, encouraging the embrace of a discipleship lifestyle generous with contribution of time, talent and treasure.

(2) Organize and spearhead an inter-parish resource sharing system in which the parishes throughout the diocese can cluster, collaborate and share their unique gifts and strengths for stewardship.

(3) Provide opportunities for parishioners to become disciples of Jesus Christ, which naturally leads to the practice of stewardship.

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VOCATIONS AND LEADERSHIP FORMATION

An integral part of our Catholic mission is to help our young people discover their vocation within the Church, which begins with our identity as adopted children of God, born again in the waters of baptism. We need to consistently create a culture of vocation in which every young Catholic naturally discerns the call they have received from the Lord.

When our families, schools and religious education programs actively form our young people in the beauty, truth and goodness of the Catholic faith, many will start asking the question, “What does God want me to be (*one’s vocation*) and do (*one’s mission*) for him?” In the context of this vocational discernment, people will follow the call to priesthood, religious life, diaconate, lay ecclesial ministry and marriage.

Our top priorities reflect the need to consciously and creatively foster that culture of vocation in which our young people can adequately hear and generously respond to the voice of the Lord. How many graduates of our Catholic schools and religious education programs have become priests, sisters, brothers or lay ecclesial ministers in recent decades? I applaud the efforts of our vocation office, priests, teachers, catechists and parents and ask how can we help our young people ever more effectively to discover their vocation and mission?

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Vocations and Leadership Formation Initiatives and Strategies:

(1) Proclaim the Good News by example and promote an atmosphere of “right relationships” to provide positive role models for vocations.

(2) Educate and inspire youth on discipleship, and they will understand and appreciate the different vocations.

(3) Valuing the baptismal call of the laity to assist in the mission of the Church, develop a plan that promotes and empowers the role of lay leadership within each parish.

SYNOD IMPLEMENTATION

The celebration of our first synod is truly a transformational moment for the Diocese of Gary. The hard work and selfless dedication generously offered by so many people has both fueled this spiritual process and renewed our commitment to the Gospel mission entrusted to each of us. I have been so encouraged by the enthusiasm, imagination and openness of our priests, lay leaders and people to new ideas and practices to grow the faith in ourselves and our parishes.

Many communities, under the guidance of their pastors and pastoral councils, have already begun thinking, strategizing and dreaming new ways of living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of this effort is truly the work of the Holy Spirit.

In order to ensure the synod's fruitful implementation, we are shifting our focus to the task of incarnating the priorities and ideals given to us on the levels of the diocese, the parish and the individual, as we seek to grow in our missionary discipleship. I am asking every parish to create and implement its own Synod Pastoral Plan, since local leadership knows best the strengths, challenges and deficits of the community.

In the principle of subsidiarity, there will be no "top-down" uniform plan that everyone must follow in the same way. As we embark on this new stage of our journey, please remember: ***Everyone cannot do everything, but everyone can do something.*** The synod initiatives provide us a broad range of pastoral possibilities to choose from and to adapt to local circumstances.

To help facilitate this process of discernment, decision and implementation, we are creating a new post-synod structure, which includes a Synod Implementation Committee, Think Tanks and Pastoral Consultants. This framework will help parishes create their own unique Synod Plan, adapted to their own identity and situation, with appropriate support and resources from the diocese, building on what they already do well and addressing needs that are still unmet.

To guide this ongoing process, I am forming a special Synod Implementation Commission, consisting of eight individuals (priest, deacon and laity) deeply committed to implement the full synod vision that emerged during Pentecost weekend. Their primary task is to ensure that our diocese is committed more deeply to the all-encompassing mission of Christ and to the dynamic growth of the Church in service to everyone, as outlined in the synod process.

To accomplish the mission of the Church, all dioceses,





parishes and institutions need to consistently examine priorities and evaluate activities to best discern concretely how the Holy Spirit is challenging us to respond to the needs of the times. This has been the great task of the synod. We must reflect upon how we pray in community, proclaim the Gospel, assist the poor, work for a more just social and economic order, form our children and young people in the faith and grow in our spiritual lives to decide what pastoral initiatives must be implemented now in order to lay the foundation for the future.

To provide resources to parishes, we are establishing eight distinct Think Tanks to assist us in the eight areas of our faith life which stand out as defining principles of our core mission and apostolic activity: Evangelization; Sacraments, Prayer & Worship; Discipleship/Formation; Social Teaching; Marriage & Family; Young Catholics; Stewardship; and Vocations & Leadership Formation. These groups would consist of eight persons - led by a priest, deacon or lay ecclesial minister - who will compile and communicate concrete ideas, lists of helpful resources, programs, books, web links and best practices to assist parishes and institutions. For example, if a parish wants to delve more deeply into adult formation, the Think Tank for Discipleship/Formation will provide necessary and helpful resources. The role of the Think Tanks is to

propose, not to impose, so that ideas and suggestions can be easily adapted and implemented at a local level.

Finally, to serve as a resource to the entire diocese, some of the department heads at the Pastoral Center and several permanent deacons will serve as Parish Consultants. These gifted individuals will dedicate quality time to meet on-site with priests, deacons, pastoral staff, parish councils and parishioners to assist them in the creation of their parish synod plan and its implementation.

We want the leaders and resources at the Pastoral Center to truly be of service to parish leadership in this transformative endeavor. The Parish Consultants' role is not to dictate, control or force parish leadership in any particular direction, but rather, to facilitate, support and guide the creation of the parish plan, which parishes themselves will create.

This planning process will be fully shared with the priests, deacons and parish leadership in September. Each pastor will be asked to form a small Planning Team, which will meet regularly to help formulate the parish synod plan, with input from parish leaders and members.

The goal is that each parish will have created, written and submitted their Synod Plan by Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018.

All this will eventually lead to Pastoral Visits by me to each of our parishes and Catholic institutions, perhaps beginning in Fall 2018 or early 2019. Working with the priests and pastoral team, I will schedule extended visits to be with the staff and pastoral council, visit schools, nursing homes and the homebound, celebrate Mass, administer the sacrament of confirmation and anointing of the sick, and to meet with parishioners and others who are served in any way by the Church's local ministry.

These pastoral visits will allow me to listen, encourage and support the parishes' efforts to live out the vision of the Gospel and their own synod plan as we share success stories and identify obstacles.

I have asked the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) to assist me and the Diocese of Gary in implementing the proposed plans. We need to build

off the momentum and excitement that the synod experience has created and to support the parishes and institutions in implementing strategies that align well with the eight areas of ministry. CLI will help lead the effort and train the staff so that we can enter fully into the process that will allow the spirit of the Risen Christ to be unleashed in us and through us as we strive to live the transforming power of the Gospel. I am profoundly grateful for the faith, love and hope of our leaders and people. The Holy Spirit is with us, as we boldly step forward with minds and hearts renewed.

CONCLUSION

The Synod of the Diocese of Gary is both a process and an event, both a deeply personal call to ongoing Gospel conversion and a broadly communitarian discernment and decision. We will continue to ask the Holy Spirit to show us the way forward as we boldly seek to live the Good News of Jesus Christ, both in the Church and the world with renewed zeal, love and faith. For two thousand years, the Church has lived missionary discipleship, fulfilling Jesus' final command to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations." Christians have always stepped boldly into the horizon of the future, trusting that Jesus will be with us always.

This future will ask much of us, especially our priests, deacons and lay ministers. We will need to collaborate and work together in new ways, come to a much deeper level of co-responsibility for the life of the whole diocese, surrender any parochialism, competition or isolation that keeps us divided, break out of the torpor that often says, "We've always done it this way," shatter the complacency that can keep us in a spiritual rut, and be more proactive and inviting in our evangelization efforts.

If we do not embrace such a vision, our local Church will simply continue a slow and steady slide towards a painful diminishment of the faith in our people.

When Simon Peter and the early Church, newly anointed in the Holy Spirit, stepped into the Jerusalem streets and proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ as the new meaning of human history, the Gospel's evangelizing power was unleashed into the world. The profession of the Good News of God's love for us in Jesus formed new churches, sent fresh disciples, built cathedrals, hospitals and universities, commissioned missionaries, and eventually reached the rich soil of Northwest Indiana. We are the inheritors of this remarkable legacy of Catholic faith. This opportune moment of the synod is

the time for us to let the Spirit of the risen Christ be unleashed in us and through us as we live the transforming power of the Gospel.

Through this letter, I formally accept and endorse the pastoral initiatives of our diocesan synod and present them with hope and gratitude to the priests, deacons, religious, lay ecclesial ministers and lay faithful of our diocese, entrusting each of you with the joyful responsibility of embracing this

Gospel vision and putting these hopes and dreams, engendered by the Holy Spirit, into bold and creative action. I look forward with great anticipation towards the marvelous ways that God will inspire us to be ever more faithful, generous and creative in our efforts to live the Gospel and build the Kingdom of God.

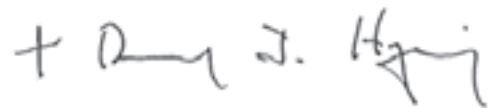
All of this effort, planning and work will only

bear fruit to the extent that we each open ourselves to the grace of the Father, the mercy of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit. The synod will succeed to

the extent that we become the saints that God has called us to be, through lives of intense prayer, sacramental worship, virtuous action and generous service. Changing structures and programs without changing hearts remains incomplete.

I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to accompany us in this pilgrim path of growth in missionary discipleship, as she breathed her Fiat to the will of the Lord and gave flesh to Jesus Christ. May the intercession of the Mother of God make all of our synod plans and initiatives bear fruit, glorifying God and serving the dignity and salvation of our neighbor.

In joy and thanksgiving, I offer everyone my episcopal blessing!



Immaculate Virgin Mary, you are our mother and the model of missionary discipleship for all of us in the Diocese of Gary.

We entrust to you all of our post-synod efforts and activities as we give thanks and praise to God for all our priests, deacons, religious and laity.

May you, who are the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, intercede for us as we strive to rekindle the fire of faith in Northwest Indiana and beyond.

Help transform us into the image and likeness of your Beloved Son, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, filled with evangelical zeal and apostolic commitment to reach out to all peoples - especially the lost and forgotten, the hurting and wounded, the marginalized and indifferent - with the saving message of the Gospel.

Amen.





Photos by Northwest Indiana Catholic