
“I believed,
therefore I
spoke”

(2 Corinthians 4:13)

A Pastoral Letter on the
New Evangelization in
the Archdiocese of
Saint Paul and
Minneapolis

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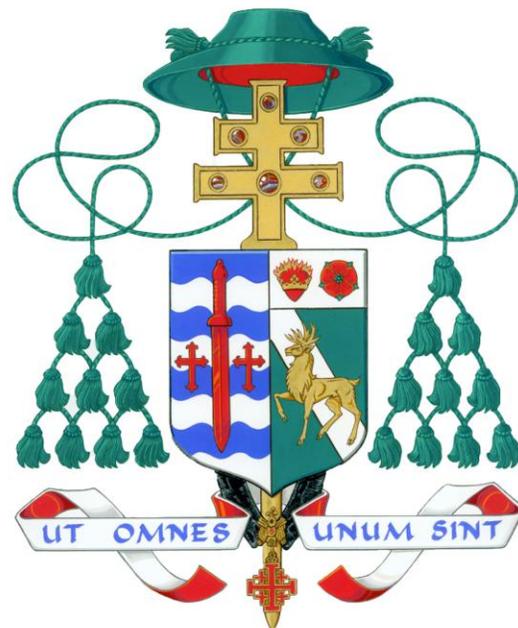


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Introduction

“Since, then, we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we too believe and therefore speak, knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us with you in his presence” (2 Cor 4:13-14).

St. Paul writes in this way to the Corinthians because he wants to speak about the power of God’s grace, which is constantly transforming his life even in the midst of difficulty. St. Paul was a man driven, impelled really, by a desire that others would know the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). In fact, he believed that he had an obligation to preach the Gospel, with dire consequences to follow if this obligation was not met. As the Apostle himself says, “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).

My brothers and sisters in this great Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, we, too, have this same obligation. Like our patron St. Paul, we, too, have believed and therefore we must speak. Our Lord Jesus has given us, his disciples, a charge — we must preach the Gospel to the whole world. As the words of Jesus written in stone on the front of our Cathedral say, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has declared this coming year to be a Year of Faith for the Universal Church. The year begins October 11, 2012, marking both the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The year will end November 24, 2013, on the Solemnity of Christ the King. This Year of Faith will begin with the Synod of Bishops convoked by Pope Benedict on the theme, “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” In convoking this year, the Holy Father has invited us as a Church to renew our commitment to the New Evangelization and to “rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”¹

When I first heard the announcement of the Year of Faith, my thoughts turned to my first pastor as a newly ordained priest, Father Bob Bretz, now gone to God. Father Bretz was a true believer in door-to-door evangelization. He recruited half a dozen women in the parish and gave each one several registration cards of inactive parishioners. Together, they would then find an opportunity over several weeks to drop in on these people, inquire about their spiritual needs and then invite them back to church on Sunday.

Every month, the small group would gather back in Father’s office to share their experiences and to pray for those who had been visited as well as for each other. This truly was faith in action and I learned from their example not to be afraid to ask another about his or her practice of the faith, with the hope of inviting their fuller participation in the Church as the Body of Christ.

¹ “Porta Fidei,” 7.

As I stated throughout our strategic planning process, which I began shortly after I became archbishop, the purpose of restructuring our parishes and archdiocesan resources was not primarily the downsizing of parishes or simple financial survival. Rather, the chief goal lay in strengthening and re-focusing our resources so that we could more effectively begin to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to the culture around us.

With this present pastoral letter, a letter meant to invite us as a local Church to engage and embrace this Year of Faith fully and actively, I urge every priest, every deacon, every religious, every member of the faithful, every mother and father, every young adult, every high school student — ALL OF US — to become part of the New Evangelization. By means of this letter, I want to convey the central importance of the work of evangelization in our life as a Church, and describe how parishes are to become truly evangelizing communities of faith, so that we might be equipped as Catholics to share the love of Jesus Christ and to invite others into the greatest drama of human life — the pilgrimage of faith.

Part I: Encountering the Living Jesus Changes Everything

“Man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (Rom 10:10).

Within just a few years after Jesus ascended into heaven, Saul of Tarsus was headed for Damascus, authorized as he was to arrest members of the new sect made up of followers of Jesus. But along the way, everything changed, for on that day, he met Jesus Christ; hit by a bolt of lightning, he realized that Jesus was alive, and that he was the Son of God. Saul came to a living faith that would make him St. Paul, the great preacher of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Faith for St. Paul was not just an assent to a set of ideas, but rather a real relationship with a living person. Throughout his life, Paul would come to know not only that Jesus was the Son of God, the redeemer, but that Jesus' love was personal. For St. Paul, Jesus Christ is “the Son of God who has loved *me* and given himself up for *me*” (Gal 2:20, emphasis added). Therefore, St. Paul would be willing to give up everything for the sake of knowing this love of Christ: “I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil 3:8-9). These are the words of a man who indeed knows the love of God!

While most people do not experience the same blinding light from heaven, it is nonetheless true that St. Paul's experience of a life-changing encounter with the living Jesus has been repeated over and over again throughout the centuries as millions upon millions have discovered the reality of that love which St. Paul sacrificed everything for.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, has pointed out that growing in faith means “not only the content of the faith, but also the act by which we choose to entrust ourselves fully to God, in complete freedom.”²

Sometimes as Catholics we have often focused on the objective content of the faith, more than on the importance of a personal relationship. Jesus Christ is still alive today, and through the power of his Holy Spirit in our midst, we can experience his love personally giving our lives deep purpose and peace. We experience it through the power of prayer or in a word of Scripture, which penetrates us and strengthens us to know we are loved by him. We experience it in the liturgy, when we reverently unite our lives to the offering on the altar and approach Holy Communion knowing that Our Lord sees us and desires to come to us through his Body and his Blood. We experience it in the confessional when we humbly confess our sins to the priest and receive the deep peace that can only come from knowing our sins are truly forgiven. The living Jesus desires today that we would know of this love in a personal way. He is longing to share it with us. We need only to turn our lives toward him and begin to live as his friends.

² “Porta Fidei,” 10.

Even though this relationship of Jesus is personal, it is never meant to be private. Living our faith in Jesus means not only surrendering our lives personally to his love but choosing to stand as brothers and sisters with those who believe in the Lord and witness to that love.

The Lord is most fully encountered in the community of disciples which we call the Church, a Church that Jesus himself founded to carry on his mission in the world and to whom he promised the constant guidance of his Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26). Since the day of Pentecost we can see that to believe in Jesus means to join our lives with those who are called to proclaim his love to the world. This is what the early Church did, and this is what the Holy Spirit is calling us to do today in a way that is ever new yet always faithful to the truth of Jesus. As Pope Paul VI said some years after Vatican II, “[The Church] exists in order to evangelize.”³

The work of evangelizing is, in fact, the natural reaction to Jesus’ love. Just like the Samaritan woman at the well, who, when she discovered that Jesus was the messiah, left her bucket and went and told everyone about Jesus (see John 4), so also, when we truly experience that Jesus loves us and is calling us into a living friendship with him, we desire to share this good news with everyone we meet. When we have really been touched by love or when we rediscover the wonder of God’s love, we find it becomes a fire within us that must be shared.

³ “Evangelii Nuntiandi,” 14.

Part II: Everyone Is Called to Be an Evangelist

“If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!” (1 Cor 9:16).

My brothers and sisters, how many people do not yet know the love of Jesus Christ! How many people right in our midst have never experienced the true meaning he can give to their lives, the joy of knowing his forgiveness in their unworthiness, his calming presence in their trials, his hope in their times of despair? We have been given in the love of Christ the greatest gift in the world, and we are called to share this gift with others. The fact is that every Christian is called to be an evangelist.⁴

Sometimes the word “evangelist” conjures up bad connotations in our minds, because we think of television personalities who become rich by their demonstrative preaching, or someone who forcefully tries to make others accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But as Catholics we must remember that evangelism is our word! Its original meaning, as it pertains to the earliest years of the Church, refers to the proclamation that the day of redemption had arrived — this is, in fact, the Good News!

Hence, we call those who wrote the Gospels “evangelists.” Our own Cathedral has four enormous statues of these men — Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — one in each of its major pillars. This architectural feature shows how the Gospel is the pillar of the Catholic Church, and how we pass through the reception of this proclamation into the choirs of heaven, depicted as it is in the Cathedral dome. An evangelist is someone who announces the good news of Christ’s kingdom of love.

By saying everyone is called to be an evangelist, we are saying that everyone is called to know the Good News of Christ’s love in their heart and to desire to share that Good News with others, and thereby invite them into a relationship of eternal significance. St. Paul says, “The love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14) and as Pope Benedict comments on these words, “it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize.”⁵

I have often heard Catholics quote the famous phrase attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words.” This saying captures a very important truth: People should be able to see that I love Jesus by the way I live my life. But sometimes this can be used as an excuse not to speak about the Good News of Jesus Christ. The fact is that St. Francis himself often preached with words as did Jesus who told us, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32).

⁴ Many Church documents make this clear: “Lumen Gentium,” 16-17; “Ad Gentes,” 23, 35, “Evangelii Nuntiandi,” 66-73, “Christifideles Laici,” 34, 58.

⁵ “Porta Fidei,” 7.

There is always a risk in sharing our faith with someone else, but if we really love our neighbor, we will want to share with them what is most dear to us and what is necessary for their salvation. As Blessed John Paul II pointed out, "Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!"⁶ Especially during this Year of Faith, the Holy Father is calling the whole Church to profess publically what it is that we believe.⁷ This means that as individuals we must not be afraid to speak about the one whom our hearts love as well as to proclaim the truth which sets us free.

How else will people come to know the love of Jesus? As St. Paul says, "But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?" (Rom 10:14).

The truth is that most people do not come to faith because they experience only a part of the Church's message through the media or some other form of public communication. Such presentations most often do not even begin to convey the full richness of the Gospel message and its way of life. But Jesus himself showed us that most people come to faith through a personal encounter (as the Scriptures show with Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman and Simon the Pharisee).

Pope Paul VI said it so clearly: "In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?"⁸ We are called to provide this personal encounter with Jesus by our willingness to share our experience of faith.

⁶ "Redemptoris Missio," 2.

⁷ "Porta Fidei," 8.

⁸ "Evangelii Nuntiandi," 46.

Part III: The Work of Sharing Christ: Evangelization and the New Evangelization

“To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ, and to bring to light (for all) what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things” (Eph 3:8-9).

The Church has been evangelizing ever since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. For much of her history she has had to focus on bringing the Gospel to those who had never heard of Jesus Christ, and this is still very much a need today. However, since the Second Vatican Council, the Popes have been consistently speaking of the need for a “New Evangelization,” which is an evangelization directed at those who have grown up in what were once Christian countries but who have lost their fervor for the faith.

As Pope Paul VI wrote in 1975, on the 10th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, “Today there is a very large number of baptized people who for the most part have not formally renounced their Baptism but who are entirely indifferent to it and not living in accordance with it.”⁹ Such a way of life is indeed a practical kind of agnosticism, and it must be countered through the loving challenge of the Gospel.

To be sure, the primary target of this outreach is meant for those who do not believe or who have walked away from the practice of the faith. But there is a secondary target for the work of evangelization, as the late Cardinal Avery Dulles has pointed out, and that is to bring the influence of the Good News to bear upon a particular culture, by means of education, pastoral care and social action. Evangelizing individuals will be all the more difficult if the culture is not supportive of values and beliefs rooted in the Gospel.¹⁰

Blessed John Paul II consistently proclaimed the need for this New Evangelization throughout his 26-year pontificate. Echoing Paul VI nearly verbatim, His Holiness pointed out that there are many countries which used to be considered predominately Christian but where we now find “entire groups of the baptized [who] have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization.’”¹¹

My brothers and sisters, it must be admitted — Blessed John Paul II’s words apply to our archdiocese as well. Many of our fellow Catholics have drifted away from the Church and are still searching for meaning in their lives. These may be our friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, or even our sons and daughters. Life away from a real relationship with the person of

⁹ “Evangelii Nuntiandi,” 56.

¹⁰ Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. “Vatican II and Evangelization,” in “The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles.” Edited by Steven Boguslawski, OP and Ralph Martin, (New York: Paulist Press, 2008) 1-12.

¹¹ “Redemptoris Missio,” 33

Jesus Christ fails to fulfill the ardent longings of the heart. And yet, many do not recognize this void as the source of their unfulfilled longing and suffering.

How many people do you know who say, either explicitly or by their actions, that they are not fulfilled through the Church and have sadly given up on the sacraments? How many have stopped going to Mass and never consider seeking the ocean of mercy and profound peace found in confession?

It is up to those who have been touched deeply by Christ's friendship and love — and experience the reward of a full participation and life in the Church — to invite, in a welcoming and loving way, these fellow Catholics to rediscover the depth and healing path of our Catholic faith. The solutions to their greatest longings — finding meaning and purpose, a sense of belonging, peace and healing, inner strength to face their challenges, and freedom from sin — remain in the place they have always been, in an intimate and loving personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let us be clear: the situation in our country in this 21st century is urgent; our culture is rapidly drawing many away from the Good News of Jesus Christ. Researchers tell us that only 23 percent of U.S. Catholics attend Mass each week.¹² These same researchers tell us that the most common reasons for Catholics not attending Mass each week lies not with their disagreement over controversial issues, but rather from the fact that they have simply gradually slipped away from the faith.¹³ The statistics about our young people are even more concerning, since the same research shows that as many as six out of 10 who grow up practicing their faith fall away as young adults.¹⁴ This is truly disturbing.

What is it that draws people away from the practice of their faith? Studies show many factors, but among the most compelling are secularization, materialism and individualism.

There are strong strains of secularization in our society, strains that treat religious belief purely as a private affair while at the same time accepting many of the beliefs from the predominant secular culture as unquestionably true. Even many people who claim to believe in Christ find their moral compass more from modern society than from the Gospel. The attitude seems to be that it is fine if someone wants to believe in God, but that belief ought not make demands on how others should live. We see this so clearly in our current battles around the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage. Pope Benedict XVI cautioned against this secularist attitude in our culture when he spoke to the U.S. bishops on his pastoral visit to our country in 2008: "Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates

¹² Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), "Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among U.S. Catholics," CARA, cara.georgetown.edu/sacraments.html (accessed, July 2012).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See David Kinnaman, "You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church... and Rethinking Faith," (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel."¹⁵

In addition, we must admit that the materialism of our culture also presents an obstacle to living in Christ. There is a great temptation in the great wealth of our country to seek our happiness and satisfaction in material things. Material things, including the advances of science and culture, can create a false sense of self-reliance, i.e., the belief that I don't need God because human beings can find all that they need through their own efforts. This way of thinking will ultimately leave us empty and even hopeless. Again Pope Benedict spoke about this to our country: "Without God, who alone bestows upon us what we by ourselves cannot attain (cf. 'Spes Salvi'), our lives are ultimately empty. People need to be constantly reminded to cultivate a relationship with him who came that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10)."¹⁶

Finally, individualism creates many difficulties for living the faith in our culture. We live in a society that idolizes personal freedom and self-gratification. The freedom to fulfill myself, to do what I want to do, is valued far above what God wants me to do. This is ultimately an abuse of freedom and leads one away from the real answers to the deepest longings we have as human beings. True freedom is not the ability to do what I want whenever I want; rather, true freedom is the ability to do what is right, and true happiness will only be found in doing God's will for my life. Freedom cannot be separated from the truth, or else it becomes a search for self-fulfillment in selfish desires where happiness always remains elusive.

In the midst of all these ideologies and forces which draw humanity away from the Gospel, Christians stand as beacons of hope and witnesses to the true life that Jesus offers everyone who turns to him with a repentant heart. The Church and her teachings seem completely counter-cultural today, because the culture has wandered so far away from Gospel values. But Christ has called you and me, in this time, to offer to our brothers and sisters in our own neighborhoods and families a living hope. We cannot simply stand by and watch our country, our neighbors and even many of our own family members abandon the faith of Jesus Christ.

As Blessed John Paul II exclaimed already more than 20 years ago, "I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples."¹⁷

The New Evangelization is a call to each and every one of us to live our faith fully and to be ready to share that faith with others. You and I must come to know deeply the peace and joy that results in our living in Jesus' friendship, and we must be ready to witness to this joy to those around us. As St. Peter said in his first letter, "Always be ready to give an explanation to

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, "Address of the Celebration of Vespers with the Bishops of the United States of America," www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_bishops-usa_en.html [accessed, July 26, 2012].

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Redemptoris Missio," 3.

anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (1 Pt 3:15). Only if we all become evangelists can we hope to influence our culture as Christ surely desires us to do. We must be salt and light in the world.

Part IV: The New Evangelization in the Archdiocese: Challenges and Opportunities

“When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).

The history of our great archdiocese has been marked by brave men and women who endured many hardships, living in very difficult circumstances, in order to try and bring the Gospel to the native peoples of our area and the immigrants who would come after them.

The Twin Cities have memorialized the names of many of them. Hennepin Avenue is named after Father Louis Hennepin, a Franciscan priest who paddled up the Mississippi River in 1680 and gave St. Anthony Falls its name. While not remaining long nor succeeding in the way he had hoped, he nevertheless endured much for the sake of the Gospel.

More than 150 years later, Father Lucien Galtier, whose last name is familiar to most residents of the Twin Cities, arrived by steamboat to serve the first few Catholics in the area, opening the first parish at St. Peter’s in Mendota. Recognizing the difficult circumstances facing him, he knew that his “mission and life must henceforth be a career of privation, hard trials, and suffering . . .” requiring of him “patience, labor, and resignation.”¹⁸ In the midst of his many struggles, he often pondered the words of St. Paul, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

When it came time to establish a second chapel just down river from Mendota in a little landing called “Pigs Eye,” these words would inspire him to name the chapel after St. Paul. Eventually, this would be the name that everyone began to call the little town by the river. That little log chapel would become our first Cathedral.

In 1841, another significant yet lesser-known figure, Father Augustin Ravoux, began full-time work with the Dakota Native Americans. He worked strenuously to learn their language, experiencing how difficult it was to work through an interpreter. Laboring through such austere conditions as housing without heat, he managed to put together a prayer book and a catechism in their native tongue. Still, few conversions came, and soon his bishop had to assign him to the pastoral care of the slow but steady stream of immigrants of European descent. Under Ravoux’s prudent care, he not only met their spiritual needs but he also acquired land to enable the Church’s outreach to expand in the future, all the while maintaining his concern and care for his beloved native peoples.

This same Ravoux would be the one to prepare for the arrival of our first bishop, Joseph Cretin, on July 2, 1851. The bishop started his ministry with three priests and three seminarians in an area that covered 166,000 square miles stretching all the way to the Missouri River in present day North and South Dakota! On November 3 of that same year, Bishop Cretin would welcome

¹⁸ “Galtier to Grace,” January 14, 1864, Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Grace Papers. Quoted in Marvin O’Connell, “Pilgrims to the Northland.” (Notre Dame, IN: U. of Notre Dame Press) 2009, p.21.

the first group of religious sisters to our area, four Sisters of St. Joseph. These sisters soon began our first Catholic schools with a minimum of resources. In 1853, they also opened St. Joseph's Hospital, Minnesota's first health care institution.

These heroic men and women sacrificed to provide the seedbed for the Church in which we live today. They met many challenges of travel and survival in primitive environments, but always with deep faith and pastoral zeal, precisely because they wanted to make the name of Jesus known and loved. Today, we find ourselves in radically different circumstances. Yet, we, too, should be motivated by the same desire that moved, indeed, impelled Hennepin, Galtier, Ravoux and those heroic sisters.

The initial evangelization of our region was carried out by priests and religious sisters who were sent out to sow the first seeds of faith on their own, directed to do so by their bishop and superiors. In our day, the Second Vatican Council has made clear that the task of evangelization belongs not only to priests and religious, but also to the laity.

As Blessed John Paul II exhorted us at the outset of this third Christian millennium, "In a special way, it will be necessary to discover ever more fully the specific vocation of the laity, called 'to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God' (LG 31); they 'have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world . . . by their work for the evangelization and the sanctification of people' (AA 2)."¹⁹

The lay people of this archdiocese can reach out to the people of our culture far more easily than I can, and they are equally better equipped than many priests and religious to influence the culture in which they live and work. Most of the people who need to hear the Gospel today rarely, if ever, come to church. And if they do come, they will not be able to understand fully what a Christian life is like from just one homily. They need to see the Christian life lived in those around them; they need to hear from their co-workers and friends about the gift that Christ wants to share with them.

As Pope Benedict has said, "What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end."²⁰

Our current situation presents many challenges. I have already mentioned the great numbers of disengaged Catholics. But, we also face the challenge of losing our youth, many of whom are so easily influenced by the prevalent, anti-Christian culture. We are also aware that many Catholics leave the Church for other Christian churches. Fewer and fewer are choosing to get married in the Church.

¹⁹ "Novo Millennio Inuente," 46.

²⁰ "Porta Fidei," 15.

Immigrants, whom we welcome in our midst, offer certain pastoral challenges for the new evangelization. We are told that 25 percent of the Catholics in this archdiocese have Spanish as their first language. Sometimes our Hispanic brothers and sisters find a greater welcome at evangelical churches that reach out to them in their own language, and provide strong community for them to raise their children, than is found in many Catholic parishes.

These are challenges that also face the Hmong immigrants from northern Laos. Thanks to early missionaries, a small number of the Hmong have in fact embraced the Catholic faith, and our own Hmong Catholic community is vibrant and slowly growing. Yet the vast majority of their people have never heard the Gospel proclaimed, or proclaimed in its fullness. The same is true for many of the immigrants from east Africa and other places. We have an obligation to offer a loving witness to Christ for all these peoples.

At the same time, in the midst of these local challenges there are also many opportunities. Our archdiocese has much strength to build on. We have many vibrant parishes with active and faithful Catholics. One sign of this is the many Eucharistic adoration chapels in our archdiocese where the faithful are continually gathered to pray for the Church, the world, our families and our neighbors.

We have many active prayer groups, Bible studies and youth ministries. We have many strong Catholic schools. This archdiocese has given birth to two nationally recognized evangelistic movements: The National Evangelization Teams (NET Ministries) fields 11 teams of young people who travel the country to evangelize high school students, and St. Paul's Outreach, which has young missionaries on 35 college campuses throughout the country. The University of St. Thomas has developed a nationally known Catholic Studies program, which is forming young people deeply in the Catholic faith and has become a model for many colleges and universities around the country.

We have two very strong seminaries which are both full to capacity with young men from both our archdiocese and other dioceses. The St. Paul Seminary in 2007 opened the Archbishop Harry J. Flynn Catechetical Institute, which has already graduated hundreds of men and women who have come to know more fully the beauty of their Catholic faith and are thus more prepared to share it.

Building on these resources, I want to see every parish begin to examine itself and ask how it can become a welcoming and evangelizing parish where people can find ways to grow in their faith and learn to share it with others. Our parishes should be places where parishioners can come to full life in Christ. Not every parish can do everything, but we can work together to become communities of faith wherein evangelization is a given priority and we engage in it with joy.

We can start by inviting and helping our fellow Catholics right here in this archdiocese to re-engage toward full life in the Church, so that they, too, may rediscover true friendship with

Christ. As one of the great scholars on the New Evangelization, Cardinal Dulles once said, “If Catholics do not evangelize, the fundamental obstacle does not lie so much in the surrounding culture as in themselves. Having failed to nourish their faith by study, prayer, and contemplation, many have become weak and flabby in their adherence to the gospel and the Church. If they personally grasped the vision of faith, they would joyfully give witness to Christ, even at the cost of wealth, honors, and life itself.”²¹

²¹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. “Vatican II and Evangelization,” in *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*. Edited by Steven Boguslawski, OP and Ralph Martin, (New York: Paulist Press, 2008) 11-12.

Part V: The Plan

“[The Gospel] is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16).

At the end of the great Jubilee Year of 2000, Blessed John Paul II spoke of a new energy in the Church, inspired by all the experiences of the Jubilee Year, and he encouraged the members of the Church to not be afraid to “put out into the deep,” citing our Lord’s challenging words to St. Peter which led to the great catch of fish and ultimately to St. Peter’s apostolic call.

However, John Paul II emphasized that prior to any apostolic activity, the Church must be deeply rooted in contemplation and prayer. As he said: “Ours is a time of continual movement which often leads to restlessness, with the risk of ‘doing for the sake of doing.’ We must resist this temptation by trying ‘to be’ before trying ‘to do.’”²²

If we don’t put contemplation before action we risk seeking our own goals rather than the Lord’s, and we know “unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build” (Ps 127:1).

As we implement the New Evangelization in the archdiocese, I want to remind us that our efforts must begin, as Blessed John Paul II said, in prayer, contemplating the face of Christ. “Nemo dat non quod habet.” We cannot give what we do not have. An ongoing encounter with the living Jesus in our own lives needs to be the bedrock on which we build our efforts to evangelize.

To this end, I would like to encourage the practice of “Lectio Divina,” a slow meditative reading of Sacred Scripture, a staple in my own spiritual life. In the words of Blessed John Paul II, “To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be ‘servants of the word’ in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium”²³

A fitting way to do this is to have even a brief daily encounter with God’s word, perhaps using the Gospel from that day’s Mass, and a longer encounter with the Lord in prayer, perhaps by making a holy hour in one of our many Eucharistic adoration chapels.

Our daily prayer flows from and leads to participation in the liturgy of the Church in general and Sunday Mass in particular. As Vatican II so clearly taught us, the source and summit of our faith is the Eucharist: “The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it.”²⁴ The goal of our evangelization is to draw people to Christ, who is truly present in the Eucharist.²⁵

²² “Novo Millennio Inuente,” 15.

²³ “Novo Millennio Inuente,” 40.

²⁴ “Presbyterorum Ordinis,” 8, cf. “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” 10.

²⁵ “The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church,(16) that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread” (“Presbyterorum Ordinis,” 8).

The Sacred Liturgy is central to the New Evangelization because through the liturgy we not only proclaim the saving mission of Jesus Christ but also make it present in a unique and even tangible way. And we will draw strength to share our faith from the grace we receive in the celebration of the liturgy. As Pope Benedict says, "Without the liturgy and the sacraments, the profession of faith would lack efficacy, because it would lack the grace which supports Christian witness."²⁶

We cannot be effective evangelists if we are not actively living a liturgical and sacramental life. And this includes regular celebration of the sacrament of penance. Frequent confession to a priest is one of the greatest means the Church gives us to encounter Christ and be able to respond to his will by gradually growing in freedom from sin. A large part of the New Evangelization is calling people into freedom from their sins, which kill the life of God within them. We must practice and proclaim the beauty of the sacrament of penance, a beauty which not only forgives sins, but helps to heal and restore us to full life in Christ.

If, as St. Paul says, believing leads to speaking, then grounded in the contemplation of Christ through prayer and the liturgy, each person should be prepared to give testimony to how Christ has impacted his or her life, giving a reason for their hope (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

One does not need a story as dramatic as St. Paul's conversion to be effective; you only need to relate how the Lord has worked in your life. Practice giving your testimony to a confidant or in a prayer group so that you grow comfortable in sharing your faith. Moreover, develop your own, personal testimony to meet different circumstances, e.g. a three-minute version or one that is 10 minutes. Pray to the Holy Spirit to guide you in these encounters, for as Pope Benedict has said, "It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us fit for mission and strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous."²⁷

Above all, we must also be committed to the Corporal Works of Mercy. Blessed John Paul II exhorts us that the poor need to feel at home in every Christian community. Love directed to the poor, he says, is "the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom . . . Without this form of evangelization through charity and without the witness of Christian poverty the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today's society of mass communications. The charity of *works* ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of *words*."²⁸

Another aspect of the New Evangelization is found in our ecumenical commitment. The focus of this pastoral letter is to help us to discover our individual responsibility to evangelize or re-evangelize those around us. Yet these efforts do not take away from the fact that we live in the midst of many other Christian believers. As I mentioned in a recent column in *The Catholic*

²⁶ "Porta Fidei," 11.

²⁷ "Porta Fidei," 10.

²⁸ "Novo Millennio Inuente," 50, emphasis original.

Spirit, I want to encourage ecumenical prayer services and discussions during this Year of Faith, so as to help deepen an appreciation of what we share in common with other denominations, as well as to appreciate the major hurdles to that unity for which Jesus prayed so ardently. Finally, I want to encourage as many as possible to participate in the special events we have planned during the Year of Faith aimed at igniting the New Evangelization at the level of our local Church.

Following the constant encouragement of Pope Benedict XVI that we recognize our “need to rediscover the journey of faith,”²⁹ we have been preparing a multi-faceted program entitled, “Rediscover,” which emphasizes the works of evangelization and catechesis.

While the Rediscover initiative begins in this Year of Faith, it is not intended to close with it in November 2013. Instead, I want to see this comprehensive program — designed to reach out and invite, in particular, our fellow Catholics to rediscover a real and personal relationship with Jesus and, indeed, re-engage in the full life of the Church — become a way of life for us in this local Church. Our Lord expects no less from us if we are to call ourselves Christians and truly live out, in an authentic way, a life of Christian discipleship.

More information on the specific offerings of this program for the New Evangelization will be provided in the coming months. There will be a special unveiling of this program as we enter the Advent season and throughout our Lenten preparation for Easter during this Year of Faith. We have the opportunity to respond fully and with a renewed commitment to our Holy Father’s call to know and love Jesus and the beauty of our Catholic faith. Rediscovering this “journey of faith” is for all of us, not just for some, for we are all people “on our way” for whom it is impossible to exhaust the depths of the knowledge of God’s love and his saving grace through Jesus Christ. We are called to draw ever closer to him, and to invite others, with joy and charity, to rediscover the only path that leads us to find authentic meaning and purpose in our lives, and to find the peace, inner strength and true freedom God desires for us.

²⁹ “Porta Fidei,” 2.

Conclusion

“I believed, therefore I spoke” (2 Cor 4:13).

My greatest desire for our Year of Faith is that everyone in this great archdiocese will come to a deeper lived relationship with the Lord Jesus. As our Holy Father has said in announcing this special year, “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.”³⁰

In the previous pages, we saw how the Lord Jesus worked in the life of the patron saint of our archdiocese, St. Paul. His encounter with the living Jesus impelled him to share the Good News so others would come to the fullness of life in Christ. If the flame of faith is burning in our hearts to its fullest extent, it cannot but be spread to others by our own spoken testimony and lived witness to this same Christ.

Our own experience demonstrates the need for a New Evangelization; how many of our own family members and friends have not yet come to a living relationship with Jesus united to His Body, the Church? Our culture needs a living witness to God’s love in Christ! What has to become an essential part of our identity as a Catholic is the proclamation of Christ Jesus. We must become evangelists in thought and in action.

What the world needs in order to discover the true beauty of our faith are authentic witnesses. People need to see that our lives reflect what we proclaim. If we are truly holy and joyful, people will be attracted to us, and this will give us a chance to speak of the reason for our hope. Pope Paul VI said it so eloquently, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”³¹

Those who brought the Catholic faith to this part of the world met their challenges with a deep trust in God and allowed their zeal for Christ to lead them through the difficulties that at times seemed insurmountable. We, too, in our own day, can be intimidated by the tremendous needs in our local society. Nevertheless, we are called to approach those difficulties with the same faith and zeal as our ancestors in the faith did.

Remember what St. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). Our world needs Christ and so it needs to hear from you. St. Paul believed and so he spoke. My dear brothers and sisters, you, too, have come to believe. Now is the time for you to speak the saving Word of the Lord:

JESUS

³⁰ “Porta Fidei,” 7.

³¹ “Evangelii Nuntiandi,” 41.