

**YEAR OF FAITH:  
A Pastoral Letter From Bishop Malooly**

My Dear People,

On October 11, 2011 Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed that a Year of Faith would be celebrated beginning October 11, 2012 and continue through November 24, 2013, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King. The date October 11, 2012 was chosen to mark the opening of this Year of Faith because it is the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and it is also the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a text promulgated by Blessed John Paul II. These milestones in the history of the modern Church are a cause for celebration and at the same time they are an occasion for critical reflection. Vatican II and the Catechism were indeed remarkable achievements. However, it would not be inappropriate to say that a great deal of the hope and expectation that accompanied these historic moments have yet to be realized. This should not be a source of despair or frustration, rather it is a reminder that as Church our work is never done. The renewal of the Church is indeed an ongoing enterprise expressed through the pilgrim journey of each new generation of believers. The Year of Faith is an extraordinary opportunity for us to engage our Faith with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and purpose so that we can be the authentic face of Christ to the world. What then is the Year of Faith?

In his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei* (the Door of Faith) the Holy Father expressed his hopes and desires for this Year of Faith:

“We want to celebrate this Year in a worthy and fruitful manner. Reflection on the faith will have to be intensified, so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing. We will have the opportunity to profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our cathedrals and in the churches of the whole world; in our homes and among our families, so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times”-*Porta Fidei*, #8.

In baptism, we enter into a lifelong relationship with Christ and his Church, for it is the moment when the door of faith is opened to us. If not carefully and deliberately cultivated, faith over time can turn into indifference. For most of us, our faith was nurtured by our parents, godparents and our religious education teachers. Unfortunately, religious education is too often seen as something only for children. Therefore many people do not engage in any kind of formal religious education beyond adolescence. Combine this lack of development with the competing messages of the secular, popular culture and it's easy to see how faith can sometimes become lukewarm. The Year of Faith is an opportunity for great renewal. It is a time for us to rediscover the beauty and majesty of our Catholic Faith, a time to get back to the basics of who we are as Christians and to renew our relationship and our friendship with Jesus and his Body, the Church. It is also a time to recognize our responsibility to proclaim Christ to others. Rediscovery is an essential element here. The Year of Faith challenges us to go back and to rediscover the basic truths of our Catholic faith, and to

see them through the lens of life's experiences. It is a call for each of us to re-evangelize ourselves and to hear and live the Gospel from a fresh perspective. It is an invitation to once again walk through the door of faith and recommit ourselves to Christ and his Church.

The Year of Faith is also a time for us to begin our preparation for the Holy Father's "new evangelization" efforts. Pope Benedict routinely laments how cultures in Europe and the West which were once profoundly Christian, have become increasingly secular. The new evangelization means announcing the faith to those regions of the world that have been Christian for centuries but are now swept by the tides of secularism and religious indifference. This effort officially began just a few days ago on October 7, 2012 with the opening of a Synod of Bishops dedicated to the new evangelization. This gathering brings together 262 top church leaders along with lay experts and representatives of other Christian groups, for a three-week summit at the Vatican. Their task is to map out a plan for the ongoing work of revitalizing the Church and letting Christians rediscover the joy and the responsibility that comes from faith. This is not simply another catechetical program or venture. It can be properly understood as a new posture, a new way of looking at the world and the Church's place in it. The new evangelization is all about calling us back to appreciate all over again the person of Jesus Christ, the truth of his Gospel and what that means to the world. This world wide rediscovery must begin in the heart of each believer. The Year of Faith invites us to begin this important mission.

Here in the Diocese of Wilmington, the Year of Faith coincides with our own efforts to shape the future of our local Church. On July 20, 2012, I announced the four priorities that will guide my vision for the Diocese for the next several years. Many of you played a significant role in helping to identify these priorities through your participation in the Diocesan consultation process. The four priorities: new models for parish structure and administration; renewed catechesis; new efforts for evangelization; and renewing our baptismal call to holiness through our vocations, are closely connected with the undertaking initiated by the Year of Faith and the new evangelization.

It is perhaps providential that the efforts of our local Church mirror so well with the efforts of the Universal Church. In order to continue to carry out our local mission we must continually form and develop strong faith communities that will have the energy and excitement to spread the Good News. The parish is the heart of any faith community and when the parish is strong, vibrant, and inviting, enthusiasm for the faith is contagious and evangelization is primed. We must challenge our parish communities to renew the call to holiness, to witness the Gospel to the world, and to invite others to come to the heart of Christ. Rediscovering our faith means that we are not afraid to share it with others. We can only be comfortable in sharing our faith if we are confident in knowing our faith. We look to strengthen and renew our catechesis at every level, our Catholic identity, our catechetical formation, and our academic excellence. Faith however, is more than just accumulating knowledge. Knowledge is the solid foundation from which to grow in our faith so that we can help others to come to know the gift of faith more deeply. Faith is learned but it is more importantly lived. We live our faith

through our various vocations in life which continually call us to holiness. This year will provide us with an opportunity to look at our own vocational call from God whether it be to the priesthood, consecrated life, married life, or the lay single life. It is an opportunity to reinforce our baptismal call to holiness through our vocation.

I invite you to fully participate in this Year of Faith, at home, in school and in your parish. There will be many opportunities for faith enrichment but I encourage you to focus your attention on the Word of God in the Scriptures and on the sacraments especially the Eucharist which is the source and summit of our faith. The sacrament of reconciliation is also a tremendous source of grace which is invaluable in our ongoing pursuit of holiness. The Holy Father is also asking us to deepen our knowledge of what we believe by studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps we can all do something as simple as committing to memory the new translation of the Nicene Creed which we began professing almost a year ago. Whatever we do, let us be sure to take the time to truly engage our faith in a new and inspiring way so that we may with confidence know that as Church, we have so much to offer to our world today.

The door of faith remain open to us, we only have to walk through it.

Sincerely in Our Lord,

Most Rev. W. Francis Malooly  
Bishop of Wilmington  
October 26, 2012