

TOGETHER  
*in the*  
SPIRIT



*A Pastoral Vision*

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BISHOP OF WILMINGTON

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*“And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” – Acts 2:2-4\**



## *My Dear People,*

Rejoice, for today we celebrate Pentecost, the great Feast which brings to a conclusion our 50-day celebration of Easter. During this time, we have had the opportunity to reflect on the presence of the Lord in our lives, to consider the reality and implications of the Resurrection, and to evaluate our personal response to God's extravagant generosity. For the Apostles, the period between the Resurrection and Pentecost was a time of uncertainty and fear. The only life they had known was rapidly changing and they were struggling to understand the events that had transpired. They were anxious at the prospect of no longer having Jesus with them.

During the Last Supper, Jesus promised His Apostles that He would not leave them as orphans.<sup>1</sup> He assured them that His Father would send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to remind them of what He had taught them.<sup>2</sup> The word *Advocate* is understood to mean an intercessor, a defender, a witness for the accused, and a comforter in distress. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, fear became hope, hesitation turned into action and doubt was transformed into passionate faith. Because of this, the Apostles were able to fulfill Jesus' final commission to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."<sup>3</sup>





Inspired and enflamed in their faith by the Holy Spirit, that small group of unlikely disciples preached the Gospel throughout the known world, continuing the ministry and mission of Jesus. This was the beginning of our magnificent Church and nearly 2000 years later we continue to nurture what was handed on to us.

Over the centuries the Church has seen empires rise and fall; cultures begin and end; war and peace develop and subside; yet through it all the Church has never ceased moving forward on Her pilgrim journey. This would not be possible

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without the Holy Spirit's steadfast guidance. Today's feast reminds us of God's extraordinary intervention into our world which continues to touch our daily lives. The Holy Spirit that came upon the Apostles, and the Holy Spirit that guides the Universal Church, is the same Spirit that is available to each one of us. Pope Francis has said that "*the Holy Spirit is the inexhaustible source of God's life in us.*"<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the Holy Spirit sustains and directs us; in doing this He enables us to participate in the Divine Life. The Holy Spirit guides us as a Universal Church, as a Diocese, as parishes, and as individuals. This guidance often comes to us in a quietly simple manner and is accessible to us at all times. Thus, in times of difficulty the Holy Spirit is always there to support us, guide us, and help us. Today we venerate the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.







## *Continued Momentum*

Drawing near to the end of my eighth year as your Bishop, as I reflect on our time together, I am filled with gratitude and humility: gratitude for having the opportunity to walk with you and to serve you; humility for being the recipient of your tremendous generosity, patience, and encouragement. Our time together has not always been easy but through it all, your dedication to our Church has never wavered. In the aftermath of bankruptcy, your overwhelming support of our capital campaign, *Sustaining Hope for the Future*, was a tangible sign of your confidence and of your support for the ongoing mission of our Diocese. Year after year, your consistent and generous participation in the Annual Catholic Appeal continues to be a source of reassurance.



In 2018 we will celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of our Diocese. It will be a time to celebrate our accomplishments, reflect on our history, and envision our shared future. Looking forward I am hopeful and certain that we as a diocese are moving into a new era overflowing with grace-filled opportunities. The Holy Spirit is truly among us.



In an effort to develop a vision for this new era, in the winter of 2012, I initiated a series of consultations with priests, deacons, religious, and laity. In July of that year, reflecting on the fruits of those conversations, I announced Four Priorities to guide the Diocese of Wilmington for the remainder of my years as your Shepherd; they were:

**PRIORITY 1** - Develop new models for parish structure and administration promoting vibrant and collaborative parish leadership, integrating the gifts of both laity and clergy.

**PRIORITY 2** - Initiate a new effort of evangelization, which will enliven the parish community to a renewed call to holiness, witnessing the Good News in word and work, and invite others to come to the Heart of Christ.

**PRIORITY 3** - Introduce a renewal of catechesis at every level including adult formation, parish religious education programs, Catholic schools, and youth ministry.

**PRIORITY 4** - Reinforce our baptismal call to holiness in all vocations with a special effort to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

These Priorities have been an essential component in our ongoing planning efforts and will continue to inform the

momentum of our Diocese. I am determined to see that progress continues to put these concerns into action. Although this pastoral letter will focus heavily on Priority 1, I recognize that all the priorities are somewhat intertwined. Thus, I will include some updates regarding Priorities 2, 3, and 4.







## *Evangelization: Priority 2*

I think it's important to note the distinction between catechesis and evangelization as many people often use these words interchangeably. Catechesis is but a part of the greater whole, which is evangelization. Think of evangelization as our relationship with Christ while catechesis provides the biography. Without evangelization we really cannot know Him. It's the difference between reading a person's biography and actually knowing that person.

The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Good News. Seen in this light, evangelization is not a program, but a way of life for each member of the Church. By Baptism, we are called to be evangelizers or, as Saint Paul said "ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us."<sup>5</sup> Evangelization is the ongoing work of each parish and each parishioner.







## *Catechesis: Priority 3*

"Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways"<sup>6</sup> The work of catechesis is carried out every day through the efforts of our Catholic Schools and parish religious education programs.

Our Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wilmington are a source of pride for all of us. Day after day our dedicated faculties and staff work tirelessly to provide our young people with a superior education while instilling Gospel values and an appreciation for Catholic Tradition. Our students are challenged to put their faith into action through service to their schools and community. I am committed to keeping our schools strong and available to all who seek an extraordinary experience for their children. I am also proud of the many dedicated



catechists in our parishes who work untiringly to hand on the Catholic Faith to people of all ages. For their ministry, I am truly grateful.

I am also thankful of the outstanding work of my Department of Catholic Education, which includes the Schools Office, Office of Religious Education, Youth and Young Adult



Ministry, and the Office of Marriage and Family Life. The guidance that they provide through professional development opportunities and ongoing support to our parishes and schools is essential in our renewal of catechesis. One of this Department's key tasks is to invite all catechetical leaders in the Diocese to revisit the core roots of their ministries which is a recognition that "at the heart of Catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father... full of grace and truth, who suffered and died for us and who now after rising, is living with us forever."<sup>7</sup>

## *Vocations: Priority 4*

The Sacrament of Baptism brings with it a vocation to holiness. Priority 4 calls for us to consider our shared responsibility in nurturing vocations. The Lord calls each of us to a certain vocation in life: Priesthood, Religious life, Married life, or the single life. Holiness can be achieved through faithfully living out the vocation to which one is called. All vocations have a unique dignity and importance in the life of the Church but at this time, priesthood is a special concern because the number of men being ordained is down substantially. It is important to remember that throughout Church history this has been a problem from time to time.

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The worldwide Catholic population continues to grow at a steady pace and the number of priestly ordinations in certain regions such as Africa and Asia, have exploded to unprecedented numbers.<sup>8</sup> Even in some areas of the United States there is a boom in priestly vocations. However, in most dioceses in North America and Europe, the number of ordinations are down and coupled with a population of priests fast approaching retirement age. Our own Diocese is experiencing this very problem, and as such, our population of active priests is reaching a critical level. As I travel throughout our Diocese and speak with laity and clergy alike, I know that there is much anxiety over the diminishing number of priests.





The “vocation crisis”, as it has been referred to over the last decade or so, is indeed a concern for all of us. I want to assure you that my Vocation Director and his assistants are engaged in efforts to invite many more young men to consider the possibility of answering a call to the Priesthood. The young men that we currently have in priestly formation are quality individuals and if they are eventually ordained, I am confident that they will serve you in an exemplary manner. Keep them in your prayers and remember, and this is critical, that promoting priestly vocations is not simply the job of a few priests; it is the obligation of every Catholic man and woman.

We must not be afraid to direct the young people in our lives to be open to God's call. A few simple words of encouragement and support can make a tremendous difference to one who may be discerning a vocation or to one who may have never even considered the possibility. We must plant the seed.

Even as we put forth our best efforts to increase the number of vocations, we still have to deal with the current reality that we will soon not be able to have a pastor for every parish.





## *Parish Structure and Administration: Priority 1*

When presented with a problem or difficult situation it is desirable that we bring these concerns with us to prayer and spiritual reflection. In everything that we do, we must always consider Christ's presence in our midst and be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is at His best when He challenges us. When we feel uncomfortable, scared, or apprehensive we are often motivated to find solutions to whatever problem is causing us these unwanted feelings. Challenges are often grace filled moments that bring with them opportunities for growth. I believe that this is what we as a Diocese are currently experiencing.

Many of you my age or even younger can remember a time when almost every parish had multiple priests. Back then, we had so many priests that we were able to staff not only parishes with a full complement of priests, but also hospitals, schools, diocesan offices and various chaplaincies. One day, we may once again find ourselves with an abundance of vocations to the priesthood but the reality on the immediate horizon is that we do not have enough priests to serve the pastoral leadership needs of every parish individually. If we believe that the Holy Spirit continues to inspire and guide us then we must see our current vocation situation as not only a challenge but also as an opportunity.



### **NEW MODELS FOR PARISH STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP**

Every parish is unique with its own personality, needs, and expectations. Just as each parish is different so too each diocese in the world is diverse with its own set of blessings and challenges. With such a variety, a one-size-fits-all solution is neither practical nor desirable. Many dioceses throughout the country are using various solutions availed to us by Church law to ensure that parish life and the overall mission





of the Church will continue to thrive despite the possibility of not having a priest for each parish. Considering the needs of our local Church and after much research and consultation both in and outside of our Diocese, I would like to share with you my vision for the future of pastoral leadership for the Church of Wilmington.

We will be employing three approaches that will be the guiding model for pastoral leadership for the next five to ten years; the Resident Pastor model, the Parish Linkage(s) model, and the Parish Life Coordinator model. The first two of these models are not unfamiliar to us in the Diocese of Wilmington as they are already being employed here. The intention of all of these models is to begin to maximize the ministry of our clergy and to mobilize the gifts of all the baptized.

### **The Resident Pastor Model**

The large majority of parishes in our Diocese are currently operating using this model; it is the most desirable of the three solutions. To state the obvious, the best possible scenario for any parish would be to always have a resident pastor who is responsible for only one parish and is assisted by professional and qualified lay staff, collaborating with lay leaders.

I believe that this will continue to be the dominant model of pastoral leadership in the majority of the parishes in our Diocese for the next decade. This however does not mean business as usual. Even in parishes with a resident pastor, it is essential that there be a spirit of cooperation and a sharing of resources with neighboring parishes. This will be expanded upon later in this letter.

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### **The Linkage Model**

The Parish Linkage Model is where an individual pastor (with or without an associate pastor) is assigned to two or more parishes. This is a familiar approach in our Diocese and is working well in each instance. The Cathedral of St. Peter is linked to St. Patrick's and St. Mary's in downtown Wilmington. All three parishes remain autonomous, retaining their uniqueness and individuality but they share a pastor and an associate



pastor. These parishes also share administrative resources. The Church of the Holy Cross in Dover is linked to Immaculate Conception Parish in Marydel. Again, these parishes are ministered to by one pastoral team while sharing some administrative resources. It is my expectation that the implementation of this model now and in the future will call for much more creative collaboration.

### **The Parish Life Coordinator Model**

In this model, there are three ministerial roles that would be working collaboratively: the Parish Life Coordinator, the Sacramental Minister, and the Priest Moderator.

- The Parish Life Coordinator is a minister with professional training, entrusted by the diocesan Bishop with the responsibility of leading a single parish community that lacks a resident pastor. The person in this role would provide overall pastoral and organizational leadership. A Parish Life Coordinator may be a deacon, religious, or a layperson.
- The Sacramental Minister is a priest authorized by the Bishop to provide the liturgical and sacramental needs of the parish community.
- The Priest Moderator is a direct representative of the Bishop appointed with the faculties of pastor to supervise pastoral care for a parish, in accord with Canon 517§2, in collaboration with the Parish Life Coordinator.



Although the Parish Life Coordinator model has been operative in some dioceses for over 25 years, it represents a stark departure from what we have experienced regarding Parish leadership and ministry in our Diocese. It is also the most complicated of the three models. It is important to understand

that parishes staffed with a Parish Life Coordinator are not to be considered as "second-class" parishes, nor are they parishes on the brink of closing. Rather, parishes with a





vibrant faith community are actually the ideal situation for this collaborative approach. Parish Life Coordinators represent a new model of ministry which draws on the gifts of many parish leaders, promising unique opportunities for church service and ensuring parish vitality. Although I do not foresee us employing this model within the next three to five years, it is essential that we begin to plan for the eventual possibility.

## *Partnerships*

At the beginning of this letter I spoke of how the Holy Spirit's guidance has animated the Church over the centuries. Moving forward together it is essential that we continue to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. I know that any discussion regarding change brings with it a certain level of anxiety, uncertainty and hesitancy. I want to assure you that any proposed change will be accompanied with communication and education in each parish where a new model of leadership and/or structure is anticipated.



Catholic life begins and ends in the parish. As wonderful and unique as each of our parishes are, they do not and cannot exist in isolation. A parish is part of the diocese, and the diocese is part of the Universal Church. It is also true that a parish is part of a local community with all of its ups and downs. No parish is truly a Christian

community without these links to the local community, the diocese, the universal Church, and the world.

Here in the Northeastern United States we have been extremely blessed to have had an abundance of priests over the last one hundred years or so. This region also has a multitude of churches, as a result of mass immigration during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when almost every ethnic group had their own parish. Even here in Wilmington we have parishes that were traditionally Irish, Italian, and Polish. In the larger cities these churches are often in walking distance of each other. With large



numbers of priests and a myriad of churches there were plenty of options for Mass, confessions, novenas, and every other parish activity. In our Diocese for the most part, we are still blessed with many options when it comes to Mass times, sacraments, locations, and access to clergy. With fewer priests, the need for partnerships between parishes becomes apparent. Going forward I expect that neighboring parishes will find creative ways to consolidate and collaborate on matters like Mass times, Confirmations, and Reconciliation services.<sup>9</sup>

Liturgical collaboration however, is only the first step. Parishes can also share administrative and temporal resources. This is a reality that many parishes have been experiencing for some time now. There are several instances where two parishes, each with their own pastor, are sharing the services of a bookkeeper, maintenance personnel, and religious education staff. The ability of parishes to share and work together in such a way depends on a variety of factors including but not limited to parish population, income, and proximity.



The level of partnership that I am envisioning is quickly becoming a necessity rather than a preference. In this regard, there are many ways that parishes can benefit from cooperative efforts:

- saving on expenses (e.g. supplies, subscriptions and quantity purchases)
- sharing part-time staffing
- scheduling of Mass and holy day events
- large scale faith formation events
- jointly sponsored RCIA programs
- combining the celebration of Confirmation among multiple parishes
- sponsoring joint reconciliation services
- enrichment for liturgy or faith formation leaders
- outreach/evangelization efforts
- care for the poor
- idea sharing between liturgy committees
- marriage preparation programs

I will be directing each Deanery (region) of our Diocese to begin discussing the numerous possibilities in which parishes can cooperate and partner with one another. We can no longer proceed in the same manner as we have in the past. Challenging questions must be studied such as: Does it really make sense for neighboring parishes to have the same Mass schedule? Can our Mass schedules be consolidated? Can we share a Confirmation celebration with another parish? It is essential that we begin to explore these questions and options, and be willing to put necessary changes into action.

Each parish has its own set of blessings and challenges, as well as a need to articulate a vision for the future. In order to begin planning for future collaboration between parishes, it is essential that each parish engage in critical reflection and spiritual discernment. It might be helpful to begin having informal conversations regarding partnerships. Now is the time to take strategic steps forward to insure parish vitality. Parishes set on thriving, and not just surviving, need to be deliberate about planning. Strategic planning involves rethinking old assumptions and possibly changing the way a parish operates. No matter what lies ahead, parishes willing to embrace change will thrive.





## Conclusion

Change can sometimes make us anxious and all of us resist it to some degree. Regardless of any changes in Mass times, Confession times, Confirmations, or parish leadership, the following will be true:

- you will still have access to Mass
- you will still have access to the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- you will still be able to receive your sacraments
- you will still have access to religious education
- you will still have access to sacramental preparation
- you will be able to have funerals and weddings.

The difference is that you may not be able to have them at the time and place of your desire. The choices will diminish to some degree and this is something to which we all must begin to get accustomed. I believe this is an opportunity to bring us closer together.

The Apostles were quite frightened of change. Their fear prevented them from imagining the glorious future that Jesus had in store for them. Their fear of course was shattered once the Holy Spirit came upon them. Only then did they truly understand their mission. As we celebrate Pentecost, let us remember that we are not orphans and to be fully aware of the Holy Spirit among us. And let us reflect on the words of Pope Francis:





*"The Holy Spirit teaches us to see with the eyes of Christ, to live life as Christ lived, to understand life as Christ understood it... Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, let us allow him to speak to our heart and say this to us: God is love, God is waiting for us..."<sup>10</sup>*

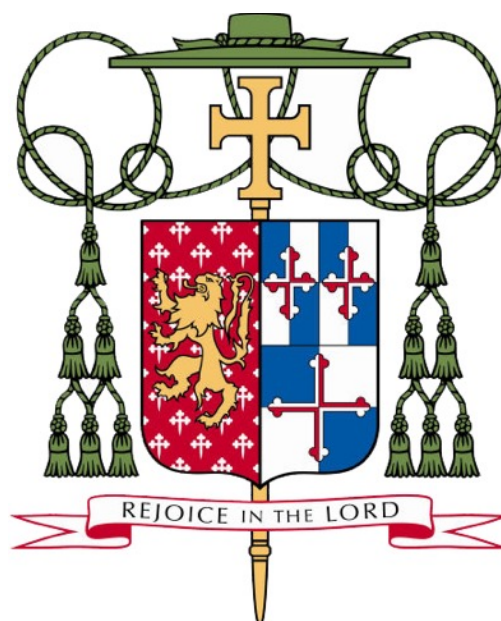
This is a call to rejoice! My Episcopal Motto is **Rejoice in the Lord**, and it is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Let this be our guiding outlook as we journey forward together as a community of faith:

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness\*should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.<sup>11</sup>*

I am optimistic for the future of our Diocese and have great hope that some of the changes that I have outlined will make us stronger, more united, and more sound in our pastoral operations. Let us patiently allow God's wondrous love for us to empower our Church with the peace that is beyond all understanding, the peace only Christ can give, the remarkable peace that the whole world knew on that first Pentecost day.

Sincerely in Our Lord,

Most Reverend William Francis Malooly, D.D.  
Bishop of Wilmington



## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:18

<sup>2</sup> John 14:26

<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:15

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience , St. Peter's Square, May 8, 2013

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis, Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998., No. 105

<sup>7</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II, No. 5

<sup>8</sup> Global Catholicism: Trends & Forecasts, June 4, 2015  
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)

<sup>9</sup> In some parts of the Diocese this is already occurring. For example, in the City of Wilmington for the past couple of years the parishes have celebrated combined reconciliation services in Advent and Lent, and several of the parishes are even coming together to celebrate a common Triduum.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, St. Peter's Square, May 8, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Philippines 4:4-7

\*All Scripture references are from the New American Bible Revised Edition

**Photos:** Dialog file/[www.DonBlakePhotography.com](http://www.DonBlakePhotography.com) except photo of Holy Cross Church by Jason Minto Photography and photo of Pope Francis and Bishop Malooly by Papal Photographer.