



# ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL

Equipping the Household of Faith

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN  
AND WHERE WE ARE GOING

REPORT FOLLOWING THE PASTORAL LETTER  
*GO AND ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD*

Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing



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## 1. WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

For over a year, all across our diocese, we have prayed, “Come Holy Spirit,” begging the Holy Spirit to bring every person in our diocese into a personal encounter with Jesus and to grow into full maturity as his disciples for the building up of the Kingdom of God and the salvation of souls. We have pleaded with the Spirit of the Living God to show us the way forward as we seek to announce the Gospel of the Lord.

2. At our High School Rally this past fall, one young man came up to me expressing thanks for this prayer which he said had transformed his parish and himself personally. Wow! Others have told me similar things. Thanks be to God who has done great things in us.
3. Twice this past year the presidents of most of our parish councils gathered here in Lansing. These leaders in our parishes have shared their experiences of reading and reflecting, with their councils, upon the pastoral letter, *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord* (April 5, 2012).
4. These council presidents have highlighted a number of positive signs of the Spirit’s activity in their parishes. They have seen a greater emphasis on being welcoming communities, where good preaching and good music have assisted. They have noted the formation of more faith sharing and Bible-study groups and the use by some pastors of a weekly e-news to their parishioners. They have found that outreach activities have helped engage not only the teenagers but adults as well. They have pointed to better follow-up to parents of newly-baptized, to newly confirmed, to newly married, to new Catholics after Easter, and to parents of our youth. They have seen greater use of adoration and confession and penance

services. They highlighted the giving of prayer cards and devotional books to parishioners or visitors. They continued to call for more help from the diocese in terms of providing resources and especially with greater leadership in catechesis. They look to greater cooperation with neighboring parishes in their vicariates as we move on to see the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in our midst.

## 5. WHERE WE ARE GOING

As a result of prayer, of discerning God’s will, and of a great deal of input, we have decided to hold three diocesan assemblies in the fall of 2014, 2016, and 2018, dealing respectively with Building up the Household of Faith, Reaching out to the Lost Sheep, and Engaging in the Courtyard of the Gentiles. Each of these corresponds to the major sections of the pastoral letter. Clearly, though we are focusing on one of these aspects in each of these assemblies, we still need to address all the matters raised in the pastoral letter during all the years ahead. These assemblies should assist parish, institutional, and diocesan leadership to help all of us become much more intentional in our being disciples of Jesus Christ, for as we know we can become effective evangelizers only after we have become true disciples.

6. Here allow me to provide some focus for this fall’s assembly on the Household of Faith.

7. **Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith** (Galatians 6:9-10).

## 8. EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

St. Paul prayed that the community gathered at Ephesus would be worthy of their calling and would work together in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Paul saw that their unity was a direct result of the many gifts and graces given by God to each and all the members of that community. Those gifts have one purpose only:

9. **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love** (Ephesians 4:12-13, 16).

10. Equipping to build! Paul is correct. To advance the Gospel, we must first grow up into Christ. We must help our practicing Catholics to use the grace they have received from God and offer to God a resounding, “Yes!” Then we must train them to employ the gifts with which God has equipped them, to build up Christ’s

body here in each of our parishes and institutions. Then our parishes will be better able to receive the Lost Sheep and welcome those who wish to know Christ.

11. Yet, it is not so much about the gifts God has given, but about the giver of those gifts. We must know and follow Jesus; we must know that God loves us deeply; we must know that Jesus is that love; we must know that the Holy Spirit wants to set us on fire with love.

12. With that in mind, we need to provide space in our parishes where encounters with Christ can take place. There are some programs already being used in our diocese which do this. Cursillo, Alpha for Catholics, Christlife, Kairos, Encounter Series, Christ Renews his Parish, Called and Gifted, Catholicism, and others. By providing these opportunities we are helping people take that first crucial step in becoming intentional disciples. It doesn't end there. We have learned that there is a great need to follow up and support our brothers and sisters in the faith in order to bring them to full maturity in Christ.

13. A TIME TO PRAY

You may have thought, ah, aren't we done praying? After all, we have spent an entire "long" year invoking the Holy Spirit. Prayer is never at an end, because all of this must be the work of God in our lives and in our Church. It is too easy to fall into the temptation of doing our works, our plans, our programs and to go off the rails from what God would want of us.

14. Of course, what God wants of us, what the Spirit is trying to instill in us, is fire, the fire of love, the fire of hope, the fire of joy which will transform not only us as a household of faith, but our culture and our world. Pope Francis, in his most recent exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium* [The Joy of the Gospel], begins with these words: "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus." Toward the end of his exhortation, Pope Francis reminds us that "the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received..." (#264). Prayer, then, prayer as relationship with Jesus, has to be the primary mode in which we continue on the work of announcing the Gospel of the Lord.

15. Ultimately, our aim is to help all our sisters and brothers in faith to see their lives as a response to God's call to each of us to be holy. Life is not chance or random. Rather, we are each called to become more like God, in whose image we are created. Thus our origin is in God and our destiny is in God. That destiny is meant to be fulfilled in heaven. The yearning for heaven, the desire to be like God, should be the hallmark of all Christians. And nothing we do should ever obscure that fundamental invitation that God issues to each of us (EG #39).

16. How does prayer lead us to this goal? Prayer opens us to be changed by God such that we will abandon ourselves more into the hands of our loving God, such that we will deny ourselves the many pleasures of this world so as to seek the true treasure of heaven. Grace alone can achieve these goods, but prayer is the means to have the doors of our hearts and minds opened to the workings of that grace. Keep going to confession and Mass! Keep praying! Keep living out your baptism and marriage and ordination!

17. PARISH INVOLVEMENT

The meetings with the parish council presidents this past year have been an affirmation of the vital role played by the laity in the transformation of our parishes and our world. It is clear that we all, clergy, consecrated men and women, and laity are co-responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel by our words and our lives. The New Evangelization, in fact, will not happen without the full participation of the laity.

18. Our key aim is to be more like Christ, not just as individuals but as a parish. Thus forming our parish into a band of disciples is probably the most urgent task we have. The heart of our prayer to the Holy Spirit this past year has been to seek the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives to change us, set us on fire, and send us forth. There is no point in inviting others to join us; there is no point in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ out in the world unless we have a band of disciples to welcome them.

19. Being a community of disciples has always been a vital part of growing in the Lord. We need others of like mind and heart to encourage us, walk with us, and keep us accountable in our Christian lives. There is no such thing as a lone Christian. Therefore, we, in the Diocese of Lansing, propose a particular small-group model to help individuals advance in their following of Christ. This will require a commitment on the part of as many of you as possible. You will become the yeast which will serve as the leaven in your own parish. Each individual, in this way, can help to build up the Household of Faith into a true band of disciples.

20. Sherry Weddell (*Forming Intentional Disciples*) makes this astute comment:

21. **While we cannot make anyone "drop their nets" any more than a gardener can make a seed germinate, we can intentionally and intelligently work to create an environment that is conducive to the growth of personal faith and discipleship** (p.185).

22. All of us, who are co-responsible for the building up of the Household of Faith, need to help to create this environment.

23. STUDY

Among other things, the early Christians devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles (Acts 2:42). In the pastoral letter, I encouraged all of us to spend more time with the Scriptures and to study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The Holy Spirit is now moving us to commit ourselves to know Jesus and to know his bride, the Church and what she, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has been teaching us for 2,000 years.

24. This is important stuff. It has to do with our salvation and with the salvation of our kids. Society will not give us an accurate portrayal of who God is or what the Church is. Thus we must feed ourselves on Jesus, who is the truth, the way, and the life.

25 This kind of knowledge is the only way we will be able to unlock the grace of God which is within us and use our God-given gifts for the building up of the Household of Faith.

26. **SERVICE AND EVANGELIZATION**

Besides our money, one of our most prized treasures is our time. If we do not consider how we are stewards of our money, we probably also do not consider how we are stewards of our time. Both are gifts to us from God.

27. I mentioned in the pastoral letter how important exercising Christian charity is for the formation of our young people as candidates for confirmation. This helps them to see that they, as human beings in God's image, are made for others. Our lives are truly meaningless until we are ready to give them away. It is in the gift of ourselves that we really do come to see ourselves as a gift of God.

28. Of course, our time is already justly consumed by family and work. However, we all need to see how well that time is spent. Obviously, one of the most important uses of our time is to worship God on Sundays and to respect that day as the Lord's Day and a day for our families to be together.

29. Nonetheless, giving a tithe of our time to helping the poor, assisting at our parish, evangelizing, or in some other way should be a sacrificial part of our lives. Our service, though, is ultimately meaningful only when it points to Jesus Christ as the answer to our deepest yearnings. This will lead us to proclaim to those we serve that Jesus Christ is "the reason for our hope" (1 Peter 3:15).

30. **WHAT'S NEXT?**

In his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote:

31. **The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine "training in holiness," adapted to people's needs. This training must integrate the resources offered to everyone with both the traditional forms of individual and group assistance, as well as the more recent forms of support offered in associations and movements recognized by the Church (#31).**

32. Our Office of New Evangelization has assembled representatives from each of the vicariates in our diocese to seek out leaders from each parish. These leaders will be asked to form discipleship groups of 4-8 individuals to make new commitments in their lives and to each other in the areas of prayer, parish involvement, study, and service, and then to meet regularly to encourage and hold each other accountable. The hope is that this model will serve as the first step in establishing concrete structures for lifelong "training in holiness" in our parishes.

33. A number of our priests and I have been in a two-year program called, Good

Leaders, Good Shepherds, which is a way for us to hold each other accountable for becoming better leaders like Christ. We all need to be intentional about responding to God's call in our lives.

34. If you are approached to participate, please ask the Holy Spirit if this is not the occasion for you to deepen your relationship with Jesus and have others who will pray for you and encourage you. If you hear the Spirit tell you, "Yes," then please respond, "Yes."

35. This November as the leadership of our parishes and other institutions gather in our diocesan assembly, we will then bear the fruit of this discipleship together. After that event, we hope to spread the fruit of the Holy Spirit's working in us to as many of our fellow parishioners who sincerely want to know Jesus Christ and to help build up the Household of Faith.





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