

PASTORAL EXHORTATION ANNOUNCING A YEAR IN HONOR OF ST. JOSEPH



Bishop David L. Ricken, DD, JCL

March 5, 2020



Diocese of
Green Bay

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This year, 2020, is a very significant beginning of a new decade in this century. We find ourselves in a world which is changing so rapidly; a time in which people are losing the moorings of their lives. Relationships are becoming disposable, as people give into despair due to the great lack of hope. Now, more than ever, the need is clear as to how much we must turn to God and prayer.

March 19 of this year marks the 150th anniversary of Pope Pius IX's announcement giving St. Joseph the title of "Patron of the Universal Church." Prior to this, the intercession to St. Joseph had been strongly encouraged and relied upon for the needs of the Universal Church.

In history, during times of great suffering of the Church, the faithful have always turned to St. Joseph with great confidence and their prayers have been very quietly and thoroughly answered. St. Joseph, who has a strong presence in the Gospels, but from whom there is not one recorded word, was an ever attentive spouse of Mary and an attentive and watchful foster father to Jesus.

**"THOUGH YOU HAVE RECOURSE TO MANY SAINTS AS YOUR INTERCESSORS, GO
ESPECIALLY TO ST. JOSEPH, FOR HE HAS GREAT POWER WITH GOD." - ST. TERESA OF AVILA**

WHY ST. JOSEPH?

Very simply, St. Joseph is a wonderworker. He works miracles constantly. I have been the beneficiary of answered prayers from him both personally and in my assignments as bishop. In my first assignment as bishop in the Diocese of Cheyenne, St. Joseph helped us increase vocations and also arranged for generous donations from the good people there to pay the cost of the seminary for 16 young men who said "yes" to the call. We had very meager funds in those days to pay for their education, but St. Joseph and the good people of the diocese responded abundantly through a special collection.

I have also made several trips to the Oratory of St. Joseph in Montreal to share with Joseph my special requests. I have even led some of the special ministries of the diocese to Montreal, for example, the leadership of Relevant Radio, for the same purpose. He always answers thoroughly and abundantly, especially if you return to give thanks.

“DO NOT LOSE HOPE; ST. JOSEPH ALSO EXPERIENCED MOMENTS OF DIFFICULTY, BUT HE NEVER LOST FAITH AND WAS ABLE TO OVERCOME THEM, IN THE CERTAINTY THAT GOD NEVER ABANDONS US.” - POPE FRANCIS

ANNOUNCING A YEAR OF PRAYER

Discerning that there are many needs in our Church, and in our world, and in our diocese that need intense prayer, I am calling for a Year of Prayer in honor of St. Joseph in the Diocese of Green Bay, beginning on his feast day, March 19, 2020, and ending on his feast day in 2021.

There are three areas of intentions that we will bring to the attention and special care of St. Joseph: strengthening and healing of marriages and family life; prayer for the Universal Church, especially Church leaders; and a significant increase of vocations to the priesthood in the diocese.

“SAINT JOSEPH WAS A JUST MAN, A TIRELESS WORKER, THE UPRIGHT GUARDIAN OF THOSE ENTRUSTED TO HIS CARE. MAY HE ALWAYS GUARD, PROTECT AND ENLIGHTEN FAMILIES.” - ST. JOHN PAUL II

FAMILIES AS HOUSEHOLDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

This year of prayer in honor of St. Joseph will assist all of us, especially our families, to center our lives on prayer and to ask St. Joseph's intercession in helping to make our homes true households of discipleship. My mother so many years ago said, “A house is just a house until it is infused with love, then it becomes a home!”

Praying together as a family is one of the most effective ways to infuse love in our relationships and is a tremendous help, especially to the children right at home. This is one powerful way to build up the “domestic church.” Every home is the Church in miniature and is a center of discipleship. Family members can grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and solidify their connection to the community of disciples in their parish community.

Given the example of St. Joseph as the protector and shepherd of his family, I ask fathers to provide leadership by being the spiritual leader of your family. The example of St. Joseph is not one who leads through dominance, but one who leads through service and humility. Likewise, I encourage you to lead your family by laying down your life for them. Specifically, lead them in prayer, daily if possible but at least once a week, by praying the Prayer to St. Joseph and the litany. Set an example for your family by going to Mass every Sunday together. Research has shown that when the father of the family kneels down with his family and prays before and during Mass every Sunday, the children are much more likely to grow up to be regular participants at Sunday Mass.

I will be asking our men's prayer and faith groups (for example, the Knights of Columbus, Esto Vir, That Man is You!, etc.) to assist dads and moms who may need help in learning to pray with their family. Also, people in our parish will be active in teaching our families how to pray the rosary and center their homes on God's presence in their lives. For those of you who are single parents, you will benefit greatly by asking St. Joseph to be the spiritual father of your household. You in particular have heavy pressures and you often have no one to share the burden. “Go to Joseph.”

I fully realize that families are pulled in many different directions today, but of all the activities you engage in with your children, prayer and keeping holy the Lord's Day should be a top priority. St. Joseph will help you move in this direction. Grandparents, I know you are faithfully keeping your children and grandchildren in your thoughts and prayers. You, too, can assist them by praying to St. Joseph and encouraging your adult children and grandchildren to become families of beloved disciples of Jesus.

Throughout the centuries, images of St. Joseph often depict him holding a lily branch in his hand. This is a deliberate choice of the Church to symbolize St. Joseph's gifts of purity and chastity. Chastity and purity are gifts so needed today, as our culture is overrun with pornography, exploitation of the body, gender confusion and many other challenges. Every person and each family needs the gift of purity. St. Joseph, please grant us an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit to assist us in being fully human and fully alive with the grace of living more in the image and likeness of God.

I am asking every family and every member of the faithful to pray at home the diocesan prayer and litany provided in honor of St. Joseph at least once a week. The prayer card for the Year of St. Joseph will be available through diocesan Catholic schools, religious education programs and in each of our parishes. It is also available for download at www.gbdioc.org/stjoseph.

I am also asking that every parish recite the diocesan Prayer to St. Joseph with the entire congregation at every Saturday evening and Sunday Mass, either after the general intercessions as the concluding prayer or after the Prayer after Communion throughout this special year of prayer.

Schools, religious education programs and ministry gatherings of whatever type ought to recite the prayer at least once a week, such as at the school Mass or at the conclusion of instruction or another suitable time. Just as Saturday is known to be the day to honor the Blessed Mother, so Wednesday is known as the day to honor St. Joseph. At Masses or gatherings that happen on Wednesday, that would be a very appropriate day to pray to St. Joseph.

“ST. JOSEPH WAS CHOSEN AMONG ALL MEN, TO BE THE PROTECTOR AND GUARDIAN OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD; THE DEFENDER AND FOSTER-FATHER OF THE INFANT-GOD, AND THE ONLY CO-OPERATOR UPON EARTH, THE ONE CONFIDANT OF THE SECRET OF GOD IN THE WORK OF THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND.” - ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

From a global perspective, the Catholic Church finds many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world suffering greatly. In a 2017 speech, Pope Francis said, “Let us not forget that today there are more Christian martyrs than in ancient times, than in the first times of the Church.” Many people live in oppressive countries and have lost all they have. They are forced to be refugees and have no place to lay their heads. We remember all people in great need throughout the world.

St. Joseph knows their struggle. After the birth of Jesus, he too was forced to leave his home in order to protect Mary and Jesus. Going to Egypt, they remained there for a time and only returned after the death of Herod. We invoke St. Joseph to pray for the many people in the Universal Church today who are facing similar situations. May he be their protector and source of comfort and solidarity in the face of difficulties.

In addition, the role of St. Joseph as the “Patron of the Universal Church” focuses on praying for the Pope and the bishops and priests as they have the important role of serving as shepherds of the flock. After the scandals caused by members of the clergy who violated their priestly promises by doing great harm to others, especially children, Church leaders now, more than ever, need great assistance and prayer for repentance and a more generous response to the call to holiness. We, as Church leaders and shepherds, must recapture our call to lead and serve our people as spiritual fathers.

There is no greater inspiration and model of spiritual fatherhood than St. Joseph. I encourage my brother priests, both religious and diocesan, to join me in consecrating ourselves and our priestly ministry to St. Joseph, who is a tremendous help in guiding us to understand our role as spiritual fathers of our people. I know that the priests and I will deeply appreciate the prayers of as many people as possible for a renewal of our spiritual lives and the spiritual invigoration of our parishes to be real communities of discipleship. We will be praying for all of you during this year and we appreciate your intense prayers for us.

“OUR MEDITATION ON THE HUMAN AND SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF SAINT JOSEPH INVITES US TO PONDER HIS VOCATION IN ALL ITS RICHNESS, AND TO SEE HIM AS A CONSTANT MODEL FOR ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DEVOTED THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST IN THE PRIESTHOOD, IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE OR IN THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF LAY ENGAGEMENT.” - POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI

AN INCREASE OF VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD

As far as the diocese goes, this is our greatest and most pressing need. This diocese has been so richly blessed with terrific people, ministries, apostolates, schools and programs, but still after much effort and many years we are struggling with regard to vocations to the priesthood. I have been privileged to ordain 24 of our own young men to the priesthood in the last 11 years, but that does not nearly fill the need we have for priests. Increasing our numbers of seminarians to 30 or more qualified young men studying for the diocese by 2025 and continuing to remain at that level is absolutely crucial.

Every year at the Priest Personnel Board meetings, it gets more and more difficult to assign priests as pastors. We have been able to meet the needs with our retired priests serving as priest celebrants well into their senior years. These men have been deeply generous in offering their service, sometimes even into their eighties. They have been serving in parishes that do not have a resident pastor or even a neighboring pastor, in those parishes where a pastoral leader has been assigned to coordinate the pastoral care and management of the parish in the absence of a pastor. We are very grateful to the pastoral leaders who have served our communities so faithfully. In addition, we have been blessed with many wonderful international priests serving in our parishes. We are very grateful to each of them and to their bishops who have generously released them for service here. However, none of our international clergy are here on a permanent basis.

So we must turn to prayer and recognize and call forth our own young men who are being called to the priesthood from our families and communities. Because Joseph was at the service of Jesus and Mary in his life, so too can he guide young men forward to devote their lives in service to Jesus and Mary through the Church. St. Joseph is a powerful intercessor. “Go to Joseph.”

“SOME SAINTS ARE PRIVILEGED TO EXTEND TO US THEIR PATRONAGE WITH PARTICULAR EFFICACY IN CERTAIN NEEDS, BUT NOT IN OTHERS; BUT OUR HOLY PATRON ST. JOSEPH HAS THE POWER TO ASSIST US IN ALL CASES, IN EVERY NECESSITY, IN EVERY UNDERTAKING.” - ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

COLLABORATION WITH THE NORBERTINE COMMUNITY

Shortly after coming to Green Bay, I learned that there is a Shrine of St. Joseph here in De Pere under the custody of the Norbertine Fathers and presently located at Old St. Joseph Church on the campus of St. Norbert College. What a gift! There is a long-standing tradition of devotion to St. Joseph right in our own neighborhood, in our own diocese. There is an Archconfraternity of St. Joseph associated with the Shrine of St. Joseph that was established by Pope Leo XIII in January 1892.

The Norbertines have regular prayers and devotions to St. Joseph. They offer a special novena of Masses and days with special prayers in his honor. This year they will continue to seek St. Joseph's intercession for the needs of the community, of St. Norbert College, and the diocese as well.

The history of devotion to St. Joseph began with a diocesan priest at St. Joseph Parish in De Pere. Later, Abbot Pennings (1861-1955) promoted this devotion mightily as he began teaching Latin to the first students of what became St. Norbert College so many years ago. In the more than 100 years since that time, so much has developed there for the community and the college. I believe St. Joseph had a lot to do with that growth through the years.

I will be making a formal announcement that the Shrine of St. Joseph at Old St. Joseph Church at St. Norbert College will be designated as the official pilgrimage site for this Holy Year. Pilgrims will be able to receive a partial indulgence through their visit and prayers there during this special year of prayer.

I have no doubt that St. Joseph will assist us in our times of need and most especially if we approach him humbly, acknowledging our great desire for the life of God to permeate our lives and draw us more deeply into union with the life of the Holy Family and the life of the Trinity. May many blessings be poured out upon each of you, upon your families, upon your parishes and communities, and upon our entire diocese. AMEN.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Ricken". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning of the first name.

The Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL
Bishop of Green Bay