

Disciples on the Way: Year II

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Pentecost Sunday, 2015

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we enter the second year of our diocesan journey called “Disciples on the Way,” we continue to strive to answer the Lord’s call to “Teach My People to Pray.” I am asking you in a special way during this next year to renew your own life and the lives of your family and friends through prayer.

Shortly after I arrived in the Diocese of Green Bay in August of 2008 as your bishop, I kept hearing the words, “teach my people to pray” as I spent time in prayer. Evidently the Lord and the Blessed Mother want to pour out even more abundant graces on all of us so that we may learn to pray and to pray more deeply, thereby growing in holiness together!

I appreciate so much all who have been able to attend the monthly holy hours of prayer in the parishes throughout our diocese. Nearly every parish now has a monthly holy hour. It has also been a great joy for me to share the days of reflection with many of you in various regions of the diocese over the past few months. I look forward to continuing teaching these days of reflection in the fall in other parts of our diocese.

I thank those of you who have offered other prayer seminars and courses of instruction in prayer and meditation to youth, young adults and adults. Various religious communities have shared their way of praying according to their own charism during this celebration of the “Year of Consecrated Life.” This, too, has greatly contributed to an outpouring of prayer across our diocese and beyond.

The Home as a School of Prayer and Love

Each household in our diocese is a domestic church with a noble purpose, meaning and special place in the Body of Christ. The home is a church in miniature. My mother used to say that a house is just a house until the family invests love and prayer in it, then it becomes a home. The “families” within our homes come in many different varieties. Currently, my sister Carol and I make up our household. I have lived by myself and with others. Whoever lives in our home is invited into a deeper relationship of love and prayer with our Lord.

During this year, July 2015 to June 2016, I would ask that you continue to seek ways to pray together in your household and grow to love the Lord and the church. I especially ask you to transform your home into a school of prayer and love by making the Holy Family of Jesus, Joseph and Mary your model and example. In the words of St. John Paul II, the mission of the family is to “guard, reveal and communicate love” (1) and the family serves as a school of compassion, respect, humility and forgiveness in the midst of a world darkened by self-absorption, conflict and selfishness. Whether you live by yourself or with others, your home is a household of faith where Christ is at the center of your life.

The Holy Father, the bishops and your pastors and pastoral leaders are greatly concerned about all of the stresses upon people but especially families these days. Pope Francis remarks that “today, the family is looked down upon and mistreated. We are called to acknowledge how beautiful, true and good it is to start a family, to be a family today; and how indispensable the family is for the life of the world and of the future of humanity”(2). The Holy Father will be present personally at the “World Meeting on the Family” in

Philadelphia in September. He has also called for another Synod of Bishops in October in Rome to help develop strategies for marriages and families during these highly stressful times for families. As a diocese, we are committed to sharing with you some of these insights and strategies so that you can truly cultivate a household where faith is the foundation of your home.

A Special Note to Parents

It is not easy to be a holy family today; life seems to be getting busier and busier. In many instances, both the dad and mom are employed and working to make ends meet. Many parents are raising children by themselves or in separate households. This makes for a very full and hectic life. Please make sure that you as a parent take the time to give your children the best gift of all — the gift of a strong faith and prayer life. Faith is a gift that will sustain your children throughout the storms of this life and one which will prepare them for the next.

Research confirms that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of children, particularly adolescents, is their parents. If we don't share our faith with our children, what will the world share with them instead? If we don't pray for them, with them and teach them how to pray, where will they turn in difficulty and who will they turn to?

Today, we must make space in our lives for Christ. If we give our lives to Christ, he will transform our households to become more prayerful, more holy and more joyful. Let us take comfort in the Holy Family and how they lived, for they have much to teach us. The Holy Family was not without its struggles! Mary and Joseph endured much hardship throughout their lives and yet poured themselves out in love for Jesus. They worried about Jesus when he went missing, only to find him in the temple. As parents, you too pour out your love every day for your children as you make many sacrifices for them and overcome obstacles and trials together. You also worry about your children but if you place your children's lives under the mantle of our Blessed Mother and under the protection of St. Joseph, they will help to take care of you and your family. Do not be afraid! The Lord is with you and the church is with you.

Many of us do not have children living in our homes. We may have grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and children of friends in our lives. By making our own household a place of prayer, we are better able to support those who are currently raising children to do the same.

Keeping Sunday Holy

The highest and most important form of prayer is the Sunday Mass. This is not just a suggestion; this is absolutely necessary to sustain us in our faith. The church requires Sunday Mass attendance under the pain of sin, because the Lord himself requires that we "keep holy the Lord's day."

I recommend that you read the Gospel for the coming Sunday together at home before Sunday Mass so you will be prepared to understand and to enter more deeply into the beauty of the Sunday Mass. The coming Sunday's Gospel reading you can easily find online at the U.S. bishops' conference website, www.usccb.org. When you give God the first hours of the first day of the week, Sunday, everything else will begin to fall in proper order. This will also help to encourage you and your family to rest and enjoy time together before the week begins and the busy pace of life picks up again. One very simple way to encourage greater reverence for Sunday and the need for sacred rest is to limit "screen" time, whether it is on the television, computer or smart devices. Instead, try to observe some times for silence, reading and prayer or enjoy some time outside walking or just being together and talking.

Two Invitations

In December, I will send to every Catholic household in the diocese an invitation to dedicate their home and those in it to the Holy Family. In addition, I will also send an image of the Holy Family to every

household, along with a prayer of dedication so that we all can dedicate our families to the Holy Family. I will include, as well, some prayers that you can pray together.

In June 2016, we will be celebrating the 160th anniversary of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I will again be sending a mailing to every household in the diocese with a beautiful image of the Sacred Heart and asking every person in the diocese to consecrate his/her life and discipleship to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Resources for your Household

I have included in this letter my “Top 10 ways to cultivate a household of faith.” Consider starting with one or two of the suggestions and throughout the year keep adding more until you integrate all 10 into your life and your home.

There is no substitute for bringing peace into your home and healing into your relationships than by praying the rosary together. Fr. Patrick Payton, the famous rosary priest, was well known for the phrase, “The family that prays together stays together.” The rosary is a most special prayer to strengthen you and your loved ones in faith. If you do not know how to pray the rosary, ask your parish priest or a parish staff member to direct you to some helpful resources or someone in the parish who can teach you how to pray the rosary. You can also find more information about the rosary by going to the Diocese of Green Bay’s website, www.gbdioc.org/rosary.

I would also like to recommend that you read my reflection entitled, “Teach My People to Pray,” along with a fine resource for you. It is a five-part study guide, also called “Teach My People To Pray,” which you can use in your home with family, friends or even alone to deepen your prayer life. These resources can be downloaded from the diocesan website at www.gbdioc.org/teachmypeopletopray.

These will be my gifts as bishop to you. Your gift to me and to the church could be the increased prayers of your household and attendance at Sunday Mass. As you grow in faith together our parishes and our diocese become even stronger and more faithful. Together we can transform our world for Christ!

Will you join with me this year to increase our prayers and to strengthen the lives of families in our diocese and throughout the world?

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Rev. David L. Ricken

1 Familiaris Consortio #17

2 Pope Francis, Remarks to the Consistory of Cardinals, Feb. 20, 2014.

Bishop Ricken’s Top 10 ways to build a household of prayer

- Open the Bible and read and reflect upon the Scriptures for the coming Sunday individually and together regularly.
- Attend Sunday Mass as a household.
- Teach children to sign themselves with the sign of the cross and to memorize the essential prayers of our faith: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, for example.
- Pray with, for and over those who live with you. The rosary is an especially important prayer to strengthen your household.

- Put religious symbols, statues and images in your home, car and, if possible, your work space.
- Volunteer together by serving those in need in your community.
- Attend the sacrament of reconciliation regularly and talk with your children about its importance.
- Manage your schedules to “keep holy the Lord’s Day” so that Sunday becomes a day to strengthen and deepen your faith.
- Speak of God and Jesus with joy and certainty and pray before and after meals together.
- Celebrate holy days with Mass and a special meal.

A holy life can be a healthy and happy life — have fun growing in faith and prayer together!

Days of Reflection with Bishop Ricken

Here are the remaining Days of Reflection Bishop David Ricken is holding around the diocese. The days run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

- Saturday, Dec. 19, 2015, Immaculate Conception Church, Luxemburg;
- Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016, St. John the Baptist Church, Howard;
- Saturday, Feb. 13, 2016, St. Mary of the Lake Church, Lakewood.