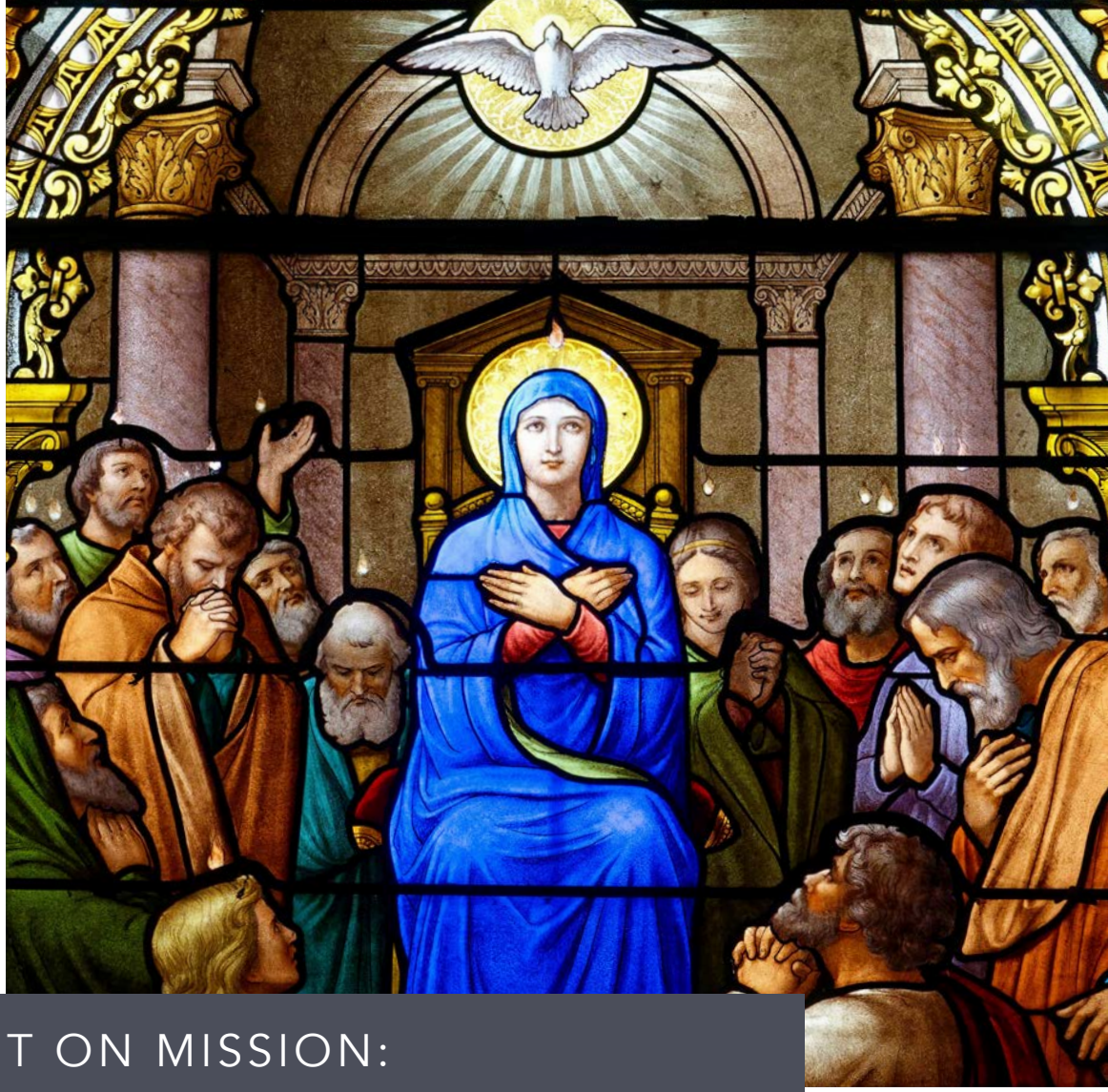


SENT ON MISSION:

A PASTORAL INVITATION TO *SHARE JESUS* WITH OTHERS

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

Diocese of
Green Bay

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David Laurin Ricken was born Nov. 9, 1952, to George William "Bill" and Bertha (Davis) Ricken in Dodge City, Kansas, the second of three children, including Mark and Carol. He was ordained a priest on Sept. 12, 1980, and on Jan. 6, 2000, he was ordained to the Episcopacy for the Diocese of Cheyenne at the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. Pope Benedict XVI named Bishop Ricken the twelfth bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay on July 9, 2008, and he was installed as bishop on Aug. 28, 2008, at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Green Bay.



DEAR PRIESTS, DEACONS, RELIGIOUS, LAY LEADERS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN JESUS CHRIST,

What a blessed and remarkable journey we are on together! I still vividly remember the joy and anticipation I felt when I began my service to the Diocese of Green Bay in August 2008. Coming from the missionary Diocese of Cheyenne, Wyoming, I carried with me a deep missionary zeal and a burning desire to share Jesus Christ with everyone I encountered, near and far.

Ordained a bishop by St. John Paul II in January 2000, I was one of only twelve bishops ordained at that time for the New Evangelization. I remain as committed and inspired by St. John Paul II's vision and passion for the New Evangelization as ever. It has been my hope and prayer that, as your bishop, I have served as a faithful instrument of Christ, striving to make Him known and loved in all that I do and in all that we do together as the Diocese of Green Bay.

DISCIPLESHIP PEDAGOGY



DISCOVER JESUS

"Come and See" (Jn 1:39)
Disciples: I am invited to encounter Jesus.
Missionary Disciples: I intentionally introduce others to encounter Jesus as their friend and savior.

FOLLOW JESUS

"Follow Me" (Mt 9:9)
Disciples: I am accompanied to grow in friendship with Jesus and his body, the Catholic Church.
Missionary Disciples: I accompany and form those who desire to grow in friendship with Jesus and the Catholic Church.

*SHARE JESUS

"Go and Make Disciples" (Mt 28:19)
Disciples: I am sent on mission to share my love for Jesus and the Catholic Church with others.
Missionary Disciples: I equip and send others on mission to evangelize and make disciples.

WORSHIP JESUS

"Remain United with Me" (Jn 15:4)
Disciples: I respond in love to worship and praise God in the midst of the Catholic community.
Missionary Disciples: I form and support people to worship in community as the body of Christ, the Catholic Church.

A major initiative to spread the love and Gospel of Jesus Christ began here over ten years ago. Since 2014, Our Lord has been forming us, as a local church, into *Disciples on the Way*. Through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, we are living as "friends and followers of Jesus" in this missionary moment as a Church. It is my fervent prayer that living as missionary disciples is not just a passing trend or program, but a way of life for us as Catholic Christians. I pray that we always hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit to go out and share the Good News we have discovered in our personal encounters with Jesus.

Throughout this journey of faith, thousands have embraced the call of Baptism to live as missionary disciples. It fills my heart with encouragement to see the Gospel proclaimed and hearts renewed by the Lord. We are also beginning to see the fruits of this labor, signs that we are truly "winning souls for the Kingdom of God."

More and more people are returning to Mass! Often, we labor without seeing the immediate fruit of our work, so this renewed participation is a tremendous gift from Our Lord. Many of our parishes have not only surpassed pre-pandemic Mass attendance but have done so significantly, with dozens more approaching 90 percent of those levels.

I am especially confident that the more than 1,500 people who have already participated in our diocesan missionary discipleship retreat, *Entrust*, have gone forth to share the Good News they

received, helping to bring others back to the celebration of the Eucharist. We are also nearing our diocesan goal for vocations: As of September 2025, twenty-five men are actively discerning and studying for the priesthood.

When we first set these two diocesan goals—forming missionary disciples and increasing vocations to the priesthood—some may have thought them overly ambitious. Yet Our Lord has blessed this journey in remarkable ways. I remain confident that He who began this good work in our diocese will bring it to completion (cf. Philippians 1:6).

LOOKING BACK

BEGINNING OUR JOURNEY AS *DISCIPLES ON THE WAY*

We began preparing for our *Disciples on the Way* journey in 2014, as every meaningful journey should begin—with prayer. Prayer is the foundation of all worthy endeavors, and at the start of our journey, we invited the guidance of the Holy Spirit every step of the way. As a diocesan family, we dedicated two years to deepening our life of prayer through the *Teach My People to Pray* seminars, learning not only how to pray, but how to be formed by prayer and how to pray with others.

"It is my heartfelt desire that every person, especially every baptized Catholic, come to know Jesus personally and enter into a deep, life-giving relationship with Him."

In 2016, we formally embraced a discipleship pathway shaped by four essential movements: ***Discover Jesus***, ***Follow Jesus***, ***Worship Jesus***, and ***Share Jesus***. This pedagogy makes it abundantly clear that our journey is centered entirely on Jesus Christ, who is present in His body, the Catholic Church. It is my heartfelt desire that every person, especially every baptized Catholic, come to know Jesus personally and enter into a deep, life-giving relationship with Him.

DISCOVER JESUS

FOLLOW JESUS

WORSHIP JESUS

SHARE JESUS

This pathway was our guide as we set out together as *Disciples on the Way*. As we grew in our relationship with Christ, we naturally shared that lived experience with others. I must admit, I initially thought this journey might take only a few years. But the old adage proved to be true that discipleship grows at the speed of relationship. There is no fixed timeline for becoming or maturing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is a lifelong pilgrimage, marked by grace, patience, and the steady work of the Holy Spirit.



"The woman at the well (John 4:4-42) embraced discipleship through her first encounter with Jesus. She discovered Him, accepted His invitation and left that moment transformed."

DISCOVER JESUS

2016-2018

The Discover Jesus years marked a pivotal time of teaching and catechesis, focused on helping individuals encounter Jesus in a deeply personal way. We never graduate from discovering or recovering a deeper relationship with Jesus. My heartfelt hope is that every person comes to know Jesus not merely in the mind, but in the heart, to experience His love and mercy in a way that is uniquely transformative.

St. Teresa of Calcutta expressed this beautifully in her words to her own sisters: "The personal love Christ has for you is infinite. You are special to God. He is waiting for you to come to Him in prayer. He wants to honor you with His presence. Jesus loves you tenderly; you are precious to Him. Turn to Jesus with great trust and allow yourself to be loved by Him."

The Woman at the Well (John 4:4-42) embraced discipleship through her first encounter with Jesus. She discovered Him, accepted His invitation, and left that moment transformed, becoming a bold missionary disciple and an evangelist for Christ. Through her witness, an entire town came to know Jesus. While an encounter with Jesus can happen suddenly, it is deepened over a lifetime. The life of St. Augustine shows us that conversion is rarely immediate. It can take time to release old ways of living and to fully embrace a deeper, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Many people take more time to grow and deepen their relationship with the Lord. Discipleship, after all, is a "walk in faith," a deliberate journey of following Jesus step by step under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Discipleship is both a way of life and a journey of ongoing conversion. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, "The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle" (*CCC* 2015). Yet, through persevering prayer and the daily conversion of heart, we truly *Discover Jesus* anew and encounter Him ever more intimately as our dearest friend and Savior. "There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him," remarked Pope Benedict XVI in his homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate, April 24, 2005.

FOLLOW JESUS

2018-2020



In 2018, we entered the next phase in the discipleship process—the call to *Follow Jesus*. During this time, we deepened our understanding of who Jesus is and how to live a life rooted in holiness and the pursuit of virtue. This, of course, is a lifelong journey. We never stop following Jesus or being formed by Him as we walk in faith.

Throughout this phase, we are, hopefully, accompanied by mentors and spiritual leaders who guide us by their lived example, showing us how to *Follow Jesus* more closely. And there is no better way to *Follow Jesus* than to do what He did: Proclaim the Gospel! As you do, you naturally share Him with others, ideally with at least two people, and walk alongside them in faith. We *Follow Jesus* together, in community, and together we grow as disciples, as part of the Body of Christ.

AN UNEXPECTED PAUSE

2020-2022

In December 2019, I had the privilege of making an *ad limina* visit with the other bishops of Region VII to meet with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and pray at the four major basilicas in Rome. Our time with Pope Francis was engaging and heartfelt. Each bishop was invited to ask any question, and the Holy Father responded with wisdom and clarity.

Più avanti!



KEEP MOVING FORWARD

When my turn came, I briefly described our *Disciples on the Way* journey and asked, "Holy Father, I think I may have made a mistake in not including the Holy Spirit more intentionally in our discipleship process. What is your opinion about the role of the Holy Spirit in the discipleship journey?"

The Holy Father paused. He looked at me, *gazed* at me, really, for a long moment. Then he responded with great wisdom:

"That is a very insightful question. The Holy Spirit will not give you the whole picture; He will just show you the next step. Take that step, and then He will give you the next."

He then added, **"Read, study, and pray over the Acts of the Apostles repeatedly."**

And finally, in Italian, he said, **"Più avanti!"** which means keep moving forward.

As we prepared to leave, Pope Francis repeated those same instructions loudly to the entire group, ensuring everyone heard:

"The Holy Spirit will reveal the next step, take it, and He will give you another. Read the Acts of the Apostles again and again. Più avanti!"

I continue to carry those words with me. They remain a gift and an encouragement to me. How prophetic they proved to be. Just a few months later, the pandemic struck.

During our diocesan Year of St. Joseph, we entered a time of uncertainty and trial. Yet even in the midst of challenge, we quickly recognized that the Holy Spirit was with us. We learned to discern the next right step, trusting in His guidance.

Several teams in the diocesan Curia and in our parishes began reading and praying over the Acts of the Apostles. We adapted quickly, shifting to online meetings and finding new ways to continue the life of the Church in unfamiliar territory. Our Curia and parishes worked diligently to care for our priests and our people. So many of you—pastors, priests, deacons, religious, parish leaders, staff, and volunteers—sought to discern the next step and trusted in God's providence.

Even as the pandemic spread, we kept moving forward (*più avanti*)—proclaiming the Gospel and building community in new ways.

As we returned to in-person Sunday Masses and parish gatherings, we became acutely aware of the many souls who did not come back. Their absence was deeply felt. We all experienced the pain of being separated from the Eucharist and from one another. At the time, the decision to suspend public worship was necessary. Yet in hindsight, we recognize the profound cost. We never want to cease celebrating Sunday liturgy as a community again. We never want to close the doors of our churches.

The pandemic years brought undeniable losses and challenges. But the good news is that recovery is well underway. Even in the most difficult moments, the Holy Spirit never ceased to guide us, always revealing the next step forward. Admittedly, we did not navigate those years perfectly. We stumbled, we struggled, we navigated stormy waters, but through His mercy, love, and grace, we remained faithful and persevered.

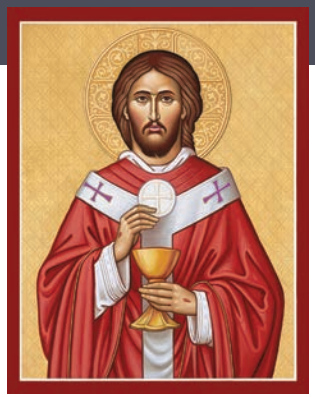
The Holy Spirit continues to be our constant companion, showing us the next best step to take. And when we are faithful to Him, He is unfailingly and abundantly faithful to us.





WORSHIP JESUS AND EUCHARISTIC REVIVAL





WORSHIP JESUS

2022-2025

In July 2022, we entered the *Worship Jesus* phase of our journey. I realized more deeply that what I had once hoped could be accomplished in a year would, in fact, take more time to bring to fruition. To *Share Jesus* effectively, we need prayerful missionary disciples, people who have discovered Jesus, follow Him, and worship Him. In short, we need people who are earnestly seeking holiness and put Jesus at the center of their lives.

To support this phase of our journey, I wrote *Encountering Jesus in the Eucharist: Disciples Called to Worship*, a pastoral letter intended to guide and accompany the faithful. How we worship truly matters, especially when it comes to Sunday Mass. The Second Vatican Council teaches that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all Her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). Sunday Mass is a vibrant source of grace and refreshment for our journey. It is the summit of our faith, because each Sunday we encounter and receive the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. There is no more intimate encounter with Jesus than this.

During these *Worship Jesus* years, we placed special emphasis on teaching *Lectio divina* (divine reading) to enrich our experience of Sunday worship. This meditative reading of Sacred Scripture, especially the Sunday readings or Gospel, helps us hear God speaking through His Word. It also prepares our hearts to receive the proclaimed Word at Mass more deeply. Another key focus for myself, our priests, and our deacons has been to improve preaching, bringing the readings to life and connecting them meaningfully to the lived reality of the assembly.

I cannot emphasize this enough: Please read and pray over the coming Sunday's Gospel before attending Mass.

Your experience will be so much richer when you come prepared to hear the Word of God.

Worship is profoundly important for it is at the very heart of who we are. We are created to worship the Lord, to give Him glory and honor with our whole being. Our worship finds its fullest and most perfect expression in the liturgy. In the celebration of the Mass, it is Jesus Christ Himself who offers the eternal sacrifice to the Father, drawing us into that sacred mystery and allowing us to participate in His self-giving love.

We, as the Body of Christ, are deeply blessed that He invites us to share in His sacrifice and worship of the Father. His offering becomes our offering. That is why, at every Mass, we proclaim in the doxology: **"Through Him, with Him, and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is Yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever."**

And we respond with a resounding, **"Amen!"**

The Mass is, at its heart, about giving glory to the Father. This is why I have been encouraging our priests and all the faithful, not just to attend Mass, but to *pray* the Mass. I urge everyone: Please, don't simply go through the motions or rush through the words. Be present to the prayers and actions of the liturgy.

You'll notice that many of the words spoken at Mass come directly from Sacred Scripture. Don't just *say* the words—*pray* them. When we do this, we become united in mind and heart, offering fitting praise and honor to the Father with the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Through our entry into the prayer and mystery of Jesus offering Himself to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we truly participate in the sacred mysteries we celebrate. The Office of Divine Worship is available to assist with resources to help deepen this experience.

I deeply desire that all baptized Catholics return to Sunday Mass. If you have been away, even for many years, I warmly invite you to reach out to your local parish, meet with a priest, or stop by during times for confession. Prepare your heart to receive Jesus anew. He is waiting for you. You are missed each week at Sunday Mass.

My hope is that we all come to know and understand the Mass more profoundly. I am confident that if parishioners truly understood the beauty and depth of the Mass, no one would ever want to miss it.



ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

What an extraordinary gift we have in the Eucharist. Our Lord Jesus Christ is truly present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity before us in the Blessed Sacrament. Let us come and adore Him!

As your bishop, I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of Eucharistic Adoration. In a world filled with noise and distraction, we need time to rest in the silence of Christ's Eucharistic presence, allowing His gaze of love to transform our hearts.

Sitting before the Lord in the Eucharist offers us a sacred pause, a chance to be still and know that God is with us (cf. Psalm 46:11). In Adoration, we pour out our hearts to Him and listen in return. If we take the time to listen, though it is not always easy, God will speak to us. No fancy words are needed. Simply come before the Lord and be present. He loves you and desires to speak to your heart.

For missionary disciples, Eucharistic Adoration is essential. It is the wellspring of grace and strength for our mission. As we sit before the Eucharist, we sit in the presence of Jesus Christ Himself. He is the one who guides our steps and leads us into the mission field. In His presence, we learn to see with the eyes of faith, to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to be renewed in the love that sustains us.

There is a popular saying: "You can't give what you don't have." If we truly desire to *Share Jesus* with others, we must first spend time with Him, adoring and receiving the gift of His abiding presence in our lives. We leave Adoration ready to share the grace and encounter we have received.

SHARE JESUS

COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

In 2025, we entered the *Share Jesus* phase of our journey, guided by the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter. Just as the apostles experienced in the Upper Room on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is essential for sharing Jesus. It is my hope that all the baptized will embrace their call as missionary disciples and go forth to *Share Jesus* with others.

The same Jesus whom we have discovered personally, followed in our daily lives, worshipped every Sunday in community, and throughout each moment of our day, we now go out and share with everyone we meet.

I want to be clear: Sharing Jesus does not need to be technical or follow a rigid format. My hope is that evangelization happens in your home, at work, in your neighborhood, at the grocery store, at your child's soccer game—*everywhere*! Evangelization is not rocket science. Let it be natural. Let it be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Evangelization is not reserved for experts; it begins with love. When Jesus has touched your heart, sharing Him becomes the most natural and joyful thing you can do. As Pope St. Paul VI wrote: **"Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit"** (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75).



The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms this clearly: **"The Spirit prepares men and goes out to them with His grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls His word to them, and opens their minds to the understanding of His death and Resurrection"** (*CCC* 737).

Without the Holy Spirit, there is no encountering Jesus, no following Jesus and no sharing Jesus. The Holy Spirit is not simply helpful; He is *essential*. He is the *sine qua non* of evangelization. He is not an accessory to our mission; He is the heartbeat of it. Without Him, our words fall flat. With Him, even the smallest act of witness can set hearts ablaze.

So we pray: **Come, Holy Spirit, lead the way!**



Pope Leo XIV, in his 2025 Pentecost homily, reminded us: **"The Holy Spirit opens the borders between peoples … God's breath unites our hearts, makes us view others as our brothers and sisters, breaks down barriers and tears down the walls of indifference and hatred."**

This is our moment. Through our Baptism and Confirmation, the Holy Spirit already dwells within us. Let us put into practice the grace of the sacraments! If you've drifted away, come back to the Eucharist. Return to the Sacrament of Penance, where Christ's mercy renews and strengthens you. Depend on the Holy Spirit, He is longing for us to acknowledge His presence and ask for His help.

Just as the Holy Spirit filled the Upper Room with the apostles and the Blessed Mother at Pentecost, Pope Leo XIV, in his Pentecost homily, expressed his amazement that the Holy Spirit "overcomes their fear, shatters their inner chains, heals their wounds, anoints them with strength, and grants them the courage to go out to all and to proclaim God's mighty works."

The same Holy Spirit who empowered the apostles is ready to do the same for you, if you only ask.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

For nearly 2,000 years, the Holy Spirit has been guiding and inspiring the Church, through the sacraments, through the beautiful gift of the Mass, and through the ongoing growth of the Body of Christ. From the humble beginnings of Twelve Apostles and seventy-two disciples, the Church has grown to approximately 1.4 billion Catholics worldwide, alongside another billion Christians who profess faith in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is not an "it" or a vague force, but a *Person*, the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity who desires to lead us ever more deeply into communion with Jesus and into mission for the world. At this moment in our discipleship journey, we unite our discovering, following, and worshipping of Jesus in the call to *share* Him. Just as the apostles left the Upper Room ready to proclaim Christ, we too need the Holy Spirit to step beyond our comfort zones and *Share Jesus* with others.

As Fr. Wilfrid Stinissen writes in his book *The Holy Spirit, Fire of Divine Love*: **"The Holy Spirit is love. He and love are identical … to give us the Holy Spirit and to pour love into our hearts are the same thing for God."**

This means that love is not merely an abstract concept, but a living Person. The Holy Spirit personalizes us and draws us into the very life of God. Wherever there is charity and love, there is God: ***Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est***.

When we choose to live in love, we live in the atmosphere of God, breathing with the breath of the Spirit. As Fr. Stinissen beautifully explains: **"Love is not a diffuse, impersonal force but rather a 'personalizing' force."**

The Holy Spirit makes us more fully who we are meant to be—sons and daughters of the Father, disciples of Jesus, and witnesses to divine love in the world.

I invite you to personally encounter the Holy Spirit in your own life. Throughout the Diocese of Green Bay, we are blessed with many ministries and retreat opportunities that offer a chance to experience the Holy Spirit anew.

For any ministry to bear fruit, the Holy Spirit must be alive and active within it. I have witnessed countless lives transformed by the Spirit's power through these ministries.

I want to make a special mention of our *Entrust* retreat, which is our diocesan missionary discipleship retreat. The fruit of much prayer, the *Entrust* retreat flowed from the Catholic Evangelization Studies courses, which provided theological, pastoral, and spiritual formation in the pedagogy of the New Evangelization. Today, our *Entrust* retreat has helped form over 1,500 missionary disciples, who we have asked to each form two to three disciples of others through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. *Entrust* helps participants deepen their friendship with Jesus, become more attuned to the Holy Spirit, share the basic Gospel message (the *kerygma*), and evangelize in simple ways. This process of spiritual multiplication is bearing fruit in our parishes, thanks be to God!

Many have experienced *Cursillo* and left the weekend renewed in Christ and ready to share Him with others. Often, we need time away with the Lord to hear His voice and rekindle our zeal. *Life in the Spirit* seminars offer a fresh outpouring and anointing of the Holy Spirit, activating His power in people's lives. *Christian Experience Weekends (CEW)* have helped countless individuals encounter the Lord and the Holy Spirit



in deeply personal ways. Ministries like *Camp Tekakwitha, Teens Encounter Christ, SPIRITUS* retreats, and many others have helped young people awaken to the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Through Baptism and especially Confirmation, we have all received the Holy Spirit. Yet often, we do not live in His power and inspiration as we are called to do.

Retreat experiences like these help us encounter the Spirit anew. They help us begin to truly listen to His promptings and live in His power. As St. Paul exhorts Timothy: **"Stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands"** (2 Timothy 1:6).

I encourage anyone who desires to grow closer to the Holy Spirit to consider one of these retreats or ministries. Come to know and experience the love, power, and healing the Holy Spirit longs to bring into your life.



DISCIPLES CALLED TO WITNESS

When I served as chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, the bishops authored a document titled, *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*. That call remains urgent today; we are invited to *Share Jesus*.

Brothers and sisters, during these years of sharing Jesus, we are called to *witness*—in both word and action. We are called to speak openly about our relationship with Jesus Christ and to invite others to consider how the Good News can transform their lives. This mission is not reserved for a select few; it belongs to every baptized Christian. As Pope Francis reminds us: **"Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus"** (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120).

To witness is simply to share the joy of that encounter, to let the light of Christ shine through our words and actions, and to walk with others as they discover that same joy for themselves. In this way, evangelization becomes not a burden, but the natural overflow of a heart set aflame by the Spirit of God. Witnessing to Christ is an essential part of sharing Jesus with others.

To share our encounter with Christ, we must first recognize that we *have* encountered Him. Too often, we live as though we are on our own, relying solely on our own strength and effort. But when we truly know we've encountered Christ, we see Him as a living person. We speak with Him daily in prayer. We recognize His presence and movement in our lives.

If you don't yet feel that you have this relationship, I invite you to ask Jesus to come into your life in a new and deeper way. Ask Him to reveal Himself personally to you. You may be surprised how, after praying this sincerely, the Scriptures begin to speak directly to your heart. You may experience the Mass differently and begin to notice Christ working throughout your day. You may even feel a growing desire and courage to share your experience of Jesus with others.

If you wish, please pray this simple prayer right now:

"Lord Jesus, I love You. I invite You into my heart. I want to know You better. Please forgive me for my sins and failings. I am sorry for all those I have hurt, especially You. I want to be Your disciple and share You with others, but I know I need You in my life to do so. Come, Lord Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and fill me with a renewed zeal and love for You—a love that is contagious and unmistakable. Come, Lord Jesus, I need You more and more in my life. Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Holy Spirit!"

Jesus always hears our prayers, and He will act in our lives.

With Jesus intimately present in our daily lives and prayers, we go forth each day—to work, to exercise, to be with our families—as missionary disciples. The missionary nature of the Church must never be forgotten, for **"the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin"** (*Ad Gentes*, 2; cf. *CCC* 767).

We can be confident that wherever the *kerygma* (which is the basic Gospel message) is proclaimed, Our Lord is present. The *kerygma* simply reminds us: We are created by God in love.

Though we sinned and fell, the Father sent Jesus to free us from sin and death. His life, death, and Resurrection not only open the gates of heaven but also allow us to live abundantly here and now as new creations.

When we share this basic Gospel message, we are sharing the very heart of our faith: We are all sinners. We need a Savior. Jesus has freed us. This is *Good News*! The Lord has done this for us; let us share it with others.

Just like the apostles in the Upper Room, we too are sent. They received the Holy Spirit in a profound way and went forth to proclaim the *kerygma*. In fact, if you read Acts 2, you'll hear St. Peter proclaiming the Gospel to the crowds in Jerusalem. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and Peter's witness, thousands came to faith that day!

You can be confident that whenever you proclaim Christ to someone, He is present with you in that encounter (cf. Matthew 18:20) and His Word will bear fruit in their lives (cf. Isaiah 55:11). Whenever Jesus and the *kerygma* are proclaimed boldly, His signs and wonders accompany His Word—clearly seen throughout the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Matthew 10:8, Acts 5:12, Mark 16:17-18).

I encourage you to find practical and meaningful ways to share the *kerygma* with those you encounter, through the witness of your life, through conversations about your relationship with Jesus, through charitable works of mercy, and even by intentionally reaching out to your neighbors and inviting them into a deeper relationship with Christ.

FOUR WAYS TO LIVE OUT *SHARE JESUS*

As we enter into the *Share Jesus* years, I want to highlight four key ways for every parish and individual to live out this call.

1

Calling Upon the Holy Spirit

2

Invoking the Intercession of Our Lady of Champion, St. Francis Xavier and St. Thérèse of Lisieux

3

Missionary Outreach to the Poor through Living the *Corporal Works of Mercy* and *Spiritual Works of Mercy*

4

Go Forth: Sharing Jesus with Neighbors

1 CALLING UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is abundantly clear: For any good work to bear fruit, we absolutely need the inspiration and grace of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of every renewal in the Church is the renewing action of the Holy Spirit, who is **"the interior Master of life"** (*CCC* 1697) and the true protagonist of evangelization.



The movement of the Spirit is more powerful and effective than our actions alone. Training and preparation for evangelization are important, but inviting the Holy Spirit to go before us, to accompany us, and to guide us is even more essential. We must learn not only *what* to do, but *how*, *when*, and *where* the Holy Spirit is prompting us to act. In this way, we are truly led by the Spirit of God.

We cannot undertake the mission of renewal entrusted to us without the Holy Spirit's guidance and power. Our fears and insecurities may tempt us to hold back from sharing Jesus. But when those fears arise, remember: **"The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness"** (Romans 8:26). He sends the fire of Divine Love into our hearts.

As St. John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*, we must have a **"renewed appreciation of the Spirit as the One who builds the Kingdom of God"** and prepares hearts for salvation. If we desire for people to return to the Church or come to know Jesus for the first time, it is the Holy Spirit working in us and in them that leads to conversion.

Therefore, in this moment of deeper reliance on the Spirit's grace and power, I am calling upon the entire diocese to entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit in a profound way. Beginning this year, we will pray the traditional Prayer to the Holy Spirit together every Sunday after the Universal Prayer. This will be our diocesan act of trust and unity in the Spirit over the next several years.



Come, ***Holy Spirit***, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your ***Spirit*** and they shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the ***Holy Spirit***,
grant that in the same ***Spirit*** we may be truly wise
and ever rejoice in his consolation.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady of Champion ***Pray for Us***

Saint Francis Xavier ***Pray for Us***

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux ***Pray for Us***

Diocese of Green Bay

* To be prayed at every Sunday Mass at the close of the Universal Prayer.

2 INVOKING THE INTERCESSION OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION, ST. FRANCIS XAVIER AND ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX



My next request is that we conclude each prayer by invoking the intercession of Our Lady of Champion; our diocesan patron, St. Francis Xavier, one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church; and also St. Thérèse of Lisieux, co-patroness of the missions.

We must never forget our model of missionary discipleship: **Our Blessed Mother, Mary**. Her role is indispensable in leading souls to Christ and His Church. As Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Mary was animated to do everything, and only what the Holy Spirit directed. Through her *yes*, we are all able to receive Jesus into our lives.

But Mary is not a distant model for us in the Diocese of Green Bay. She appeared right here, in Champion, in 1859. Stay close to her, and you will never be far from Jesus. You will be protected and comforted by the Queen of Heaven. Let us not be afraid to go out. Let us take the next step, confident that the Holy Spirit will show us the way.

Mary, our Mother and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, we seek your maternal intercession and love as we, *Disciples on the Way*, go forth to share the love and mercy we have received from your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, with everyone we meet.

St. Francis Xavier's zeal for the Gospel carried him to the farthest reaches of the earth. Francis was born in Spain in 1506, and while studying the liberal arts in Paris, he became a follower of Ignatius of Loyola. After his ordination in 1537 in Rome, he devoted himself to works of charity.

Francis went to India and Japan in 1541, where he tirelessly proclaimed the Gospel for ten years and brought many people to faith in Jesus Christ. In 1552, near the China coast on the Island of Sancia, Francis died (see the Liturgy of the Hours for more details on the life of St. Francis Xavier).

As the patron saint of the Diocese of Green Bay, we will be seeking St. Francis Xavier's intercession during these *Share Jesus* years. May he intercede for us, that we may be renewed in missionary discipleship and share the joy of the Gospel with courage and love.



We will also ask for the intercession of **St. Thérèse of Lisieux**, the Little Flower, who is known as the patroness of missions, not because she ever traveled to distant lands, but because of the depth of her love and her constant prayer for missionaries throughout the world.

In the hidden simplicity of the convent, St. Thérèse discovered that true missionary zeal flows from intimacy with Christ and from doing small things with great love. Her "little way" teaches us that holiness and evangelization begin in the ordinary moments of daily life, offered with extraordinary love.

St. Thérèse (1873-1897) lived only 24 short years, but her "little way" of love and trust in God continues to inspire many throughout the world. As the youngest declared Doctor of the Church, St. Thérèse discovered that holiness does not always consist in grand deeds, but in small acts of love done with great trust in God. Many who complete a Novena asking her intercession often receive a flower, usually a rose, during the time of prayer.

We seek the assistance of Our Lady of Champion, St. Francis Xavier and St. Thérèse to inspire and help us live out the missionary vocation, to be missionaries right here at home, in our families, in our workplaces, in our parishes, and in our communities. The mission field is not far away; it begins on your street, in your workplace, and around your dinner table. Every baptized Catholic is sent, right here and right now.

As you reach out to those in your parish boundaries, seek the intercession of Our Lady of Champion, St. Francis Xavier and St. Thérèse to boldly share Christ with all those you encounter.

I will be asking the parishes, the schools and the diocese in general, with St. Francis Xavier as their patron, to educate their parishioners, students and the diocese in general about the life and witness of St. Francis Xavier and to develop more of a consistent reference to him in prayer, both at Mass after the Prayer to the Holy Spirit and also in our personal prayer lives. I will also emphasize St. Thérèse's "little way" of evangelization through small acts of generosity and kindness carried out with great love for Jesus Christ.



The Holy Spirit calls us to witness to Christ in both word and action. The following two steps will help us live out this call, through service to those in need and through intentional invitations to others to return to the Church and parish life.

3 MISSIONARY OUTREACH TO THE POOR THROUGH LIVING THE *CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY* AND *SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY*

Once again, the Holy Spirit has perfectly positioned our diocese to be in communion with the universal Church and with the Holy Father's call to renewed compassion for the poor. In his recent apostolic exhortation, *Delexi te: On the Wounded Faces of the Poor* (no. 9), Pope Leo XIV reminds us, "On the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself."

The Lord Jesus reminds us that in serving the poor, we serve Him: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

The Church, in her living tradition, calls these concrete expressions of love the *Corporal Works of Mercy* (*CCC* 2447). In our diocese, I have been continually inspired by the generosity and tireless ministry of so many who live out these works: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, burying the dead, and giving alms to the poor (including clothing the naked).

I wish to recognize and thank these witnesses of charity for their faithfulness and generous service to the poor, the lonely, and the marginalized.

Let us remember that the source of this service is not our own strength, but the grace that flows from the Eucharist. As Pope Leo XIII taught, the Eucharist "is the very source of Christian piety, the soul of the Church, and the font of all virtue."

Strengthened by this sacrament of love, may we continue to be a Church that goes forth to encounter Christ in the poor and marginalized with joyful and humble hearts.

"Whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).



FEED THE HUNGRY



GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY



SHELTER THE HOMELESS



VISIT THE SICK



VISIT PRISONERS



BURY THE DEAD



GIVE ALMS TO THE POOR

It is the Holy Spirit who propels us to charity and gives us the energy to serve with love. During his homily on July 13, 2025, at the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova in Castel Gandolfo, the Holy Father reflected on the parable of the Good Samaritan, exhorting us to embrace compassion and mercy, not merely external observance. Pope Leo XIV reminds us: "To believe in Him and to be His disciples means allowing ourselves to be changed … with hands that help others and soothe their wounds."

This captures the essence of the *Corporal Works of Mercy*, not out of obligation, but as a response to Eucharistic love that transforms us and moves us to compassionate action.

Pope Francis also emphasized mercy as the defining characteristic of a true Christian: "One cannot understand a true Christian who is not merciful, just as one cannot comprehend God without His mercy. This is the epitomizing word of the Gospel: mercy. It is the fundamental feature of the face of Christ" (Angelus Address, Jubilee of Mercy). He reminds us that: "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, §1).

As we go forth to serve our brothers and sisters in need, St. Teresa of Calcutta reminds us to begin all works of mercy with prayer: "See the humility of God. He made Himself the hungry one to satisfy our hunger for God through our love … See the unity between prayer and wholehearted free service. We meet Jesus in the Bread of Life in the Eucharist and the humanity of Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor. We must be able to unite both of these … Prayer by itself — no! Work by itself – no! These two have to go together" (*Instructions*, 1978).

Service to the poor without Christ and prayer at the center becomes something other than a corporal work of mercy. Let all our charitable service flow from and be sustained by constant prayer. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us in *Dilexi te*, no. 27, "For this reason, works of mercy are recommended as a sign of the authenticity of worship, which, while giving praise to God, has the task of opening us to the transformation that the Spirit can bring about in us, so that we may all become an image of Christ and his mercy towards the weakest."

"It is the Holy Spirit who propels us to charity and gives us the energy to serve with love."



COUNSEL THE DOUBTFUL

INSTRUCT THE IGNORANT

ADMONISH THE SINNER

COMFORT THE SORROWFUL

FORGIVE INJURIES

BEAR WRONGS PATIENTLY

PRAY FOR THE LIVING AND DEAD

Of course, living out the *Corporal Works of Mercy* does not diminish our call to practice the *Spiritual Works of Mercy* as well (*CCC* 2447): counseling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing the sinner, comforting the sorrowful, forgiving injuries, bearing wrongs patiently, and praying for the living and the dead.

Living out the inspirations of the Holy Spirit through the *Corporal Works of Mercy* and *Spiritual Works of Mercy* is a powerful witness to the world of our Christian faith and our love for Christ. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us in *Dilexi te* (no. 120): "Christian love breaks down every barrier, brings close those who were distant, unites strangers, and reconciles enemies. It spans chasms that are humanly impossible to bridge, and it penetrates to the most hidden crevices of society. By its very nature, Christian love is prophetic: it works miracles and knows no limits. It makes what was apparently impossible happen. Love is above all a way of looking at life and a way of living it. A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today."

These words beautifully capture the essence of our mission as disciples. When we act with mercy and love, guided by the Spirit, we become signs of God's boundless compassion and instruments of His transforming grace in the world.

4 GO FORTH: SHARING JESUS WITH NEIGHBORS

In the Great Commission, Jesus sends out his disciples to evangelize the world: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Sharing Jesus is for all the baptized.

Yet, while making "disciples of all nations" may sound daunting, evangelization most often starts locally, with your family, friends and neighbors. It is helpful to begin with those the Lord has already entrusted to our care, our brothers and sisters within our own parishes.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that "from the beginning, the first disciples burned with the desire to proclaim Christ" (*CCC* 425).

This same missionary impulse is alive in the Church today and must be rekindled in our own diocese and in each parish. Might we all "burn with desire" to *Share Jesus* with those in our parish communities, especially those who may have drifted away from the practice of our Catholic faith.







One practical way for us to embody this missionary spirit is through person-to-person outreach, particularly in our parishes. Many of our fellow parishioners, while still registered in our parishes, have stopped attending Mass or living out their Catholic faith. This person-to-person outreach and connection could be done by calling or connecting with every parishioner registered in our parishes (as was done during the pandemic).

A personal connection by visiting the home of every registered parishioner can be a meaningful way to start building confidence in person-to-person outreach. How much more powerful it would be today to knock on a neighbor's door, to extend a personal invitation to return to Mass (perhaps if done in Lent to return for Easter, or during Advent to return to Mass at Christmas) or simply to say: *"You are missed. We are praying for you. How can we serve you?"* A single invitation, offered in love, can change a life.

When we knock on a neighbor's door or make a phone call, we are not just reaching out; we are extending the hand of Christ Himself. If someone is not ready to return just yet, we can still ask how we might support them and assure them of our prayers. Even if they are not prepared for a physical return, we can foster a spiritual connection that, with time and care, may grow into a renewed relationship with Christ and His Church.

This is not merely a human effort; it is Christ Himself reaching through us. Like the apostles sent out two by two (cf. Mark 6:7), we too are sent, not waiting for others to come, but bringing the presence of Christ into their homes. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul models this beautifully through their home visits, which often begin with a prayer, a listening ear, and a word of hope. Such encounters, though simple, reveal the missionary nature of the Church: to go forth, to meet people where they are, and to invite them into communion with Christ and His Body, the Church.

Evangelization at the doorstep reminds us that the Church is missionary by nature, and that every baptized Catholic is called to be a witness to the joy of the Gospel.

I encourage each parish to begin this "mission of encounter," even in small, intentional ways. Trust that the Lord Himself will open hearts and bear fruit through your efforts.

Once every parishioner has been invited anew into the life of the Church, our mission naturally extends to our wider communities.

Whether you're chatting with a neighbor, helping a coworker through a difficult time, or sharing a meal with family, these are sacred opportunities to *Share Jesus*. The Holy Spirit is already at work in your heart and in your community. Your role and responsibility is to notice, respond, and speak with love to one person at a time. Let us reclaim the missionary identity of the Church by reaching out to those closest to us, trusting that even the smallest act of witness can bear eternal fruit.

May our patrons for the *Share Jesus* years, Our Lady of Champion, St. Francis Xavier and St. Thérèse, help us to see that every act of kindness, every prayer offered, and every word spoken in love can become a seed of faith planted in the heart of another.

Together, may they inspire us to live our missionary call with both the fiery zeal of the apostle and the gentle trust of the child of God.



CONCLUSION: *DISCIPLES ON THE WAY* — A NEW BEGINNING

My dear brothers and sisters, as we enter the *Share Jesus* years, we are not reaching the end of our *Disciples on the Way* journey—we are making a fresh, new beginning. You will find that as you go out and *Share Jesus* with your fellow parishioners, you will *discover* Him anew in your own life.

You will begin to *desire to follow* Him more closely, to know His life and teachings more deeply. As you *Worship Jesus*, you will feel a deeper connection to the One you have shared with others. And you will come to realize that whenever you go out in Jesus' name to share Him, you are never alone—He is always with you.

When the Lord called me to be a bishop, He did so that I might be an agent of the New Evangelization. My heart's desire has always been to see more and more people set ablaze with the love of Christ and to go forth joyfully to share that love with others.

May the joy of the Gospel fill your hearts, and may Jesus radiate through you in all that you do and say. You will also come to appreciate more deeply the privilege of being a member of the Catholic Church, Christ's Body in the world today.

Let us entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



Bishop David L. Ricken, DD, JCL

"My heart's desire has always been to see more and more people set ablaze with the love of Christ and to go forth joyfully to share that love with others."

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