



Diocese of Green Bay  
*Parishes:*  
Called to be Holy,  
Fully Engaged,  
Fully Alive

*A Pastoral Letter on Priorities for  
Parishes and the Diocese*

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On the Solemnity of Pentecost

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# Introduction



Dear Fathers, Deacons, Consecrated Women and Men, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

God is good. God is so generous in blessing us with life and faith. I continue to be amazed at the rich blessings of the church here in the Diocese of Green Bay. I find myself commenting from time to time about how the diocese is filled with wonderful people, dedicated priests, sisters and brothers, vibrant parishes, Catholic schools and quality faith formation programs, retreat centers, Catholic hospitals and health care facilities ... the list could go on and on.

At the heart of the faith in our diocese is our local parish. It is in our parish that we live out our lives within the context of our relationship with Christ and His church. Beginning in the seventeenth century, missionaries brought the Catholic faith to this part of the world. Immigrants would later join the Native Americans, and bless our diocese over the years by building parishes that became centers of faith and community. Parishioners sacrificed to build churches in almost every town of any size. Over the years, as cars provided easier transportation and demographics changed, some parishes combined with neighboring communities to strengthen parish life and make best use of a reduced number of priests.

In the last twenty years in particular, our diocese, through local planning processes, has gone from 220 parishes to our present 157 parishes with 183 churches or worship sites, served by about 86 full-time priests. This reduction in the number of parishes in many ways has been needed and good, but it has come at a cost. In some ways, it has put a damper on our faith life and been discouraging. I have said, and I repeat here, that we are not looking to close any more parishes.

Instead, this past year we have been engaged in a process of looking at what is good and great in our parish communities. Through the "Appreciative Inquiry" Planning Process, we have seen more clearly the awesome presence of God in our midst, and we have dared to dream about what could be if we become fully engaged, fully alive, as parish communities called to be holy.

This process has been one of listening — to different voices representing many facets of our parish and diocesan life. In

this letter, I wish to bring these voices together, to articulate a vision of who we are called to be within our parish communities.

## Called to be Holy

In the Gospel of Matthew we read:

"Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48)

Jesus is calling each one of us to become holy.

"As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves, for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Pt 1:15-16)

In Blessed Pope John Paul II's document that anticipated the new millennium (2000) entitled "*The Coming of the New Millennium*," he called for dioceses to engage in pastoral planning so that the Kingdom of God may become more evident to the world, the light of Christ shining forth from those who love Christ.

He called on parishes to become "schools of prayer" and "places of training in holiness."

"Our Christian communities must become *genuine 'schools' of prayer*, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly 'falls in love.' ...It would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life."<sup>i</sup>

In a world that has become very secularized and is losing sight of God, it is incredibly important for all of us who are members of the church to help to satisfy the great hunger for holiness and for meaning in life through spirituality. Some people are embracing other religious or even migrating to "New Age" philosophies that can never compare with the truth and the great treasury of spiritual wisdom that is contained in the Catholic Church.

We need to make space for Christ in our minds and in our hearts which are often too cluttered. We need to make space for the gift which is Jesus Christ himself for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8).

In the Our Father we pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is

in Heaven." Join me in praying that we accomplish the will of the Father here in the sixteen counties of the Diocese of Green Bay and in each and every parish.

We place all of our efforts and our lives under the mantle of Our Lady of Good Help. We ask her to be the patroness of this very important mission in the next few years. Indeed, so many prayers have been answered at her Shrine at Champion over the 150 years of its existence. With the approval of the authenticity of the apparitions, Our Lady is drawing many more people to her Son through her great love. She is welcoming her children, no matter their age or background.

Our diocese is blessed with many spiritual resources. We have the National Shrine to St. Joseph at St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere. We have a camp for children and young people, Camp Tekawitha. We have a retreat house, Holy Name Retreat House on Chambers Island off Door County. We are blessed with the Shrine to Our Lady of Good Help in Champion and the St. Joseph Catholic Youth Expedition Center in Baileys Harbor. All of these places offer opportunities right in our own backyard where we can grow in holiness and get away from the hectic pace of our daily lives to spend time in quiet and peace to pray to Our Lord and get to know him in a deeper way. We have been blessed with several other retreat houses, staffed by our religious orders.<sup>iii</sup> I encourage all of you to use these great resources we have, to use them often and to invite your friends to attend them also as a way of growing in faith-life and in interior life.

Learning to pray is the greatest gift we can be given. As St. Thérèse of Lisieux said:

"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven. It is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy."<sup>iv</sup>

### Realizing Our Dream for the Call to Holiness — We will

- deepen our commitment to disciple people and teach them to pray, to teach them to cultivate their relationship with Christ, with the Blessed Mother, and with the Saints to help them to see that within the church there is such a rich treasury of wisdom and knowledge about the spiritual life;
- assist one another in answering the call to grow in holiness and be sent forth to change the world;
- assist in engaging and serving our parishes by providing them

## The "Four Voices"

Prior to convening the Diocesan Leadership Summit in February 2011, the process incorporated detailed input from four distinct groups around the diocese. These four groups, referred to as "voices," provided the core body of information for the Diocesan Visioning Process. These "four voices" include:

■ **Focus Groups** of "typical" Catholics from throughout the diocese. These include St. John the Baptist Parish in Howard; St. Raphael the Archangel in Oshkosh; St. Margaret Mary in Neenah; Ss. Peter and Paul in Kiel; and a group of smaller parishes in the northeast corner of the diocese. 30 focus groups, representing six specific age groups, offered their input at these meetings.

■ **Parish Discovery and Dreaming Report.** Each diocesan parish was invited to solicit input from parishioners or parish leaders. Some parishes surveyed each member; some held parish meetings; some queried the pastoral, finance, and/or education councils.

■ **Diocesan Leaders.** Twenty-one leadership groups ranged from diocesan staff, deacons, priests, lay ministers, educators, campus ministry leaders, health care leaders, and other ministerial groups.

■ **Wisdom Committee.** A group of theologians, pastors, and parish directors studied the history and mission of the diocese and then came up with a vision for parish life today based on the definition of parish found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

as a diocese with the resources to discover this great treasury of the Catholic Church's tradition on holiness and prayer.

■ participate in retreats and spiritual direction offered through retreat houses and parish renewal small group experiences, missions and retreats, such as Christ Renews His Parish that are offered in the parish.

St. Francis de Sales, pray for us.  
St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us.

## What is a parish?

The challenge of preserving our legacy of faith calls us to ask the question: What is a parish and how should a parish function at this time in church and diocesan history? With the complexities of change swirling around us, how does the church instruct us to be the Body of Christ with the parish as the centerpiece of church life throughout the world? What does that mean for our diocese and for our parishes?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

describes the parish beautifully and fairly comprehensively.

"A *parish* is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian



people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together for this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love."<sup>v</sup>

The parish is not the only *locus* of the church's mission. As our "Diocesan Visioning Process Leadership Summit Wisdom Committee" reflected on the mission of the church, they identified many other ways the church is active in our diocese:

The mission of the church also manifests itself in a myriad of ways, most notably in the ministries and apostolates of the Bishop and diocesan staff; Catholic Charitable Ministries, including health care ministries such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and group homes, as well as all works of mercy and love; Education, including colleges, universities, campus ministries, high schools, grade schools, and faith formation programs; Lay Movements and Associations; the Missions, both foreign and domestic; Religious Communities of women and men; and Retreat Centers, Houses of Prayer and Shrines.<sup>vi</sup>

They conclude, however, that even though these other aspects of the church's mission are critically important, "the core of the mission is played out most fully in and through the parish."<sup>vii</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI when consecrating a new parish in Rome recently had the following reflection on the parish:

"In every neighborhood where people live and work, the church wants to be present with the evangelical witness of coherent and faithful Christians, but also with buildings where they can gather for prayer and the sacraments, for Christian formation and to establish relationships of friendship and brotherhood and where children, youths, families and the aged can grow in that spirit of community that Christ taught us and that the world needs so badly."<sup>viii</sup>

In my reflections on the parish, I would like to add that the parish is the place where the people of God gather to offer worship and sacrifice to God and where they grow in deeper intimacy with Christ and the church through the sacramental life of faith. It is a place where we welcome others and strive to build a family of love by our communion with Christ and one another.

It is a center where we learn about our faith and are formed for service to those whom we meet in our daily circles of contact, the local community, and the world in which we live. It is a center where we strive to form the next generations through Catholic education and faith formation; where we protect and guide our youth with the very best that the faith has to offer. It is a center of communion with other parishes, with the Bishop, and through the Bishop with the Holy Father and the church universal.

The parish is the means through which the Lord, the church, and the Blessed Mother surround the People of God with the mantle of love and then send them on mission to the world, only to return

every Sunday for refreshment and renewal around the table of God's Word and the table of the Holy Eucharist. What a gift, what a mission, and what a responsibility!

## The Dream of Parishes That Are Fully Engaged and Fully Alive

One might wonder what the term "fully engaged" from the title of this pastoral letter means. According to the definition from the Gallup organization, which conducts statistical studies, "engagement" in reference to parishioners means:

"These members are loyal and have a strong psychological and emotional connection to their church or parish. They are more spiritually committed, they are more likely to invite friends, family members and co-workers to congregational events, and they give more both financially and in commitment of time."<sup>ix</sup>

***It can be stated definitively that through this pastoral visioning and planning process we are asking all of our parishioners to become engaged in their parishes and in living out their faith and their Christian vocation in the world today.*** They need to be spiritually engaged and committed and to truly make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others by bringing the Good News to those in the world

around them. From the many inquiry responses that I received, there are six "pastoral focus areas" that have emerged. I believe that these six pastoral focus areas that emerged from the deliberations and discernment of those in attendance at the Diocesan Visioning Process Leadership Summit Leadership Summit in February 2011 as presented to me will truly help us to grow more engaged parishes, not in the sense of "doing church but in the sense of being church."<sup>x</sup>

The term "fully alive" is also part of the title of this pastoral letter. I am convinced that if we can engage parishioners in the life of the Lord and church, that our parishes will be fully alive! ***We become fully alive as we center our lives more deeply on the person of Jesus Christ and, no matter what our vocation or walk of life. We become fully alive when we root everything we are and do in the person of Christ and live our lives out of that relationship.*** After all, Jesus told us that he came into this world so that we and our parishes might have life and have it more abundantly. (Jn 10:10)

It is my hope that the implementation of these six pastoral focus areas throughout the diocese will bring our parishes, not just into more projects and programs but truly into a deeper living relationship with the person of Jesus Christ and with his body, the church. As we build upon all the good already being done in and through our parishes, may this great love and grace within our parishes be poured out to all of the communities in which we live in Northeastern Wisconsin.

## Can you imagine?

Let's dream about our parishes fully alive, and our people fully engaged.

Imagine if all of our parish Masses throughout the diocese were packed full every Sunday with faithful who are truly walking with Christ! Imagine if there were plenty of priests to pastor our parishes, all zealous, holy and collaborating well with the laity in many different ways.

Imagine our Catholic elementary, middle, and high schools with full registrations — packed to the maximum with students every year. What if our religious education programs were filled with people of all ages eager to engage in lifelong learning about our faith from childhood and through the senior years?

Imagine if youth and young adults were fully accepted as an essential asset to our parishes becoming fully engaged and fully alive. What if our youth and young adult ministries were true "schools of training in discipleship?" What if youth and young adults are the leaven of the Lord challenging all of us to live lives of authentic faith and heroic virtue? What if youth and young adults are so filled with zeal for the Lord that they become primary evangelizers of older generations who may have become lukewarm in their relationship with the Lord and the church?

Imagine if all our marriages and families



were strong and faith-filled. What if we committed ourselves to strong programs in chastity and marriage preparation, marriage enrichment, and the witness of marriage as a sacramental sign of faithfulness and love? What if parents were prepared to be the primary teachers of their children in the Christian way of life, love and faith? What if families discovered once again how to pray and support one another as generational bearers of faith?

Imagine if fully engaged and fully alive parishes actively pursue the protection and promotion of life from conception to natural death. Imagine if not only all of

our Catholic population but all of society found abortion totally unthinkable. What if all of our people saved their gift of sexual intimacy for their future marriage only?

Imagine if our parishioners were so joyful in their faith that they brought home to the church many of their family members and friends who had fallen away; that they returned to full participation in the life of the parish. What if we were as devoted and excited about our faith and activity in our church as we are about the Green Bay Packers? Wow!

Imagine if every Catholic in our diocese felt a call to get his/her life in proper order, to return to the sacraments, to attend Mass every Sunday, and to genuinely feel a deep call to grow in holiness.

Imagine if there were overflowing vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the diocese, and that the deacons and the lay ecclesial ministers continued to work together with the pastors, parish directors and parish leaders to build strong parish communities in concert with the Bishop.

Imagine if everyone in the diocese became eager to share their blessings of time, talent, and treasure, through prayer, service and sharing and there was no scarcity of resources to carry on the mission of Jesus here in the Diocese of Green Bay.

Imagine parishes that are the foundation from which parishioners give generously of their time, talent and treasure in the promotion of social justice and care for the poor and needy of our local communities as well as, nationally and internationally.

Our faith is filled with hope. Let's open our minds and hearts to Christ, so that through us, he can make these dreams a reality. This is the mission of Christ, carried out in the life of our parishes.

# Our dreams for the future: six pastoral focus areas

Many of the dreams which surfaced during the past year during the listening phase of our Diocesan Visioning Process have been presented to me in the form of pastoral focus areas.

I have chosen pastoral focus areas from the Diocesan Visioning Process Leadership Summit<sup>xi</sup> from which we will develop a pastoral plan for the diocese and for our parishes. What follows are the six pastoral focus areas that emerged from the discernment of

a cross section of church leaders and parishioners who attended the Diocesan Visioning Process Leadership Summit in February 2011. They are listed here in no particular priority, but as pastoral focus areas that each parish can use for a self-assessment of current progress so as to determine parish strategies for future action. They can be implemented one or two pastoral focus areas at a time per year so that genuine growth can be achieved. All six pastoral focus areas should be implemented over the next

five to seven years.

The six pastoral focus areas are:

- Evangelization
- Youth, Young Adult and Family
- Leadership
- Education
- Sacraments
- Dignity of Human Life

Each pastoral focus area will have one or more related areas of concentration which describe and develop that

particular focus area.

The format of each Pastoral Focus Area is: title, description from the Visioning Process Leadership Summit; followed by a Scripture quote; points for Realizing Our Dreams; and the invocation of saints who symbolize the focus area or who are designated with a particular title by the church. For example: St. Thérèse of Lisieux is patroness of the missions. Therefore, she is patroness of the Evangelization pastoral focus area.

## 1. Evangelization



to reach out and invite others to join us.

Our faith is relational. It is important that we become true communities that share our faith journey and assist and help one another to grow in our relationship with Christ, with the other members of the parish and with the church.

Hospitality is central to living out our faith. Hospitality is not just an attitude but it is a set of actions by which we welcome others into our Masses and worship services and

into various parish groups. We are truly a welcoming community when we allow the light of Christ to shine through us and extend the arms of hospitality to others.

We experienced wonderful progress last year when we prepared for the "Catholics Come Home" project. Much of what we have learned must lead us into the future.

### Realizing Our Dream of Welcoming Parishes — We will

- find ways to welcome and invite those around us with whom we interact to come to church with us.
- discover ways to walk this journey of faith in support of one another which helps us to deepen our relationships with Christ and the church.
- challenge all of our parish groups and organizations to be open and welcoming to new members.
- welcome immigrants and integrate them into our parish and diocesan life.
- build upon and expand our efforts at Ecumenism (Christian unity).
- continue and improve the

initiatives in Hispanic, Hmong and Native American ministries.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us.  
Blessed John Paul II, pray for us.

### Called to Evangelize —

*Evangelization is helping people come to know the love of God and drawing them into a deeper relationship with Christ and His church. We open our hearts to God's word, turn away from sin, and put the Gospel into daily practice. We joyfully share with others how God has touched us and welcome them to experience the Good News of Jesus Christ. We as individuals and as a parish accept this responsibility because of our baptism (Visioning Process Leadership Summit).*

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call upon him in whom they have not believed? How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? ... Thus faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes from the word of Christ." (Rom 10:13-14, 17)

Every welcoming and fully alive parish reaches out with the good news to people who perhaps have fallen away and also to those who have never truly experienced the Gospel or the Catholic Church. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth in mission with "the Mass is ended, go forth in peace." We bring this good news to everyone with whom we are associated.

Pope Paul VI in his Pastoral Letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on proclaiming the good news states that the church:

"... exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be a channel of the gift of peace, to reconcile sinners to God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection."<sup>xii</sup>

We are called to go forth into the world and to introduce others to our very best friend, Jesus Christ and to his body the church. We announce this good news not only to those who may never have heard of Jesus Christ or never had a relationship to the Catholic Church, we also announce this good news in what is called today the "new evangelization." Pope John Paul II encouraged the entire church "not to re-evangelize but to a 'New Evangelization,' new in its ardor, methods and expression."<sup>xiii</sup>

In the United States and in our diocese the numbers of those attending Mass has been in steady decline in recent years and so we need to reach out in a particular and focused way to those who are not presently practicing their faith by coming to Sunday Mass. They need to be re-invited to become fully active and engaged in their practice of the faith.

Pope Benedict has asked the entire church to "re-propose the Gospel to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization."<sup>xiv</sup>

This new evangelization is often a matter of reaching out and inviting someone who may not have come to church for some time to let them know that they are missed, that we want them and need them in church so that they can journey with us.

"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" (Mt 28:19-20).

### Realizing Our Dream of Evangelization — We will

- develop a missionary approach to our outreach to both those who are not familiar with the Gospel or the church (evangelization), and to those who may have fallen out of familiarity (the new evangelization).
- "re-propose" the faith to those who have fallen away with a personal invitation to return.
- help our parishioners to evangelize others by telling them about Jesus who is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the one who forgives our sins. We will help our parishioners to invite others to our churches, invite them to become Catholics.
- show our people how to overcome the fear of sharing their faith with others and how to converse about and live the Gospel in various situations.
- consult the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis for ways to evangelize.

St. Francis of Assisi, pray for us.  
St. André Bessette, pray for us.

### Welcoming Parishes —

*We are a Eucharistic community of welcome and hospitality. Our parish life fosters an environment that creates and builds relationships with people united together as children of God. Through these relationships, we walk with each other on our faith journeys and challenge one another to grow in relationship with Christ and the church (Visioning Process Leadership Summit).*

"You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. ... In him you are also being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph 2:19-22)

So many of those involved in the visioning process mentioned that having a parish that is truly welcoming and family-like is a high priority for them. This includes people who want to become members of the parish. It also means that we show forth an attitude or disposition toward visitors to the parish that is welcoming. As parishes, we need

## 2. Youth, young adults and family

### Youth & Young Adults —

We provide a community and network for youth and young adults, and families in our diocese. The Catholic community equips every individual with the tools needed to answer the call to discipleship, embrace their Catholic identity, and live the Gospel with courage in all their transitions through life stages, aided by sacraments, in a life of prayer, service, and sharing (Visioning Process Leadership Summit).

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you should also love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34-35)

This particular theme area was expressed time and time again in the parishes, among the leadership, parents and all the members of the church highlighting how critical it is for youth and young adults<sup>15</sup> to be involved in Sunday Mass and other important pastoral activities of the parish. We see the youth and young adults as critical, not only to the future of our parishes and our diocese, but also for the present life of the diocese. Acknowledging a great diversity of status and need among youth and young adults (single, married, married with children, etc.) will necessitate a variety of pastoral programs and services in our invitation to youth and young adults to become fully engaged and fully alive in parish life!

The planning process also acknowledges that young people living at home are not a category in and of themselves but that they belong within the family unit.<sup>16</sup> It is critical that we look at ways to engage the entire family in the process of our outreach to youth to bring them all into greater participation in parish worship, parish community and outreach.

**Realizing Our Dream for Youth / Young Adults — We will**

## 3. Leadership

As Catholics invited by the Lord through our baptism by water and the Holy Spirit, we are raised up to be leaders — ordained and non-ordained, to inspire by lives of holiness, to guide by example and to give hope through service to all people as we carry on the mission given by the Lord to His church (Visioning Process Leadership Summit).

"I will appoint over you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you wisely and prudently." (Jer 3:15)

"A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11)

"It was not you who called me, it was I who called you to go forth and to bear fruit that will last." (Jn 15:16)

### Vocations to Priesthood and Religious Life —

- learn to *disciple* (to teach and form) our young people on how to enter into an active and engaged Catholic life.
- engage the youth along with their families in faith formation and in parish activities. Speak to youth and young adults in their language and with access to the contemporary means of modern electronic communication and networking, especially at times of transition in their lives.
- challenge the diocese and the parishes to find fresh and innovative ways to reach out to youth and young adults.
- instill within our youth and young adults the idea that as standard bearers of the light of Christ to their generation, that they pass on the legacy of faith to future generations.

St. John Bosco, pray for us.  
Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, pray for us.  
Blessed Kateri Tekawitha, pray for us.

### Marriage & Family Life —

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband." (Eph 5:31-33)

The most fundamental building block of society and church life is the quality of our marriages and families. The definition of marriage itself and the institution of marriage are under serious attack by many elements of our culture today.

It is more and more difficult for people to remain faithful to one another when divorce is so radically accepted and when people question the very definition of marriage. As a church and a parish, we must cling to our teaching and ever

more clearly help our young people to prepare for their life together as a married couple, through the Sacrament of Matrimony. We must recognize the importance that church has always placed on the family as the "domestic" church. As the U.S. bishops say in their pastoral letter *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*:

"The domestic church rests on the foundation of a baptized husband and wife. They establish a communion of love into which children are welcomed."<sup>xvii</sup>

Marriage is a communion of life and love. Its primary goals are the procreation and education of children along with an intimate partnership of life and love. It is a natural and supernatural gift.

Our parishes, then, need to be places where marriage and family life are not only valued, but strongly supported and nurtured. The life of our parishes builds on the life of our families, including those struggling with separation and divorce. Our ministry needs to be sensitive to the needs for childcare, of busy schedules, and the unique ministry needs of families in different situations. In a special way, our parishes can play a role in healing broken families through our care, support, and outreach.

"It is the permanent, faithful union between a man and a woman, intended for the good of the spouses and for the bearing and raising of children. Both of these purposes contribute to the good of society.

"Marriage is a natural gift to society; it is also a supernatural gift to the church. Christ himself raised it to the dignity of a sacrament. Sacramental marriage does

not replace natural marriage but, in a marvelous example of grace building on nature, raises it so that the spouses share in God's own divine life."<sup>xviii</sup>

**Realizing Our Dream for Marriage & Family Life — We will**

- develop a more comprehensive, diocesan-wide marriage preparation program suitable for parishes that is well rooted in the Theology of the Body and prepares engaged couples for a life-long commitment with a spouse and the beautiful gift of children.
- increase our efforts at marriage enrichment with assistance to married couples in understanding their vocation, their relationship to one another, and their children as a gift and a call from God. We will help them see their responsibility is to protect life from conception until natural death. We will demonstrate how marriage is "to be a school for nurturing gratitude"<sup>xix</sup> and a journey of human and spiritual growth.
- assist families in becoming strong together and in bearing witness to the world and assist those struggling with separation/divorce.
- develop a family-friendly approach to our ministries.

The Holy Family, pray for us.  
Blessed Louis Martin and Marie Celine Guerin, pray for us.



for many years to come as the shortage of priests continues to impact negatively upon our parishes. We are making slow but steady progress in the number and quality of young men in discernment and actually entering the seminary.

We need around forty (40) qualified and skilled young men in the seminary at any given time to begin to match the needs of our parishes for pastors. These young men need to be some of our very best leaders.

We also need to emphasize the call to consecrated religious life. The striking witness of the consecrated religious is evident in our parishes and parish schools. They bring vitality to parish and diocesan life in a way that no other vocation can. Bonded in community with a strong witness to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, lived in a spirit of great joy and love, is a powerful witness of the Gospel becoming real.

We have the good fortune of having a

strong relationship with communities closely associated with the diocese: the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc; Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross, Bay Settlement; Carmel of the Holy Name of Jesus, Denmark; and the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, Oshkosh. Also serving the diocese are members of A New Genesis, an association of women established by our own Bishop Wycislo. In addition, there are many other religious sisters whose communities may not have been started here but have served in our hospitals, parishes, schools, and in specialized ministry through the years.<sup>xx</sup>

We also have the presence of religious men in the diocese, both priests and brothers. The Premonstratensian Fathers — Norbertine Fathers, St. Norbert Abbey, De Pere and Franciscan Friars, Order of Friars Minor, Pulaski are rooted in this diocese. Other communities of religious men continue to serve faithfully in our midst: Institute of Christ the King; The Order of Friars Minor Capuchins, Appleton; Salvatorian Residence, New Holstein; and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), Oshkosh. In addition, there are others who reside in the diocese.<sup>xxii</sup>

For the witness of the sisters, brothers, and religious order priests, we are deeply grateful.

I call on each parish and family in the diocese to increase the awareness of vocations in your families and in the parish family through prayer, discussion and encouragement.

## Parish Leadership —

As a result of the Theology of the Second Vatican Council and because of the need, a new call to leadership by the laity has blossomed. These new roles demand commitment and training as well as thoughtful guidance by the diocese.

The diocese is well advanced in its approach to diaconate formation and also to lay ecclesial ministry formation through the Commissioned Ministry Program. We are grateful to these programs for providing leadership for our parishes. We need to continue to sustain and help these programs to form people for ministry according to their proper roles, and responsibilities.

In addition, we appreciate the enormous amount of time and talent that literally hundreds of the faithful provide in parish leadership roles through their service on canonical and consultative bodies such as the parish pastoral council, finance council, stewardship, education, worship, and numerous other committees.

I am so grateful to our priests who are serving and leading multiple parishes and communities. I am thankful to our retired priests who offer our communities Mass and the Sacraments. The commitment of our senior priests is invaluable in this regard.

I am very grateful for the service of the Parish Directors who lead our parishes in the absence of a resident pastor. Please remember all of them in your prayers. We are also grateful for the service of our deacons and lay ecclesial ministers who do so much in bringing our faith and charity to others.

## Realizing Our Dream of Vocations and Parish Leadership — We will

- engage each parish intentionally in prayer for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life and ask the youth and young adults to consider the call.
- continue to develop diaconal vocations and vocations to lay church ministry.
- ensure continued support of our good formation programs and provide increased clarity in roles and responsibilities among ordained and lay ministers, fostering an even more genuine collaboration.
- support parents and families of young people considering or already answering the call to service in the church.
- ensure that larger numbers of parish leaders would regularly avail themselves of the various ministerial formation, continuing education and professional development programs offered in the diocese.

St. John Vianney, pray for us.  
St. Hannibal Mary di Francia, pray for us.  
St. Rita of Cascia, pray for us.

# 4. Education

“Jesus said to the crowds, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me?’ Day after day I sat teaching in the Temple area.” (Mt 26:55)

“Crowds gathered round him and, as was his custom he taught them.” (Mk 10:1)

“He entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, not like the scribes.” (Mk 1:22)

## Catholic Schools —

In the Diocese of Green Bay, we have a great tradition of strong Catholic education with our Catholic schools, highlighted by the commitment of so many parishes to school systems or to schools in their particular area or parish. Our new advances in faith integration studies, combined with the new curriculum development are key factors in continued strength and development of our Catholic schools.

As you may know, I have called for the Catholic School Initiative study to make recommendations to me in planning for the present and the future for our Catholic schools. We need to strive to strike a delicate balance between the financial needs of our Catholic schools and other parish ministry needs.

The Catholic schools are a great asset because we have so many contact hours with young people. The values and knowledge of our faith is absorbed not only through an integrated curriculum but by contact with committed Christian teachers and staff in our schools. With an emphasis on youth and young adult ministry in the diocese, we need to find more ways to connect the Catholic schools to our parishes and parish life so that their collaboration is stronger and clearer. There also needs to be greater complementarity between our religious education and catechetical efforts and Catholic schools.

Catholic schools are the diamonds in our own backyard. We need to send our children there from the early grades, find ways to increase enrollment through recruitment and retention programs, and solidify the financial stability of our schools through expanded third-source funding and assistance programs like tuition tax credits or parent voucher programs for school choice. Financial obstacles should not exclude lower income families from having access to the same quality Catholic school education as families of means. Once a Catholic school is closed, it is very difficult to resurrect it. We are committed to finding ways to prevent closings from happening.

## Catechesis (Religious Education) & Lifelong Faith Formation —

Pope John Paul II wrote this about catechists. “In catechesis it is Christ the Incarnate Word and Son of God who is taught. Every catechist must constantly endeavor to transmit by his (her) teaching and behavior the teaching and life of Christ. He (she) will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ’s teachings. The catechist should be able to apply to himself (herself) to Christ’s own words. ‘My teaching is not mine, but him who sent me.’” (Jn 7:16) (On Catechesis, page 7)<sup>xxiii</sup>

Augustine of Hippo emphasized the tremendous value of catechists and described the encounter between the catechists and the convert to being, “the experience of one friend giving another a tour through a beautiful countryside, a landscape familiar to one, yet new to the other.”<sup>xxiiii</sup>

Religious education is a valuable and essential aspect of Catholic life from the



time of childhood all the way through senior adulthood. Catechesis is a lifelong effort and faith formation process. We have been blessed in this diocese to have many very good religious education programs. We need to continue to give strong support to these programs.

Each of us ought to see our own faith formation as a lifelong journey.<sup>xxiv</sup> The Lord invites us to a deeper knowledge of him. With each passing year, we are to improve our relationship with him, with the church, and to the world at large through His grace.

If at all possible, we need to continue advanced study pursuits at various Catholic colleges and universities. We are blessed in this diocese with two Catholic colleges: St. Norbert College in De Pere and Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in Manitowoc. What a gift these colleges are to our area. They provide Catholic presence and formation of adults academically, ecclesially and spiritually.

Let us continue to foster adult faith formation study groups in our parishes centered around Bible study, prayer groups and renewal groups so as to further solidify this wonderful education and formation goal which has been such a large part of this diocese’s history.

## Realizing Our Dream of Catholic Schools, Catechesis & Lifelong Faith Formation — We will

- develop a plan through the Catholic Schools Initiative to strengthen our schools and their relationships to our parishes.
- place strong emphasis on the recruitment and retention of students, and provide solid financial planning for the future of our Catholic schools.
- strengthen and support our Religious Education programs to be strong formative programs in making the best possible presentation of the faith in the short amount of time allotted.
- utilize the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA) and the Bible as foundational sources for Adult Faith Formation programs, (as well as many other relevant topics).
- continue ongoing discussions and cooperation between the diocese and St. Norbert College and Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in a shared mission.
- set **measurable goals** for all areas of Catholic education.

Our Lady of Good Help, pray for us.  
St. John Neumann, pray for us.  
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us.

## 5. Eucharist

### Sunday Eucharist and Sacramental Life —

*Sunday Mass is a joyful gathering where we consciously participate in the celebration of the source and summit of our faith – the Eucharist. We are transformed through the word of God proclaimed and preached and through the body and blood of Jesus Christ offered and received. Renewed by the Eucharist, we go forth to make disciples in the world around us* (Visioning Process Leadership Summit).

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:16-17).

The Sunday Eucharist (Mass) is the highlight of the church's expression of faith and community. We need to have a greater sense of the importance of the day of the Lord, not just to remember and keep it holy, but also to begin to **love** the day of the Lord. Sunday ought to be the highlight of our week, the first day of the week, not the last day of the weekend. We give to God his proper due by giving him the first hours of the first

day of the week each Sunday.

We renew our commitment to teach and preach about the importance of Sunday Mass and, the obligatory nature and privilege of honoring God in this way every Sunday in our parishes. We invite everyone to come to love the day of the Lord and the Sunday Eucharist as the source and summit of our lives as Catholic Christians. In recent comments given in Venice, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that “our spiritual life depends especially on the Holy Eucharist. Without that, faith and hope burn out and charity grows cool.”<sup>xxv</sup> We need to excel in our parishes with homilies that truly nourish our parishioners and with beautiful and uplifting sacred music.

The seven sacraments are the great mysteries of our faith through which we at very important times in our lives, enter through the door of our salvation, Jesus Christ the Lord. Continuous renewal of our hearts as we prepare to receive the sacraments and to enter these mysteries worthily is incredibly important. Over the next years as a diocese, we will review and renew our sacramental preparation for these grace-filled moments in the lives of our people.

“We cannot live without Sunday.”  
Attributed to the North African Abitene martyrs, 304



### Realizing Our Dream of the Sunday Eucharist — We will

- continue to prepare for the reception of the New Translation of the Roman Missal in the coming months.
- find ways to increase Sunday Mass attendance and to truly engage all of our parishioners in desiring to become fully alive members of our communities.
- answer the call to grow in holiness and to be sent forth to change the world.
- reclaim the importance of Sunday in the lives of our parishioners;
- commit to help all the faithful to love the Sunday Eucharist and to be renewed and refreshed around the table of God's Word and the table of the Eucharist.

- revise and review diocesan guidelines and preparations for the sacraments through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process as well as sacramental catechesis in schools, religious education programs, baptism and marriage preparation programs. We hope to breathe new life into our practice by treating the sacraments with respect and devotion.
- encourage excellent homilies and beautiful sacred music which will greatly enhance our Sunday celebration of the Eucharist (Mass).

St. Norbert, pray for us.  
St. Peter Julian Eymard, pray for us.  
St. Clare of Assisi, pray for us.

## 6. Dignity of human life

*Our community focuses on social justice and charity issues through awareness, education and action. The parish is the heart of the community that lives the Gospel message of caring for all God's people by embracing respect for human dignity from conception to natural death. Through education that stems from and flows out of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, we go and serve others* (Visioning Process Leadership Summit).

“What good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas 2:14-17).

### Dignity of Human Life —

One of the priorities for the church is the great need to realize the value and the dignity of all human life from the first moment of conception to its natural end.

The most fundamental right of all is the right to life. Without this most basic right, there is no dignity of human life whatsoever. Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have been strikingly outspoken in defense of life. This is not a Catholic issue *per se*, this is a human issue. Life is the *sine qua non*, which means without this, all else can not be. I pray for the day when there will be a comprehensive awakening in the minds and the eyes of our society that through abortion we are slaughtering

our own innocent children, and in the not-too-distant future, our society will justify disposing of our elders or those with physical or mental abnormalities. Our response to that awakening must be clear, swift, and comprehensive in educating all of our parishes in the awareness of the sanctity of all human life.

The Dignity of Human Life Office will work with others in society and in our parishes to bring awareness, especially to the young, about the incredible importance of the gift of human life itself.

### Justice —

“When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice” (St. Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rule, 3, 21).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have summarized the Catholic social doctrine of the universal church into seven major themes of Catholic Social Teaching. (See the accompanying sidebar for a brief description of these themes.) The themes definitely help us to organize our education and formation in the realm of justice and social teaching. We need to root ourselves more deeply in these seven principles.

There is a wonderful document called *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* that comes from the Holy See in Rome which is full of documents rich in justice and charity education<sup>xxvi</sup>. Our social doctrine is one aspect of the church's teaching with which many are unfamiliar. This teaching needs to

### Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. This teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents.<sup>xxx</sup>

■ **Life and Dignity of the Human Person.** The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.

■ **Call to Family, Community, and Participation.** The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society — in economics and politics, in law and policy — directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.

■ **Rights and Responsibilities.** The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency.

■ **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.** A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

■ **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.** The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

■ **Solidarity.** We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world.

■ **Care for God's Creation.** We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation.

be integrated into our education and formation programs on the parish level for a greater familiarity and thorough knowledge. As the Bishops' document

*Sharing Catholic Social Teaching* states, “the roots of Catholic social teaching are found in the scriptures, but its branches continue to grow. The body of social

doctrine grew throughout the centuries as the church encountered new social situations.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

## Charity —

“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?” “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me. And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Mt 25:44-46).

We presently reach out in so many ways through Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and all the charitable work that our parishes and the Catholic institutions in this diocese do. We are very grateful for their tremendous work. Also, I am very proud of all the parishes who continuously reach out in assistance to others in so many very practical ways. I can say with confidence that the diocese and parishes will continue to be generous in countless ways to those in need.

We are so grateful for the presence of and

ministry of our Catholic health systems, nursing facilities and hospitals: St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, Green Bay; St. Vincent Hospital, Green Bay; Langlade Hospital, Antigo; St. Elizabeth Hospital, Appleton; Calumet Medical Center, Chilton; Holy Family Memorial Medical Center; Manitowoc; Mercy Medical Center, Oshkosh; and Door County Medical Center, Sturgeon Bay, and to the religious orders and institutes that sponsor them. We encourage them in the fine practice of their profession and urge them to continue strong Catholic ethical practices that will assist them in their mission and Catholic identity. Our Catholic hospitals do a huge amount of *pro bono* work for the sick and poor every year.

As I have written in a previous document, “Charity and justice are actually two sides of the same coin or like the right and left hand of the body of Christ, the church. When we do acts of charity, we ought to be thinking about how we can be part of the solution on a systemic level so that people are not devastated by unjust actions of others. At the same time, acts of justice which are not rooted in charity can easily become politicized

and lose the connection to the Gospel mandate of charity.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

“In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits.”<sup>xxix</sup>

### **Realizing Our Dream for Justice, Charity and the Dignity of Human Life — We will**

- establish a Dignity of Human Life office in the diocese that will focus especially on making contact with youth and young adults who are considering an abortion and help all of us to address other threats to the gift of human life.
- bring the social justice teaching of the church to the awareness of more and more of our Catholic faithful through the Diocesan Commission on Living Justice.
- direct that the former Office of “Social Concerns” title will now be changed to the Office of “Living Justice.” This office will help to guide and direct the diocese in regard to the Catholic social

teaching of the church. This will foster activities and projects which are consistent with Catholic teaching, and help us to collaborate with other groups in order to accomplish common projects that are of great need in our area.

- ensure that every parish would renew its commitment to promoting the dignity of human life, justice and charity through the renewal or establishment of a standing parish committee that will work closely with the diocesan offices of Human Life and Living Justice.
- foster support for Catholic Charities in the diocese which does so much work and assistance to help people who are having struggles, economically, socially, in their families, and in many other ways.

St. Gianna Beretta Molla, pray for us.  
Saint Damien of Molokai, Patron of Charity, pray for us.  
St. Martin de Porres, pray for us.  
Blessed Mother Teresa, pray for us.  
St. Thomas More, pray for us.

# Implementing our dreams

As we begin to pray about and discern which pastoral focus areas to address first, I am asking each parish to engage in a discernment process to prioritize one or two goals for the next fiscal year beginning July 1, 2011. I am also asking the diocese to develop a Diocesan Strategic Pastoral Plan that will assist the parishes in responding to these areas of concentration to the best of our ability.

## Stewardship as a way of life —

I ask all of us to practice being good stewards of the resources God has given us. **Stewardship** is a wonderful model of holiness as we are called to share our time, talent and treasure through prayer, service and sharing of all the gifts we have been given. In so doing, much more can be accomplished to reveal and to build up the presence of the Kingdom of God and to build up the Kingdom of God. Without continuing a strong commitment to stewardship in the diocese, many other ministries in this plan will not

be able to be accomplished.

This is a work that certainly cannot be accomplished overnight. As we focus our energies and choose on the parish level one or two goals per year to work on and then move on to the next set of goals, I am confident we will be able to enliven our parishes, to engage our people, and to be responsive to the call to holiness.

All that we do in the areas of parish life, diocesan life and in these six pastoral focus areas over the next five to seven years must be marked by a true desire to grow in holiness. In fact, we often need to entrust the responsibilities in these parish and diocesan plans to our Lord. We trust that he will make up for what is lacking in us. He will bring to perfection our good intentions and our efforts to please him and use them for a greater glory. Each of us is called and I call myself and each of you, to strive to become holy, to become saints.

I am so very grateful to all of you who have participated in this process, and I know that your input has and will greatly enhance our diocese. Over the

next five to seven year period, parish by parish, we will gradually implement each of these pastoral focus areas and, as a result, become dramatically more engaged and more fully alive.

We entrust these dreams, this vision and the plans and actions that will flow from them into the hands of the Holy Trinity, Our Lady of Good Help, and Blessed John Paul II and all the saints listed here:

### **Litany of Saints for the fulfillment of these pastoral priorities in the Diocese of Green Bay:**

Our Lady of Good Help	pray for us.
St. Joseph	pray for us.
St. Francis Xavier, patron	pray for us.
St. Francis de Sales	pray for us.
St. Thérèse of Lisieux	pray for us.
St. Francis of Assisi	pray for us.
St. André Bessette	pray for us.
St. John Bosco	pray for us.
The Holy Family	pray for us.
St. John Vianney	pray for us.
St. Hannibal Mary di Francia	pray for us.
St. Rita of Cascia	pray for us.
St. John Neumann	pray for us.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	pray for us.
St. Norbert	pray for us.
St. Peter Julian Eymard	pray for us.
St. Clare of Assisi	pray for us.
St. Gianna Beretta Molla	pray for us.
Saint Damien of Molokai	pray for us.
St. Martin de Porres	pray for us.
St. Thomas More	pray for us.
Blessed John Paul II	pray for us.
Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati	pray for us.
Blessed Kateri Tekawitha	pray for us.
Blessed Louis Martin and Marie Celine Guerin	pray for us.
Blessed Mother Teresa	pray for us.

May God who has begun this good work in us, bring it to fulfillment.  
May Almighty God Bless You, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Promulgated At**  
**St. Francis Xavier Cathedral**  
**Green Bay, Wisconsin**  
**On the Solemnity of Pentecost**  
**June 12, 2011.**  
**By Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL**

+ David L. Ricken

### Endnotes

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xiii Pope John Paul II, *Address to CELAM (Opening Address of the 6th General Assembly of CELAM, 9 March 1983, Port-au-Prince, Haiti)*, *L’Osservatore Romano* English Edition 16/780 (18 April 1983) 9.

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xx Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac, WI; Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, St. Louis, MO; Felician Sisters (Our Lady of Hope Province), Chicago, IL; Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, La Crosse, WI; Handmaids of the Divine Redeemer, Ghana, West Africa; Our Lady of Charity, Green Bay, WI; Adrian Dominicans, Adrian, MI; Dominican Sisters of Peace, Columbus, OH; Racine Dominicans, Racine, WI; Sinsinawa Dominicans, Sinsinawa, WI; Franciscan Sisters (Wheaton) Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, Wheaton, IL; Hospital Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, Springfield, IL; School Sisters of St. Francis, Milwaukee, WI; Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis, WI; Servants of Mary, Omaha, NE; Religious Hospitaliers of St. Joseph, Kingston, Ontario, Canada; Sisters of the Divine Savior, Milwaukee, WI; Society of Sisters for the Church, Green Bay, WI; Sisters of St. Elizabeth, Chicago, IL; Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, Stevens Point, WI; Sisters of Notre Dame, Elm Grove, WI.

xxi Brothers of the Christian Schools, Burr Ridge, IL; Maryknoll Fathers, Oblates of Mary, Maryknoll, NY; Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, Milwaukee, WI; Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorians),

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