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# *A Light Brightly Visible*

LIGHTING THE PATH TO MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

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*A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization-Based Parish Planning*  
*Most Reverend William E. Lori, S.T.D., Archbishop of Baltimore*

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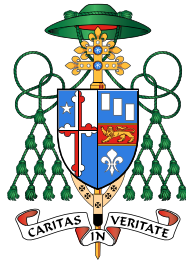






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# 1/ Introduction





*“Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.”*

Lumen Gentium, No. 4.

**N**ow and then almost every bishop gets the urge to write a pastoral letter. I am no exception to that rule. Since I began my ministry as Archbishop of Baltimore, I have been tempted, more than a few times, to sit down and pen a pastoral letter on a number of topics but hesitated to do so. It’s not that I am averse to putting my thoughts on paper or in the social media. I often write talks, columns, and short reflection pieces. Yet the pastoral letters are longer, usually more complicated, and I fear, seldom read.

This effort, I hope, is different. It grows out of talks I gave at a series of regional meetings that were held all around the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The subject of these meetings was the core mission of the Church of Baltimore – the same mission entrusted to the Apostles by the Risen Lord before He ascended into heaven: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). These

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*What decisions need to be made so that we can marshal the resources the Lord has given us to do the work of the Gospel?*

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meetings dealt with the same questions that preoccupied the Apostles and the first disciples as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles: Are we equipped to fulfill the great commission the Lord has given us? Do we personally have the qualities of mind, heart, and spirit to take up this task? Are our parishes ready to respond to

the challenges of the mission in our times? What decisions need to be made so that we can marshal the resources the Lord has given us to do the work of the Gospel? Are there ways we can pull together as a Catholic community to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel more effectively in the City of Baltimore and the nine counties of Maryland that comprise the Archdiocese? How can we reach out more dynamically to those who have left and those who are searching?

At the end of these meetings, which were attended by clergy, religious and parish lay leaders, many asked if I would turn my talk into a pastoral letter. For a bishop, that's like a dream come true: "Of course, I will," I replied. And I wanted to issue this letter on the great Feast of Pentecost when the Church celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. After all, we cannot bear witness to Christ or fulfill his mission unless we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. May the Holy Spirit animate, guide, and sustain our efforts to be disciples and to make disciples in the Archdiocese of Baltimore now and for years to come.

# 2/ Getting Stretched





Let me begin personally. I find Pope Francis to be a challenging Holy Father, a Pope who is stretching me, pulling me and occasionally pushing me. The challenge he lays down in my life is not ideological but evangelical. He is asking me, as a bishop, to test the quality of my encounter with Christ. As I go about my ministry, what is my relationship with Christ like? Is it warm, personal, transformative, or is it cold and formal? Have I allowed the Risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit to open my mind “to the understanding of Scripture”? (Lk 24:45)

Pope Francis is asking me to accompany those I serve. One of his famous lines is that bishops should acquire “the smell of the sheep” – and that means being with people, walking with people, caring about them, listening to them and asking questions. Accompanying others on their journey through life, however, means more than just “being there.” It also means bringing something to the journey, or should I say,



“Someone” who will open my mind and the minds of my fellow travelling companions “to the understanding of Scripture” as we walk together.

Pope Francis’ challenge to me as your bishop is even more thorough. He is challenging me to make evangelization that foundation of my entire ministry. He

is asking me first to be a missionary disciple myself and then to be the Lord’s instrument in helping many to encounter Christ and become missionary disciples as well. Our Holy Father has much to say about pastoral ministry, first to bishops: about preaching and about temptations that afflict pastoral ministers, such as being self-absorbed. The Pope is asking that the Gospel be brought to the margins: to the poor and vulnerable, to those alienated from the Church, to those who may be searching for something better in their lives, and even to those who are not searching and have never given much thought to the Gospel.



And I may say to myself, “Gosh, I’ve been a priest 38 years and a bishop for 20. Haven’t I been doing those things? Don’t I have the hang of it by now? Is he saying that my ministry to this point hasn’t had any value? Or that my way of doing things has been all wrong and has borne no good fruit for the Kingdom?” At this stage of the game, frankly, that would be pretty hard to hear: “It’s later than one thinks!” But that’s not what Pope Francis is telling me or any of us who labor in the Lord’s vineyard. Rather, he’s “reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4). That is to say, he is reading the signs of our times and telling you and me to do the same. The Pope is telling me as your bishop to

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## *Our Relationship with Jesus Christ*

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How do I know—how does any Christian—gauge his or her relationship with Christ? Are there “metrics” or is it just a matter of subjective feeling? And in gauging my relationship with Christ, is there danger that I will fall into introspection, that is to say, the trap of becoming so absorbed in assessing my discipleship that I lose sight of the Lord’s mandate to bear witness to the Gospel? Clearly, every disciple must “come away and rest awhile” (cf. Mk 6:31) by spending time each day reflecting on Scripture and opening one’s heart to the Lord. Every disciple must repent by the regular and fruitful reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and recognize the need for ongoing conversion in his or her life. There is no better guide for this process than the Beatitudes. If we wish to be like Christ and to love what he loves and to reject what he rejects, we should turn, again and again, to the Lord’s words in the Sermon on the Mount where he sketches for us a self-portrait. It is that same portrait the Lord wishes to inscribe on our hearts as well. As we dig deeply into the Beatitudes we come to know how the Lord loves us and how we should love others, including those we are to serve. By meditating on the Beatitudes we absorb Jesus’ compassion for us and for all and discover afresh the way to authentic happiness, indeed, “the joy of the Gospel.” As we continually refresh, repair and deepen the image of Christ within us, then what the Church believes and teaches becomes not a burden but a response of love to the One who loved us first and poured out his life in self-giving love to save us. Then we become his authentic witnesses to our families, friends and co-workers.

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## *Jesus Accompanies His Disciples*

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The model for pastoral accompaniment is the story of the Risen Lord's encounter with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus as recounted in the Gospel of Luke (24:13-35). The two disciples were discouraged and disillusioned like many people today who no longer practice their faith and have left the Church. They thought that Jesus' death on the Cross was a debacle. They no longer saw any point in following Christ. The Risen Lord joined them on their journey, though they did not recognize him. Jesus engaged them on the way; he drew them out and got them to express their concerns. Then, as if personally conducting a Liturgy of the Word, he opened their eyes to the understanding of Scripture, revealing to them the plan of God and showing them how Scripture refers to him and to his death and resurrection. And when they arrived at Emmaus, the Lord indicated he would be on his way but the disciples, now with the faith rekindled in their hearts, begged him to stay. There at table, the Risen Lord took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened; they recognized the Risen Lord "in the breaking of bread" – that is to say, in the Eucharist.

look with the fresh eyes of the Gospel at what the mission requires of us in our time and place. What then are some of these "signs of the times" we need to read and even scrutinize?

Numbers do not tell the whole story but they do tell us something. A recent study by the Pew Foundation found that religious affiliation in the United States in general is dropping, and while many Protestant denominations are losing members, the Catholic faith is losing members in far greater percentages. Two years ago, a study done by the

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Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) indicated that while there are 97 million Catholics in the United States only 18 million attend Sunday Mass with any regularity and, of that number, only 3 million are involved in their parishes outside of Mass. These days, in most parishes, weekly Mass attendance hovers around 20 percent and we are facing a decline in sacramental practice across the board. These numbers indicate that many Catholics were baptized, shriven, communicated and confirmed, but unfortunately many were not evangelized. In other words, many have been prepared to

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## *St. Paul: A Model of Evangelization*

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In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke describes how St. Paul attempted to evangelize the Greeks at Athens. There he found himself in a new situation. God had not revealed himself to the Greeks as he had to the Jews. The Greeks were not awaiting the coming of a Messiah. Theirs was not the language of Scripture or the Law of Moses. And in coming to the Areopagus of Athens, St. Paul entered a public square of great knowledge and culture. It was a place where there were many shrines to various pagan deities and where philosophical issues were being vigorously debated. Here the brilliance of St. Paul shines as he finds the way to connect the Gospel with the Greek culture. He begins by doing his homework. He reviews the shrines to the various gods and comes upon an altar to “the unknown God.” He identifies the unknown God as the One True God who created the heavens and the earth. He draws his listeners in by quoting from Greek poets, including Epimenides, who said of this unknown God, “in him we live and move and have our being,” a God who loves and cares for the human family. Boldly St. Paul then proceeds to link the God of the Philosophers with the God of Scripture and to His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and was raised from the dead. As in our secular culture, St. Paul’s highly intelligent and bold proclamation was met with a mixed reception. Some scoffed at the idea of being raised from the dead, others said they would like to hear more and still others converted and became disciples. We need to study St. Paul’s address in the Areopagus as a model for evangelizing our secular culture, in making connections between Gospel and culture, while at the same time boldly proclaiming the kerygma, the saving death and resurrection of Christ.

receive the Sacraments but too few have deeply rooted their lives in the Lord's truth and love. What's more, the culture is changing and it's changing rapidly. It is sometimes said that people are becoming "more spiritual" and "less religious." But spirituality without the shared beliefs and values of a community soon withers, and ends up putting oneself, not Christ, at the center. Not too surprisingly, many now say that society as a whole is becoming not only less religious but also less spiritual. This manifests itself in the removal of religious symbolism from public places and in laws and ordinances aimed at deterring or even eliminating public expressions of faith.

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*We have to be willing to ask how we are responding to the vocation to discipleship we received on the day of our Baptism.*

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We do not wage war against the culture but recognize instead that in every age the Gospel we preach both engages the ambient culture and at the same time challenges

it. Pope Francis is telling us to find those points of engagement and proceed with joy, just as St. John Paul II before him told us to evangelize the culture "from within." So, Pope Francis is challenging me at a deep and personal level. It is my hope and prayer that you, as priests, deacons, religious, parish leaders and parishioners, are feeling the challenge too. It's not just the Pope's



soundbites we need to hang onto, not even his symbolic gestures, inspiring as they may be, but rather the substance of what the Pope is calling us to. And the way for us to respond to what the Pope is saying is not by looking into anyone else's heart but our own. We have to be willing to ask how we are responding to the vocation to discipleship we received on the day of our Baptism.

# 3/ Getting Stretched with My Co-Workers





What is true of me is true of my co-workers in the Catholic Center (where the Archdiocesan central services offices are located). Since coming to the Archdiocese I've met some very wonderful people at 320 Cathedral Street who work incredibly hard and with great dedication. But one of the things we all began to notice as time went by was this: in our meetings and discussions we don't talk enough about the "core business," and the "core business" of the Church is "the kerygma" – spreading the Good News of the Lord's life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection and exaltation, coupled with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We face that very human tendency to focus on the business and the planning at hand but not enough on the mission for which we were transacting the business and doing the planning.

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The Senior Staff (department heads) of the Catholic Center decided to undertake the ChristLife program (which was developed locally and is now used in more than 50 parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore). No program, of course, is the be-all and end-all of evangelization, but we needed a proven vehicle to get and keep us focused on "what really matters right up to the day of Christ Jesus" (cf. Phil 1:9). We met for six weeks around my dining room table and talked about the faith not merely in theoretical and professional terms but rather about the impact of Christ and faith upon our personal lives. Next we offered the first phase of the three-part program, Discovering Christ, to the entire staff at the

Catholic Center. It was well attended and well received. We then offered further opportunities for prayer and reflection, including daily Eucharistic adoration across the street at a chapel in the undercroft of the Basilica. During Lent various members of the staff at the Catholic Center presented personal reflections or witness regarding their own life of faith and their own discipleship. As a staff whose purpose is to support those who work “on the front lines” of evangelization in parishes, in schools, and in service to the poor and vulnerable, we are seeking to bring about what Pope Francis calls “missionary conversion.” We are seeking to undergo, not only a change of thinking, but indeed a change in how we operate such that our daily work will clearly bear witness to Christ, and be and be seen as a response to Christ’s missionary mandate.

And we have begun to make some changes. We have a Department of Evangelization and that is a step in the right direction.

But sometimes offices have a tendency to operate in silos and to be purveyors of programs. And while we will never escape programs and event planning entirely, we wanted to shift the focus of the department to creating a small cohesive team of people who are themselves missionary disciples and who possess knowledge and skills in all the ministries that are part of parish life. We are seeking to create a team that can work with parishes and schools to help them do their job well, in areas such as fostering marriage and family, catechesis and missionary outreach. In other words, we are seeking to undergo missionary conversion from within so that we might be a catalyst in missionary transformation across the Archdiocese.



# 4/ Stretching Parish Life







**P**ope Francis wrote “The Joy of the Gospel” to encourage and challenge us. The Holy Father encourages and challenges us to take up the mission afresh, with the youthful joy of the Gospel, aware that “the mercies of God are new every morning” (Lam 3:23). In that spirit I issued a planning document titled “Be Missionary Disciples” (see [www.archbalt.org](http://www.archbalt.org)). It recognizes and affirms that much is being done in the area of evangelization and parish planning, but it also recognizes that we have “miles to go before [we] sleep.” As you read and study that document, I also ask two things of you: first, that “Be Missionary Disciples” not be seen as just another document from the Catholic Center but rather as a guide that lays down the principles to be followed as we go about authentic evangelization-based parish planning; second, that it not be regarded as “window dressing” for hard decisions about the future configuration of parishes across the Archdiocese. Rather, that document and this pastoral letter are all about missionary conversion, that is, equipping ourselves not for institutional self-survival but for the mission of spreading the Gospel in each neighborhood in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

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In fact, when I first came to the Archdiocese, I began to speak about evangelization-based parish planning; early on, I even produced a document and a plan. I circulated that over the summer to the members of the Presbyteral Council who told me, rightly, that it looked like “business as usual” but with an evangelization label appended. I took the advice of my brother priests and went back to the drawing board. Then and there I decided to begin again, starting with myself, my brother priests and with the Catholic Center. Missionary transformation in central services and in the parishes won’t be quick or easy but the Second Vatican Council and successive Popes keep reminding us that it is the only path forward.

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## *Who are the Millennials?*

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Millennials make up most of the youths and young adults in the Church today. This generation is also the one that is becoming one of the fastest to move away from participation in the life of faith and declare themselves “none” or no religion at all. And yet, they are a generation that seeks the mystery, tradition, community and opportunities for service that Catholicism has to offer. For many Catholic Millennials, being Catholic is a very conscious choice that is often not affirmed by those around them. Keeping this generation engaged in our parish communities is a challenge but it is not impossible. They are seeking encounter with others and, even if they cannot express it fully, with Christ, and they respond to parishes that offer creative ways to engage them. One of those ways is forming already engaged Millennials as missionary disciples who are able to reach out not only to their peers but indeed to many others as well.



Pope Francis says as much in “The Joy of the Gospel” where he calls for the renewal of structures: “The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself” (No. 27). Not to do this, Pope Francis tells us, causes us to succumb to “ecclesial introversion.” The Holy Father then applies the notion of missionary conversion to parishes: “The parish is not an out-of-date institution precisely because it possesses great flexibility; it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. If so, the parish is the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.” The Holy Father then adds: “This presumes that [the parish] really is in contact with the homes and lives of its people and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few...” (No. 28).

In other words, a parish might well attract people from beyond its own ZIP code, but it can never cease to reach out with missionary love to the people in its own ZIP code: “The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration.” (Ibid) But for a parish to undergo a

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## *Portals of Evangelization*

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In the Gospels, we occasionally see the disciples as attempting to act as Jesus’ “handlers.”

When people want to come to Jesus to ask for a cure, they reprimand them and push them away. This is what happened when Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, approached Jesus and asked to regain his sight (cf. Mk 10:46-52). Bartimaeus was already enlightened by faith and by confidence in Jesus. His disciples, however, put obstacles in his way. Thankfully Bartimaeus was not deterred; sadly, however, many others are deterred. When missionary outreach bears the good fruit of the Gospel, what obstacles do people who have been away from the Church or who are entering perhaps for the first time, encounter? Is the parish as a whole welcoming or is it more like a club that only reluctantly admits new members? Do we allow people who want to join or return to our parishes to languish as strangers or are they welcomed as fellow disciples? As part of missionary conversion, each parish needs to ask about its portals, its points of entry. What are some of these?

- A user-friendly phone system
- A digital presence (including a dynamic website and engaging social media channels) that are not only informative but inspiring
- A warm welcome at the door of the church
- A warm welcome by pastoral leaders and parishioners
- An invitation to join parishioners in a service project or a social occasion
- Convenient and ample opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- A well-run RCIA program

In these and other ways, parishes show they have undergone a missionary transformation, thus serving not as an obstacle to Christ but rather as a bridge.

missionary transformation, not only the clergy, parish staff and the lay leaders are to be missionary disciples but there must also be numerous parishioners who are missionary disciples. They may not necessarily serve on the Pastoral Council or the Finance Committee, they may not be extraordinary ministers of the holy communion or a greeter or an usher but they are well formed and able to bring the Gospel beyond the walls of the church. Again to quote the Pope: “In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.” (Ibid) And it is through them that we reach out to re-evangelize those who no longer participate, those who are in need of help, those who have been hurt by the Church or those who are seeking for some kind of meaning and stability in their lives.

Thus, every parish, every cluster of parishes, must be “outward bound,” that is to say, geared up not just to offer good things and then hope that people will show up, but actively in search of those who need to hear the Gospel, actively trying to make connections with people in the parish boundaries, intentionally inclusive of parishioners and potential parishioners in all their diversity. This includes large numbers of African-American individuals and families, as well as a growing number of Africans, Hispanics and people from many Asian nations. It includes those whose families have been in Maryland for generations and those who represent that European heritage of the



Archdiocese. But it must also include the emerging generation known as “millennials,” with the challenges and opportunities for evangelization that they represent.

A few years ago Father William Byron, S.J. former president of The Catholic University of America, wrote in *America*

magazine that when a parishioner leaves the parish, sort of drops out, one of the things we need to do is an “exit interview.” That was confirmed by Pope Francis when he spoke to the Bishops of Brazil during World Youth Day in 2013. He said, in effect, that a church which never asks why people leave will never be able to give people a good reason why they should return to the faith.

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## *Working Together for the Sake of Mission*

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We want parishes to work together in a formal way. Many already do. This will be a continued benefit to the communities they serve and integral to the evangelization-based planning process now underway. Collaboration and a collegial approach will bring forth the creativity Pope Francis asks of parishes and parish leaders. While many of the existing parish relationships will remain, others may be asked to work with different parishes, depending upon the attributes they possess and the benefits that could be realized. For example, parishes with similar pastoral strengths, needs and demographics, especially if located close to one another, might be grouped so as to work together. We may find that current clusters of parishes are too large, too small or pastorally unworkable. As this planning process proceeds, I will look for a better term to describe how parishes can be appropriately grouped not just to exist side-by-side but to collaborate for mission. In some dioceses the word “collaborative” is used in place of cluster. I want to make it clear that when parishes are grouped together for the sake of mission this does not automatically mean they will be merged. If the mission calls for it, however, this step will be considered.

As we think about evangelization-based parish planning, we recognize the need for a comprehensive plan in every area of the Archdiocese, whether in communities with longstanding population declines or in areas experiencing tremendous growth. We also recognize that we are facing a growing challenge in our shortage of priests even as we continue to pray and work wholeheartedly for vocations to the priesthood. Further, the recent unrest and violence in the City of Baltimore strongly suggests that we need to be present in the City in ways that correspond to pastoral need, whether in parishes,

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hospitals, schools, or charitable outreach centers. And that brings us to the heart of the first principle we hope to follow in this renewal: it is not whether the Church will be present but how it will be present. We have to link together more effectively all the Church's ministries for the sake of mission.

A second principle in the evangelization-based planning process is that all parishes in the Archdiocese will be clustered, if they are not already. The size and shape of these clusters will vary across the Archdiocese but every parish will be expected to function in some way as part of a cluster. The basis for decisions regarding which parishes should work together will be guided in the first instance by the parishes themselves.

A cluster is a group of parishes actively working together to envision, plan for and provide pastoral care to those within the cluster boundaries. Cluster parishes may be administratively, sacramentally, canonically and financially distinct from each other, or they may be linked, by varying degrees, to each other in one or more of these ways. Cluster parishes also collaborate with other Church entities active in their local areas, including schools, charitable agencies, and healthcare institutions. The cluster relationship is one that is characterized by a spirit of *communio*, which breaks down territoriality or other obstacles and brings people together in support of the universal

mission of the Church. Ultimately the clustering of parishes should result in a greater presence of the Church in a given community.



What I don't want to do is simply to combine struggling parishes into a slightly larger parish that also will struggle not unlike the merger of two old makes of cars,

Packard and Studebaker back in the 1950s. By the time they merged both were struggling and only managed to pool their weaknesses. Before long, both marques disappeared. That's not the model we should be following! Rather, I am hoping our decisions will ensure that parishes are centers of evangelization that connect people with the pastoral, educational, healthcare and social services that they need, with special help in living out the vocation of marriage and family.

# 5/ The Great Temptations





There are four temptations we must reject as we engage in this process.

The first temptation is one that I must avoid and it's this: how easy it would be for me to gather with a few advisors, review the data, make decisions about how the Church will be present in our communities, and then roll out my plan and weather the consequences. That would be a top-down or "end-determined" model of parish planning that I'm unwilling to follow. We need to begin locally, with pastoral need and opportunity, presented by pastors in collaboration with parish leadership, with resourcing and facilitation provided by the Catholic Center. For the Church to chart a course that will address the pastoral needs of each community in a way that advances the spread of the



Gospel, there needs to be a clear understanding of each parish community. This will be the basis for appropriate follow-up conversations that will help us all discern and clarify what must be done.

The second temptation is to say "we've heard this before": other plans have come and gone, nothing changed then and nothing is going to change now. This would be an understandable reaction,

but a mistake. It's hard for us to miss the sense of urgency in the Pope's exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" but it should also be hard for us not to have that same sense of urgency as we look about us. The mission entrusted to us is too important and the needs of the people we serve are too great for us to give in to complacency or cynicism.

The third is the temptation to inevitability or fatalism. One person said to me, evangelization won't fly because the culture is against us. That's just the point: every pope since Vatican II told us that we have to evangelize from within the culture and for the culture. After all, the Greco-Roman culture in which the Church began her mission was not a piece of cake! I think of that excerpt from the letter to Diognetus we read each year in the Liturgy of the Hours: in it, a second-century author tells how Christians to



all appearances are indistinguishable from other citizens yet the Christians were also strangers in their own homeland because of their faith and hope in the Lord Jesus. They are like their fellow citizens yet they live differently and sometimes are ridiculed for doing so. Despite that, they do not feel like a persecuted and beleaguered group but instead are confident in the Lord and his love, so much so that they understand themselves to be an animating principle for society, like the soul is to the body.

The fourth temptation is to say, “What a beautiful vision the Pope has given us. Thank God we’re already doing it! It’s in the bag. Let’s continue with business as usual.” Yes, we are doing many of these things but we have to be willing to ask, “with what results?” What will happen if we just keep on doing what we have been doing? Where will we be in three years? In five years? In 10 years? Who will we have missed? Will we have been accountable to God and to ourselves for the mission we’ve been given? Entering into this process requires willingness, a sincere openness, to test everything: to see whether or not the mission is being accomplished and to what degree. It means asking who is in each parish and what do they need. It means listening to people who have left and welcoming them home. And it means asking how the parish can be linked to other services that are needed, like a hub with spokes.

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## *Evangelization in Education*

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Catholic schools, from elementary and high schools, to colleges and universities, religious ed. programs and even homeschools, exist not only to provide students with a strong academic foundation but to pass along to them the teachings of our Catholic faith. In doing so, they fulfill the mission of Catholic education, to provide “a particular environment for the New Evangelization by presenting the Gospel anew within the school and parish communities” (USCCB Statement on Catholic Education). Catholic schools bear witness to the truths of the Gospel and challenge children to live Gospel lives in the world today. Pope Francis said to the youths of the world, “The Lord needs you for His Church. Be active members of the Church, go on the offensive, build a better world of justice, of love, of peace, of fraternity, of solidarity’. Don’t leave it to others.”

# 6/What Is To Follow





The Be Missionary Disciples planning process will be conducted in two phases: a parish-level phase and a cluster-level phase. Phase I will consist of a parish-level review of mission focus and activity. Each parish community – clergy and lay leaders, is to have a thorough and discerning discussion about how effectively it is fulfilling the mission of evangelization. This is more than a review of statistics and financial data, important as those are. Rather, we are asking parishes to engage in prayerful discernment so as to dig deeper into what lies behind the numbers: parishioners who have stopped practicing the faith, young people who depart after Confirmation, changing parish demographics, groups in the parish that have not yet been reached, etc. To guide this discussion the Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Planning will provide three things: First, an instrument designed to help parishes gauge mission-vitality. This instrument will be developed and tested during the summer months of 2015. Second, a compilation of parish data, demographics, and maps packaged in ways that are easy to understand and use in these discussions. Third, facilitation services for parishes that request it.

Beginning in September, each parish will be asked to engage the discernment discussion by using the instrument and data compilation mentioned above, while striving to include as many parishioners as possible. Following the discernment process, each parish will be asked to suggest strategies for enhancing missionary activity within the parish itself or in collaboration with neighboring parishes. Parishes will be asked to provide these strategies to the Office of Pastoral Planning by the First Sunday of Lent 2016. (Note: Some parishes, after consultation with the Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Planning, may find themselves in a position to follow a more condensed timeline, thereby allowing them to turn in their results by the first Sunday of Advent 2015.)

Following the parish-level reviews, Phase II will begin. Parishes will be asked either to reaffirm their current cluster arrangement or to request they be realigned based on their parish discussions. A discussion with the vicariate offices will take place to establish and/or confirm the cluster configurations. Parishes that are ready formally to engage in cluster planning will be identified and a facilitator selected for each. Not all clusters

will be ready to enter this process at the same time, so a staggered approach will be taken, with several clusters at a time moving through the process, rather than all of the clusters at once. Using results from the parish discernment discussions, clusters will engage in facilitated conversations to identify strategies for enhanced missionary activity. The resulting product will be a cluster action plan that can be put into effect and will provide for ongoing evaluation of mission focus and disciple-making activity.

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*We should approach this process with hope and joy for its goal is to make our parishes ever more vibrant centers of evangelization, that manifest the attractiveness of the Gospel and the warmth of Jesus' truth and love.*

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Additionally, throughout both phases, opportunities will be incorporated for personal transformation and conversion to occur as those involved reflect on what it means to be a missionary disciple.



So while we have a lot of work to do, and I know it won't be easy, we should approach this process with hope and joy for its goal is to make our parishes ever more vibrant centers of evangelization, that manifest the attractiveness of the Gospel and the warmth of Jesus' truth and love. As we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, let us ask for a fresh outpouring

of the Holy Spirit upon each parish and each member of our Archdiocese, and beg the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven and Earth and the Star of the New Evangelization. May the light of Christ shine brightly on the countenance of this community of faith so dear to me, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the oldest Archdiocese in the United States of America. May God bless us and keep us always in His love.

# *Appendix: Be Missionary Disciples Process Outline*

## **Key Acknowledgments:**

- Parishes throughout the Archdiocese are involved in strategic planning, parish clustering and evangelization efforts that are making a difference – we want to honor the time and commitment that has been invested already and incorporate that work wherever possible
- There have been several “parish planning” initiatives put forth over the years – we value the body of knowledge that these efforts yielded, and want to build on that work while making evangelization the overriding focus of the current initiative

## **Core Beliefs:**

- Effective evangelization first requires understanding and an honest self-assessment of how we are making disciples now and how we are positioned to make disciples in the future – so we are asking each parish to evaluate itself on a series of characteristics that relate to this
- True and lasting transformation requires continual assessment and improvement – so we are incorporating a benchmarking element against which parishes and clusters will gauge their current state and progress, and evaluate which areas need more attention
- Effective evangelization also requires that we align our resources in ways that channel everything towards this goal, rather than self-preservation – so we anticipate that every parish will be engaged to some degree in a cluster relationship with other parishes

## **I. Phase I: Parish-level assessment**

- a. Each parish will be asked to do a self-assessment using an assessment tool provided by the Archdiocese.
- b. The assessment tool will collect responses on how the parish understands and reaches out to those within their parish and parish boundaries within the following areas:
  - i. Evangelization;
  - ii. Pastoral care;
  - iii. Service & outreach;
  - iv. Worship & sacraments;
  - v. Discipleship/faith formation;

- vi. Fellowship & communio;
  - vii. Financial sustainability;
  - viii. Physical structures;
  - ix. Clergy/leadership/administration.
- c. The assessment tool will ask a series of questions related to goals within the areas listed above. The goals will be expressed as aspirational qualities that characterize an evangelizing, mission-oriented parish. Each goal will have a corresponding benchmark, or target, against which parishes should measure their current status and future progress. A rubric will be provided that will help parishes understand where the responses fall on the spectrum relative to the benchmark.
  - d. The assessment process should solicit responses from a broad spectrum of people, including parish staff, parish leadership, and parishioners.
  - e. Once the assessment is completed, pastoral councils or other teams of parishioners should review the responses and rubric scores against the benchmarks. Based on the review, pastoral councils or other teams of parishioners should suggest strategies for moving closer to the benchmark.
  - f. In the process, parishes should be considering in what areas it will be necessary or desirable to collaborate to some degree with neighboring parishes to reach the benchmarks or achieve greater success than could be achieved by an individual parish? Which parishes would complement this work and how might those relationships be structured?
  - g. **AOB Deliverables to Parish:** guidance document for the assessment process; sample meeting formats and suggested preparatory reading; assessment tool and rubric; parish and community data and maps  
**Parish Deliverables to AOB:** completed assessment matrix

## II. Phase II: Cluster-level planning

- a. Recognizing that clusters already exist and that some may be more or less active than others, following the parish-level evaluations, parishes will be asked either to reaffirm their current cluster arrangement or to request they be realigned based on their parish assessments. If necessary, a facilitated discussion with the vicariate offices will take place to establish the cluster relationships.
- b. Parishes ready to formally cluster together and begin the cluster planning process will be identified and a facilitator selected.
- c. Using responses from the parish assessments, clusters will engage in facilitated

discussions to address the goals and benchmarks as a cluster and identify the strategies that will most effectively move them closer to the benchmarks.

- d. The resulting product will be an action plan that can be put into effect and will provide for ongoing evaluation of progress towards the benchmarks.
- e. The cluster-level planning process should be completed within one year.
- f. **AOB Deliverables to Cluster:** guidance document for the process; sample meeting formats; facilitator training; cluster plan template; cluster and community data and maps

**Cluster Deliverables to AOB:** completed cluster plan

### III. Resources

- a. Demographic and development data, historical parish statistics, and mapping tools will be provided at the greatest level of detail possible to help parishes in their conversations
- b. Teams from the Archdiocese will be available to consult with parishes or groups of parishes on specific topics, as needed
- c. Parishes are encouraged to integrate any strategic planning initiatives already undertaken at the parish or cluster level to maintain continuity and build on accomplishments

### IV. Timeframe

- a. All parishes in the Archdiocese will be expected to engage in this assessment beginning in fall 2015, though flexibility exists for extenuating circumstances
- b. Summer 2015 – Office of Pastoral Planning prepares evaluation tool and rubric, data and mapping for parish use
- c. Parish-level evaluations
  - i. Condensed timeframe: September 2015 – late November 2015
  - ii. Normal timeframe: September 2015 – February 2016
  - iii. Key moment: 1st Sunday of Advent or 1st Sunday of Lent
    - 1. Assessment completed
    - 2. Clusters envisioned
    - 3. Preparations for welcoming moments of Christmas or Easter
- d. Cluster-level planning
  - i. Beginning as early as January 2016 (depending on parish process)
  - ii. One year process



# *A Light Brightly Visible*

LIGHTING THE PATH TO MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP



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