



**As the Father has sent me,
so I send you**

A PASTORAL LETTER

+PATRICK M. NEARY, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF SAINT CLOUD



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so I send you**

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Diocese of Saint Cloud
P.O. Box 1248
St. Cloud, MN 56302-1248
Phone: 320-251-2340
www.stcdio.org

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It has been designed for reading and studying individually or in small faith-sharing groups, particularly in observance of the National Eucharistic Revival.

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SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO USE THIS LETTER

This letter is for everyone to read on their own or in small groups. While we share some practical tips on how to read the letter, also be open to the Holy Spirit guiding your creativity. Feel free to incorporate your own ideas by adding other forms of prayer, traditional devotions, sacred music, hospitality or other elements that fit your parish culture and community.

Whether alone or in a small faith sharing group, find a comfortable, quiet space in which to read, learn, reflect and pray.

IF FORMING A GROUP, CHOOSE A LEADER

The small-group leader facilitates the small-group experience. The leader creates an environment of welcome, trust and acceptance, keeps the discussion on track and stays on schedule by beginning and ending each session at the allotted time. The leader encourages everyone to participate but also gives people the freedom to pass if they do not feel comfortable sharing at that time. She or he does not need to know all of the answers; in fact, it may be better that the leader does not. This is not a role of teacher or counselor. The small faith-sharing group is meant to learn and grow from the sharing of personal experiences and listening to others' witness.

BREAK THE DOCUMENT INTO SESSIONS

Each section includes a Scripture passage, a story from the bishop, a lesson, reflection questions, prayer and a call to action.

At the first session, read the introduction from Bishop Patrick. If in a small group, the facilitator may opt to read the introduction or may suggest taking turns reading the paragraphs aloud.

Following the introduction and at subsequent sessions, continue with these steps:

First, the facilitator will **READ** the Scripture passage and invite people to listen for a word or phrase that speaks to them. Then, the leader asks participants to share their word aloud, if they wish.

Ask a group member to read the **LISTEN** section, which is a personal witness story from Bishop Patrick.

After a short pause, the leader may ask participants to share a word or feeling the story evoked.

The facilitator then gives the group time to read the **LEARN** section on their own. Individuals are encouraged to underline, circle or mark words and phrases that speak to their hearts or raise questions they have.

After a given period of time to read quietly, the facilitator will lead the group through the **REFLECT** section, giving each person time to answer the questions aloud.

Once everyone has had a turn to reply, the leader will bring the group back to silence. The group then may **PRAY** the prayer aloud together.

As a final step, the leader might ask the group how they feel called to **RESPOND**. Discuss the prompts in the letter and/or make a list of your own ideas.

APPROACHES THAT WILL AID IN A POSITIVE FAITH-SHARING EXPERIENCE

- Be considerate as participants listen to others.
- Expect differences of opinion and respectfully accept them.
- Create an atmosphere that is comfortable, warm and friendly.
- Give each person the opportunity to express his/her honest feelings.
- Allow each person the opportunity to share, or not share, at his or her level of comfort.
- Recognize that silence, at times, is an appropriate part of sharing.
- Emphasize confidentiality as participants share and reflect personal thoughts and/or experiences.

INTRODUCTION

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” – John 20:21

While searching for a theme for this pastoral letter, these prolific words from John’s Gospel spoke directly to my heart, “As the Father has sent me I also send you.” Since my entrance into the Congregation of Holy Cross and ordination to the priesthood, the Lord has sent me to many places. I have led my congregation’s seminary in Kenya, served as its district superior in Uganda and ministered as a parish pastor in Portland, Oregon. Then, in December 2022, the Holy Father appointed me to serve as bishop of this beautiful Diocese of Saint Cloud. Jesus sends us into the world to be his disciples, sometimes in places and in ways we would never expect.

The words of John’s Gospel call us back to a powerful scene in Scripture following the resurrection of Jesus. The Risen Jesus appears in the midst of his disciples, who are huddled and fearful. By his presence he brings them gladness and peace. He speaks to their heart, encourages them to step out of their fearful huddle, and breathes on them the Holy Spirit to empower them to do so. Then he tells them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Although not a typical eucharistic scene within the Gospels, this powerful, Spirit-filled event that brings the peace and presence of the Risen Jesus nonetheless contains an important detail: it occurs on the first day of the week — a Sunday. This first day of the week, resurrection day, becomes transformative for how Christians will measure time and orient their daily and weekly activities. Sunday becomes central for their worship, their experience of community and their identity. It remains this way today, as the Sunday eucharistic liturgy “is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows” (Sacrosanctum Concilium 10).

The Risen Jesus breathing the Spirit on his followers and sending them forth takes place amid a community of believers, who bring their woes, trauma, fears and troubles with them. Jesus enters this dynamic and transforms it totally, from fear

to mission, from hiding to sharing the Good News. His gift of peace heals and propels his disciples to become healers, peace-givers themselves.

In many ways, we can recognize these elements in our Sunday gatherings, where we again encounter the real presence of Christ in our midst, a presence that heals and brings peace and a presence that sends us forth in turn to be that Christlike presence for others.

Our sacramental encounter with Christ in the Mass is a dynamic encounter. Meeting the Lord in the word, the community and the Body and the Blood works upon us and calls us ever deeper into conversion to holiness. Like his risen presence on that first Sunday, in the eucharistic liturgy he brings peace, gladness and mission.

We are currently celebrating a National Eucharistic Revival that offers a much-needed opportunity to restore our understanding and devotion to this Great Mystery by renewing our worship and relationship with Jesus Christ. I believe it can rekindle the hope and healing that so many people need, especially right now — not only in the Church, but also in our families, local communities, across the country and in our anxious world.

The Eucharist has a rich array of meanings and consequences for our Catholic faith. This brief letter cannot do justice to all of them — theological, historical, liturgical, spiritual — but intends to stimulate your reflection on how the Eucharist gathers us and sends us, with the presence of Jesus, our savior and friend.

I appreciate that many of our parishes and Area Catholic Communities provide opportunities for eucharistic adoration. When I'm before the Blessed Sacrament, I experience Christ's loving presence in a special way. I love having time alone with the Lord. Sometimes I come to him with my struggles and problems. Other times I just like to enter the stillness and quiet with him — experiencing his gift of unconditional love and discerning his will for my life and ministry.



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It is also important to remember that, powerful as it is, our faith calls us to more than this personal devotion of adoration and prayer. We also experience the Eucharist as a community, just as Jesus' first disciples did. As St. John Paul II said in his letter about the Lord's Day: "Those who have received the grace of baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God" (Dies Domini, 31). The celebration of the Eucharist unites us with God and one another. It transforms us, shaping our minds and hearts, and sends us on mission. Living the Eucharist as mission is one of my pastoral priorities for all of us in the Diocese of Saint Cloud.

St. Augustine taught us that, through the Eucharist, we are to become what we receive. We respond to Christ's self-gift by offering the gift of ourselves, our love and our good works in service to others. The Eucharist moves us — as individuals and as a community of faith — to recognize the dignity of every person created in God's image, especially those on the margins who, sadly, often feel excluded and unloved. It is just as our diocesan mission statement says: We must be Christ's "heart of mercy, voice of hope, and hands of justice" to all those we encounter.

I encourage you to be intentional about practicing this faith through daily prayer and attendance at Sunday Mass, the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and your advocacy for public policies that promote human dignity and the common good. Our world needs witnesses in word and action to the power of Jesus Christ, whom we encounter in the Eucharist. Our efforts are his work empowered by his Spirit and sent by the Father as he was. As St. Peter reminds us: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (1 Peter 3:15). My hope is that this letter will help you to renew your appreciation of the Eucharist as the greatest of gifts the Lord has given us.



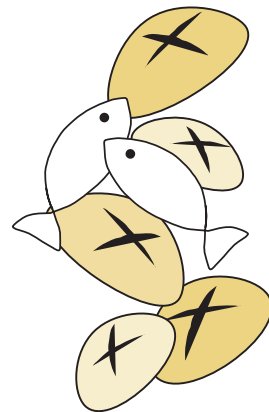
SECTION ONE: Eucharist as gift

READ

Multiplication of the Loaves

John 6:1-15

After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee [of Tiberias]. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little [bit].” One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people recline.” Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, “Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted.” So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.” Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.



LISTEN

In the parish I served in Portland, Oregon, before becoming a bishop, I met an amazing man named Javier. He crossed the Mexican border into San Diego without papers when he was 16 years old. Homeless and penniless, he lived under a bridge for 10 years, but unfortunately became an alcoholic and drug addict. By the grace of God, he met a man who led him to Alcoholics Anonymous and then back to his Catholic faith. In the parish, this bright light, this prophet of hope, runs A.A. in Spanish twice a week. On Saturdays, he spends three hours taking food to homeless encampments in North Portland. With some preparation, he regularly takes parishioners and young people preparing for confirmation to accompany him.



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Twice I was able to go with him and those assisting him. In one encampment I met a young man from Cuba, another from Uganda (where I once lived), and a young couple who could no longer afford the cost of rent for their apartment. At another camp I met a homeless pastor. He had served in Iraq, and when the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder set in, he lost his job, his wife and his friends. He shared with me that his new flock was now the homeless of Portland.

The food that Javier prepared and served with a crew of volunteers from the back of his truck was an echo of Christ feeding the multitudes. The food served was simple but nourishing, just like the barley loaves and small fish provided by a boy that Jesus blessed. Yet in giving what little Javier had to feed the homeless poor, a miracle occurred. Our eyes were opened, our hearts enlarged, as we realized that through us Christ was giving them not just food, but tenderness, compassion, understanding and friendship. We, in turn, were fed when we received their smiles, words of thanks, hugs and repeatedly heard, “God bless you.” And before I left the last encampment, that homeless pastor gave me a special blessing that I will cherish forever.

LEARN

While the four Gospels vary in their accounts of Jesus’ earthly ministry, all of them recount the feeding of the 5,000, sometimes called the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. This familiar story clearly foreshadows the Eucharist, where Jesus continues to feed his hungry people, not only with food that perishes but his own Body and Blood, the life he will lay down on the cross and take up again in risen glory. Nourished by this divine Gift that is communicated in the form we can take within ourselves by the daily necessities of food and drink, we are given a share in that life that endures forever.

Of the four accounts, John’s version includes some thought-provoking details. Here, the food that becomes the center of the miracle comes from a young boy. We aren’t given his name; it might have been Levi, or Simon or Benjamin. He was likely sent by



his mother with some bread and fish to make a little extra money for their family by selling these meager provisions if he could, and this large crowd looked like a seller's market. The barley loaves he carried were the food of the poor, not the wheat those better off could afford; and though we might picture loaves like French bread, each was probably about the size of a pita. And the two fish were not like salmon or walleye, but more like herring or sardines. But by any measure, Andrew was right: this was not enough even for the Twelve, much less a vast crowd.

In the story, Passover is approaching, and the crowds would think of Moses and of the manna with which God fed his people in the desert; and of the Paschal Lamb whose blood set their ancestors free. Five loaves suggest the five books of the Torah, the Word that fed God's people; and the 12 baskets hint at the Twelve Tribes of Israel. By clarifying that the food comes originally from this young boy, John hints again at Passover, since the youngest member of the family was charged each year with introducing the Passover story in the household's celebration. Tradition suggests that John was that youngest among the Twelve, so it is his way to place himself in the story to announce the new Passover Jesus was to bring. John is not merely a narrator of an impersonal story; he is remembering as a participant.

As barley was the first crop to ripen, so Jesus is gathering the first fruits of his followers. And after the miracle is done, Jesus flees to the mountain alone, rather than be made king, because the last time Israel insisted on having a ruler to be like the other nations it eventually led them into exile. All of this foreshadows Jesus, alone on the cross on the mount of Calvary, mocked as the King of the Jews. And finally, the fish and bread will make another appearance at the end of John's Gospel, when the disciples do not at first recognize the Risen Jesus but come to know him when he feeds them with the same meal: bread and fish that he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives. This is the quartet of verbs that always points to the Eucharist in the Gospels and is still enshrined in the consecration at every Mass.

Among many others, two points of reflection offer themselves as we consider the meaning of the Eucharist for our lives today. First, this boy had what was needed for a miracle to occur. God provides, but often through unexpected human participants. It is a classic lesson in stewardship: to offer what we have to Jesus, even if it seems utterly insufficient, for in his hands it becomes more than enough. We can look at the needs of our lives and our world and then at our resources and understand perfectly Andrew's words when Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowds rather than send them away: "What good is that for so many?" So many problems, so many hurts, so many questions. It is true that we do not have enough;

but God does.

Related to this, a second reflection connects the divine multiplication of daily bread with the Mass. Just before the preface, the celebrant invites: “Pray that my sacrifice and yours will be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” My sacrifice and yours: what does that mean? In the first place, of course, it means our prayerful union with the one perfect offering of Jesus on the cross. When we gather for Mass, mercy is fully revealed, and time itself is changed, so that we do not just remember something that happened 20 centuries ago; it is our reality, here and now. As Jesus offered his life for us, so we too offer our lives through him to the Father.

But “my sacrifice and yours” also gets very personal, very individual, like this boy’s meal. Some offer their sorrows and losses; their prayers and anxieties for loved ones; their frustrations at hopes that will never be fulfilled, plans that will never be realized, reunions that will not take place in this world. There are the aches and pains and diminishment of aging; the abilities and opportunities that have disappeared with time; the friendships that are gone, sometimes suddenly and sometimes gradually. Some offer weary hours of work and care for others who may never say “thank you;” misunderstandings and even lies that have damaged relationships; or the dull routine that seems more like just staying alive rather than truly living. Some offer their struggles with addictions, or habits of anger or impatience or being hypercritical, or even their doubts and questions about a God who makes us wait, does not seem to answer questions, and sometimes simply says “no.”

All of these sacrifices and more are gathered up as the assembly says: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands.” Here is the heart of a eucharistic disciple: All our offerings of prayer, service, daily routines and remarkable moments are handed over with intentional trust as a sacrifice to God, our sacrificial gift of everything we are and experience as members of the Body of Christ. Coming to the Eucharist is the integral and natural breath of our Christian life. We gather to take in Jesus; we are sent by him to give out his love in everything the next hours and days hold, pleasant and difficult. My sacrifice and yours.

Though John doesn’t describe the moment, it must have been remarkable to see those lines of people coming for bread, and each always found more; it did not run out. So too is God’s love and mercy: There is always more; it will simply never run out. Today, that same divine love and mercy visits us and feeds us whenever

we come to Jesus in faith, and we experience a miracle far greater than the 5,000 who heard Jesus that afternoon. For today we receive, not a ration of earthly bread to tide us over until the next meal, but the very life of God so that we might live forever. The Eucharist both teaches us and empowers us to imitate this miracle's pattern of abundance: When we give our love in concrete ways, we do not have less. We become more.

REFLECT

Name a moment when you unexpectedly received something special or meaningful. Recall how you felt. How might you bring that feeling to others?

Where do you see God's abundance in your life and the world around you?

What sacrifices do you, or can you, bring in faith to Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist?

PRAY

God of inexhaustible mercy, you fill our lives with gifts and blessings, sometimes hidden beneath the appearance of the ordinary, the commonplace, and even the insufficient. Help us to discern your presence and your will in the people, events and sacrifices that you place in our path. May we always be united with your Son, Jesus, in the mystery of his saving love, strengthened by and united in the gift of the Eucharist, his own living presence with us until the end of the age.

RESPOND

- ✚ In sacrificial giving, we do not have less, we become more. Choose a worthy cause today and make a charitable donation, large or small, as a sacrifice inspired by the words of Jesus: "Do this in memory of me."
- ✚ Sometimes our own "abundance" consists of material blessings that accumulate, things that we no longer use or need. Choose one or two of those unused or unnecessary things in your home that could bless someone less fortunate and give them away.



SECTION TWO: Eucharist as encounter

READ

The Road to Emmaus

Luke 24: 13-35

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

LISTEN

One of the men I most admire is Blessed Basil Moreau, the founder of the



Congregation of Holy Cross, the order to which I belong. After witnessing a period of impressive growth after founding Holy Cross in 1837, it seemed to all come crashing down when the order faced financial ruin through the mismanagement of a member, when Holy Cross religious and students died from typhus at schools in the United States, and Father Moreau began to face unexpected internal opposition.

He wrote, “I saw, or believed I saw so clearly the proximate and complete ruin of Holy Cross.” In his dark night of the soul, Father Moreau was like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, convinced as they were that the mission of Jesus had failed. In a moment of sadness and despair, alone in the small chapel of the motherhouse, he knocked on the tabernacle door and cried, “Are You there?”

This crisis for Basil Moreau ended when a friend, Countess Marie-Antoinette de Julien, wrote him unexpectedly from Rome, “I see you in the same straits as St. Peter sinking in the water” and he said, “In the twinkling of an eye, light swept into my soul; my entire confidence returned; the trial was over!” The countess was a Christ figure for him, using Scripture to enlighten his understanding of recent painful events, just as Christ did for the two disciples whose hearts burned within them as he spoke to them on the way.

On occasion we come to the Eucharist with heavy hearts because of life’s many challenges. Christ speaks to us through the readings and suddenly light sweeps into our souls, and we receive him in the breaking of the bread. The Eucharist we receive is meant to make us missionaries who take the presence of Christ, which is now in us, to people who do not yet know the Lord.

LEARN

In the Road to Emmaus story, a Sunday story, we recognize a familiar pattern. The breaking open of Scriptures followed by the breaking of the bread, all in the presence of the Lord, is at the heart of our eucharistic experience as well. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we walk together with Christ, who in the Liturgy of the Word speaks Good News to our lives, our joys and our sorrows. Like

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the disciples of Emmaus, we gather with Christ around the table and recognize his real presence in the breaking of the bread. And like these same disciples, we experience both his presence and his absence in our lives, an absence that makes room for our faith to grow forward into relationship with Christ.

As we reflect on the eucharistic pattern of the Road to Emmaus, and as we begin to see ourselves alongside these two disciples when we celebrate Mass, one important question remains. Does our sacramental encounter with the Lord also propel us to action? Does meeting the Lord in the Eucharist become mission for us in the same way it became mission for the Emmaus-road disciples?

The mission that the Emmaus-road disciples take up is an evangelizing mission. This means that in the context of the story, we see them specifically engaged in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with those they know to be yearning for it the most. In this, they take up the example of the Risen Lord, who not only walked with them in their grief, but was clear in showing them his intent to go further at the end of their day. The Risen Lord is dynamic. In turn, the disciples are compelled to move as well: to take and share the news of their mysterious, heart-enflaming, hope-filled experience with the Risen Lord to those whom they know to be traumatized by and grieving his loss. This is the essence of evangelization: to readily share the good news of Jesus, in context, so that it brings life, hope and joy to others. In the Eucharist, we receive so that we are also able to give.

One of the challenges we may face in the life of faith is the tendency to see our faith activities as distinct and separate rather than related and interconnected. Given the manifold expressions of faith, it can indeed be challenging to maintain a cohesive big picture. Engaging in traditional devotions seems quite distinct from commitment to social action, care for creation or outreach to those who feel marginalized in our communities. In the Church, we experience these distinctions locally and globally. When driven to tension points, these distinctions can even lead to divisions in the Church. A deep devotional life can become



something seen as foreign to commitment to social justice, with believers aligning with one or the other. This kind of division is detrimental to community, as it forgets the essence of who we are in communion. When reflecting on the Eucharist in our lives, this call to communion, especially in light of the divisive tendencies we may see in church and society, is essential to keep in mind.

An essential part of our call to communion is a commitment to listening. Listening is as much a spiritual discipline as an interpersonal ability. Pope Francis reminds us that listening means not only the perception of sound but rather it points to the relationship between God and humanity (World Communications Day Message 2022). God's loving Word and Spirit address us, give us life, call us into communion. When we grow in faith, we are developing our ability to listen deeply to Word and Spirit and to respond by our commitment and way of life. The ability to listen deeply is fundamental for our spiritual life: We practice this deep listening especially when we pray. As a disposition toward God, listening also forms the way we are able to attend deeply to one another as well. The Road to Emmaus story teaches us this, especially in the way the Risen Lord accompanies the disciples on the road. He first and foremost relates to them by listening deeply to their grief and confusion. From this deep listening, he guides them to listen in turn by re-encountering the Scriptures together, drawing from this listening new hope, vision and life. Through this mutual experience of listening, the Risen Lord forms these disciples, and us in their footsteps.

Listening is at the heart of discipleship and of being Church. Pope Francis' ongoing commitment to synodality is built on the idea of a listening Church:

A synodal Church is a Church that listens, that realizes that listening "is more than simply hearing." It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17), in order to know what he "says to the Churches" (Revelation 2:7) (Pope Francis, Address for the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Oct. 17, 2015).

Another of my priorities for the people of the Diocese of Saint Cloud is listening in this synodal way, toward deeper communion with God and one another. In

a cultural context of polarization and division, a Church that listens deeply is radical and prophetic. By a commitment to listening, people of faith are offering a prophetic witness and a model of hope. Toward this, we are called to attune the ears of our hearts to those whose stories and voices have not been heard, those on the margins. The boundless desire to be heard is one of the deepest needs of human persons. (Pope Francis, World Communications Day Message 2022). Turning to one another to listen then is a gesture of dignity, belonging and communion.

The Road to Emmaus story, with its comprehensive image of word, sacrament and mission, speaks particular wisdom for our time. For the believer seeking to encounter Christ in word and sacrament, it also offers the essential reminder that this encounter is meant to propel us to action. That is to be missionary and evangelizer. In some way, shape or form, it is meant to bring us into life-giving encounters with others, where we readily “give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” (1 Peter 3:15). Essential to this life-giving, missional encounter is our ability to listen, and through this, welcome and dignify the voices of those we might not often hear. This is not only an arising call from the Eucharist, but also the very call of our baptismal identity as Christians. Following Christ, we are baptized to be sharers of his Good News. This is the very identity of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the identity of each of the members therein. It is the core of who we are.

REFLECT

What is your Road to Emmaus moment? Where have you encountered Christ in the world?

What sets your heart burning when it comes to your experiences of faith? How does this connect with your hope, joy or need to heal?

What does listening with your heart mean to you? What helps you listen well to others? What hinders it?

PRAY

God of Hope and Life, Your Risen Son was present to his disciples, enkindling their hearts with his word, and calling them to eucharistic gratitude in the breaking of the bread. Teach us to walk with the Emmaus-road disciples in the presence of the Lord. Give us listening hearts, a sense of your Son's real presence, and the power of the Spirit to propel us to action so that we might readily share the reason for our hope with others. We ask this through Christ our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

RESPOND

- ✦ Commit to deep listening during Sunday Mass, prepare for the liturgy with a few moments of stillness. Study a pew resource to follow the readings and prayers. Be mindful of how the Word is addressing you and stirring your heart.
- ✦ Consider the many ways of Catholic faith expression in our diocese. Choose to participate in an activity or event that is new to you or not part of your regular life of faith at this time. What are you hearing through the ear of your heart?





SECTION THREE: Eucharist as communion

READ

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

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.

LISTEN

My dear friend, Father Joe Corpora, C.S.C., told me recently about a Mass he attended that is celebrated annually on the Feast of All Souls, at the border between Ciudad Juárez in Mexico and Anapra in New Mexico. The Mass is offered for all those who have died trying to cross the border, about 5,000 in the past 15 years.

Half of the altar is on the United States side of the border and the other half on the Mexico side. An 18-foot-high fence goes across the border. White crosses with the names of people who have died trying to cross the border were all along the fence.

Hundreds of people lined both sides of the border. Renato Ascensio León, the archbishop of Ciudad Juárez, and about 20 priests were on the Mexico side. On the U.S. side were Bishop Ricardo Ramírez, the bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico, Armando Ochoa, the bishop of El Paso, Texas, and about 15 priests.

Father Joe wrote, “I could not stop staring at the fence with the altar on either side. Here we were gathered as one Body of Christ divided into two. While the Eucharist speaks of our oneness in Christ, of the One Bread and the One Cup, of inclusion, the fence speaks of the opposite — division and separation and exclusion.”

At the Sign of Peace, people on both sides put their fingers through the holes in the fence to touch the fingers of their sisters and brothers on the other side. Father Joe did the same, touching the fingers of another man. He said, “I cannot describe what I experienced at that moment, perhaps the deepest longing I have ever known for justice, for peace, for unity, for acceptance.”



This story should remind us that the Eucharist is the divine banquet that unites all people in solidarity. We are one body in Christ: the poor, the elderly, the differently-abled. Can we also welcome immigrants to our parishes who have fled extreme poverty and violence and receive them as we would Christ himself?

LEARN

The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the believers of Corinth, reminds them that all the faithful people who actively participate in the eucharistic banquet are called to live in continuous solidarity, forming a community intimately united by the love and mercy of Christ's gifts. What the apostle established for the Corinthian faithful also applies to all of us, the Catholic faithful of today.

Forming a community and remaining committed to it is a timely reminder for us. In recent years, our country has experienced a deeper and deeper social polarization. We are not only divided in our opinions but find it increasingly challenging to talk to one another about our differences. Beyond division, there is a tendency these days to retreat to ideological camps that see the other as someone to mistrust and vilify. This tendency presents itself in the political realm, on social media and, sadly, even in the life of the Church. From the perspective of faith, these divisions, whether in the secular context or in the ecclesial one, present a profound concern. Divisions and polarization are fundamentally opposed to communion. Communion is a gift of the Eucharist, and it is integral to our identity, calling and ultimate hope. Shaped by the Eucharist, people of faith have a prophetic opportunity in today's divided culture to be witnesses of communion, and to commit to being community with our brothers and sisters. This commitment to communion feeds a hunger in today's world for being one with others.

In our contemporary ecclesial communities, sometimes we experience the divisions brought about by the immoral ideologies of racial discrimination, xenophobia (fear of those from different cultures and lands) and individualism. Faced with these hurtful and destructive realities, we have had the same temptation as the disciples of Emmaus: We want to flee and leave everything behind because discouragement, disappointment and the experience of failure overcome us (Luke 24:13-35). But also, on many occasions, we have experienced how Christ Jesus does not abandon us, and he approaches us as he approached the disciples of Emmaus. He wants to share our problems. He wants to give us a word of encouragement that will dispel our doubts. The disciples of Emmaus



BY ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN THE EUCHARIST, WE RECOVER AND BUILD SOMETHING IMPORTANT: A COMMUNITY JOINED IN ONE BODY AND CENTERED ON CHRIST. NO ONE CAN BE AN ISOLATED AND SOLITARY DISCIPLE; WE NEED TO LIVE TOGETHER IN A COMMUNITY OF FAITH TO DEVELOP AND THRIVE AS TRUE CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS.



discover the presence of the Lord when he breaks and shares his bread at the common table, at the table of friendship.


By actively participating in the Eucharist, we recover and build something important: a community joined in one Body and centered on Christ. No one can be an isolated and solitary disciple; we need to live together in a community of faith to develop and thrive as true Catholic Christians. That is why the disciples of Emmaus returned to Jerusalem, where they found their other companions gathered and shared with them the love and solidarity that they received from the Risen Lord Jesus.

To receive Christ Jesus in the heart is to accept his unconditional love, so that we can pass it on to others; to be able to leave behind our infidelities and selfishness, to be able to ask for forgiveness for our faults, and thus be capable of giving our sincere love to our children, spouses, family and those in need. Receiving Christ in Communion enables us to live in friendship and peace with everyone. Some of the fruits of our communion at Mass are kindness, service, forgiveness, mercy, mutual help, patience and affection.

The Eucharist is a privileged moment to meet and be in the place of worship with relatives, neighbors and friends, to share prayer and adoration of the Lord, and to communicate ideas and experiences with everyone, including those who are strangers to us. Family ties between grandparents, parents, grandchildren and relatives are deepened and enriched by sharing the Lord's banquet, and the traditions of the faith are effectively passed on to young people and children.

One of my priorities as bishop is to be a source of welcome, inclusion and respect for the beauty of the cultural values and traditions of all who live in our region. It is my responsibility to provide for the well-being of the spiritual life for all those in my care and for the improvement and growth of the Church right here in the Diocese of Saint Cloud.

Diversity is all around us and always has been. Indigenous peoples



inhabited this land for thousands of years before this diocese was founded. Explorers, missionaries and immigrants from Poland, France, Ireland and Germany, just to name a few, came and built many different styles of churches to express their own faith culture in their communities. Today, we continue to see new faces in our communities, just as our ancestors did. We see people of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, lifestyles, social experiences and physical and mental abilities. This diversity helps us see each person as a unique gift from God.

We are blessed with a vibrant Hispanic/Latino population in central Minnesota, many of whom share the Catholic faith and seek to participate in the eucharistic celebrations that we offer in our parishes, chapels, convents, hospitals and educational centers.

Just like our English-speaking communities, many of our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters are fervent Catholics who are looking for a community of Catholic Christians that welcomes them and receives them with fraternal charity. They want to live together and be actively integrated into an ecclesial community to practice their faith, worship the Lord and share their spiritual and social talents with their brothers and sisters who already live in the region.

One thing I have witnessed in ministry with people from a Hispanic/Latino background is the value placed on the adoration and veneration of Christ Jesus in the Eucharist. For them, it is not only a time for quiet, individual prayer. They go to the chapel to establish a dynamic love relationship and have an exchange of feelings and ideas with the eternal God who is alive and actively transforming hearts and the universe. From this follows, for Latinos, the celebration of the Eucharist — very festive and lively, filled with joyful music, sonorous songs and harmonious body movements. The Mass is the feast, in which popular, energetic and lively musical and dance expressions have a place; expressions that indicate the great joy that this encounter with the risen and glorified Lord brings to the entire community.

In that respect, I have also developed an appreciation for Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of the Americas and of the National Eucharistic Revival. This particular image of Mary, the Mother of God, has a privileged place in the religiosity and in the hearts of Latin American men and women. Her maternal affection and her delicate tenderness engender feelings of unity, fraternity and harmony in the souls of the faithful who sincerely seek God in the celebration of the Eucharist.



AT MASS
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 CHRIST,
 REGARDLESS
 OF
 SKIN COLOR,
 SOCIAL STATUS
 OR
 IMMIGRATION
 STATUS.



From my own experiences, I have learned that Mass for all of us can be a joyful and festive meeting with brothers and sisters from different places, ideologies and cultures, in which everyone shares their feelings and thoughts equally and builds a united and harmonious human community.

At Mass we are all one in Christ, regardless of skin color, social status or immigration status. When the sons and daughters of God are united by their faith and devotion to Jesus during Mass, the true integration of groups of people in unconditional solidarity is possible. If we are deeply in communion with God, surely we will find some way to enter into communion with brothers and sisters who come from different cultures than ours or who have different points of view than ours.

We all share this banquet that unites us as a community of people who sincerely love each other because they are firmly attached to Christ. We call the Eucharist “Communion” because it puts us in union with God and in union with all the people who share our faith and are celebrating with us.

REFLECT

What gifts do you have that you bring to your community of faith? Think of someone in your community who is different from you. What gifts do they bring to the community?

Why do we say that the Eucharist can bring unity and harmony to our communities of faith?

How can people from diverse backgrounds, generations, cultures and even faith traditions enrich the spiritual and sacramental life of our parishes and schools?

Where have you noticed the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe? Find a picture of her and read the story of her and St. Juan Diego. Spend some time in prayer reflecting on the image. What might we learn from this story?

PRAY

Almighty and eternal God, we praise you and give you thanks for all the spiritual and heavenly gifts that you bestow on us, and especially for the eucharistic banquet that you instituted for the salvation and gathering of the whole human family. Enkindle in our hearts the desire to always be welcoming and accepting of those who think and act differently than us, so we can build up together, with the guidance of your Holy Spirit, a community of faith that is always united in true bonds of solidarity and mutual respect. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

RESPOND

- ✦ How is your school, parish or ACC welcoming to others? Commit to learning more about cultural values and traditions of new people in your midst.
- ✦ Choose to participate in a bilingual Mass or event in your community or neighboring community.
- ✦ Practice more openness and tolerance when you encounter and work with persons of other cultures or people who have different points of view.
- ✦ Be hospitable and friendly with all people who have different social backgrounds and pray with them and for them.



4 SECTION FOUR: Eucharist as mission

READ

John 20 19:23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

LISTEN

Since the beginning of the Eucharistic Revival, which kicked off in June 2022, we have had the opportunity to hear and share personal witness stories of how the Eucharist has worked in the lives of people around the country as well as right here in our diocese. Somewhere along the way, our diocese endearingly coined these testimonies “Eucharistic love stories,” which I think is both poetic and fitting.

When I reflect on the beginning of my love story with the Eucharist, I think about the time I made my first holy Communion as a young student at my home parish of St. Joseph in La Porte, Indiana. I remember being excited that it was finally going to happen. I was taught by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. They were great teachers. My teacher spent months and months with us in school, helping us to better understand the Eucharist and appreciate the mystery of what it really is. When the day finally arrived, I remember experiencing an intense moment of inspiration, of true joy, of peace. I still have a photo of me in the back of our house holding my first Communion candle — fiercely with pride — in my hand. The candle was a symbol that I finally received Christ. That day stands out as monumental to me, and the memory is forever etched in my mind.

Later in my life, I went through a time of discernment about my vocation and felt a call to the Congregation of Holy Cross and the priesthood. I’ve been a priest now for three decades and a bishop for only a short time. I celebrate Mass every day, and I find I’m still growing in my understanding of the Eucharist — that it’s Christ’s way of touching us, of coming to us, of being more intimate with us.

I was reading something recently in which Dorothy Day said, “I couldn’t imagine a day going by without receiving Christ in the Eucharist.” I think that awareness is growing in me, too — that as time goes on, this is Christ’s unique way of touching each one of us with his presence and his love. He is closer to us than even our own breathing, our own heartbeat. That’s an intimate communion. It took me a while to come to understand that. As a priest you can learn the theology of it, and you celebrate it. But maybe sometimes you don’t fully grasp it. It takes time even as a priest to enter more deeply into the mystery of it. So, I think for me, it is that sense that Christ is coming to be present to me in this unique way. This is a great gift we have in the Church — one that sometimes we do not always appreciate as much as we should.



So, when it comes to my eucharistic love story, I don’t know that I have just one, or one that I can pinpoint to a certain moment or experience. It’s more of an awakening to the fact that what St. Augustine said is true: There are two ways Christ is present at Communion. There is Christ in the Eucharist that the priest is giving, but there’s Christ also in the person receiving. If there’s a love story, it’s that I’ve awakened to the fact that Christ is also coming to receive Christ. I’m more aware of the people in the Communion line — their eyes, their hands, especially farmers and laborers. A lot of immigrants, they’re using their hands. Whether they receive on the tongue or in their hands, I’m making that connection between the Body of Christ in my hand and the Body of Christ in the Church coming to receive him.



WE NEVER
SIMPLY
LEAVE
MASS.

My eucharistic love story is about falling in love with the people who are coming to Christ — becoming more aware of that. The idea of the body of Christ as the Church, as the faithful present — this has become increasingly alive for me during my priesthood. It’s broader than I once thought. There’s an intense closeness that we should feel because we are the body of Christ. I pray the Holy Spirit helps me — helps us — to realize the beauty of what’s in front of us, the majesty of it, the source and summit of our lives. I can’t think of a more amazing love story to be a part of.

WE ARE
SENT FORTH
BY CHRIST
THROUGH
THE CHURCH,
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WITH US
THE
LOVE OF
GOD MADE
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JESUS.

LEARN

For many years, the dismissal at Mass was the Latin phrase, “Ite, missa est.” It was often translated: “Go, the Mass is ended.” Literally, however, it means, “Go, it is sent.” Not you are sent, but it is sent, or perhaps even he is sent. The “it” in question is what we have shared — the love of Christ in word and sacrament, the Gospel message we have received and been fed upon in both body and soul, also the Spirit who has filled us. The very word “dismissal” contains this same idea — to be sent.

Thus, we never simply leave Mass. We are sent forth by Christ through the Church, carrying with us the love of God made flesh in Jesus. The current formulas for dismissal capture this idea well.

The first is simple: “Go forth, the Mass is ended.” Rather than simply going, we are going forth, with the connotation that we are going out from one place to somewhere specific, sent forth with a destination — not so much a place to go as a task to do.

The second is: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” Again, a clear task is entrusted to us in this command.

The third is especially rich: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” This reminds us that our task is not simply a chore we can check off and then get to our own business; glorifying the Lord is our business.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Jesus chooses you and sends you. To whom will you go today?



REFLECT

Where do you think Jesus might be sending you to minister to others?

In what ways are you announcing the Gospel in the ordinary moments of life?

What does it mean to you to glorify the Lord by your life? List some ways you can do this individually and as part of a community of faith.

PRAY

God of Life, You created us for communion, with you, with the created world and with one another. Time and time again you nourish us to deepen this sense of communion so that we can live out of it with and for others. Your Son came to give his life toward the same end. His body and blood became bread and wine, giving us life, abundance, strength and an eternal bond with you that is sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Open within us the desire to hunger and thirst for this heavenly communion. May it shape us in such a way that our presence may be bread and wine, broken and shared for the world. May we be generous to give ourselves as gift for others. May we be humble to bend down and wash feet. May we be courageous to lay down our pride, our will, our lives. May we live a eucharistic life to share the joy of our communion with you.

We ask this through Jesus, the Bread of Life, whose real presence accompanies us from the altar to the highways and byways of our lives and back. Amen.

RESPOND

- ✚ Traditional and personal devotions can fuel activity. In your personal form of prayer and devotion, how might God be calling you to act?
- ✚ Practice spiritual and corporal works of mercy. (pg. 29)
- ✚ Consider where God might be calling you to mission — is it far away in another place or is it right here at home or your neighborhood?
- ✚ Be real when sharing about your life and journey of faith. Talk about the challenges as well as the joys.

ON YOUR OWN: Write your eucharistic love story

Using one or more of the prompts below, consider your own love story with Jesus.

- Using words and phrases that you have collected from reading and reflecting on this letter, ponder your experience with Christ. Where did you first encounter the Lord? Who formed and informed your thoughts about faith? What do you believe now? How do you continue to grow more in love with Jesus?
- Imagine that you are in an elevator with someone and they ask you about your relationship with Jesus. You have 60 seconds until they reach their floor. What would you tell them?
- Jesus asked the question, “Who do you say that I am?” How would you answer him?
- Not everyone has a “lightning bolt moment” when they first felt the love of Jesus. Just like any relationship, great love happens over days, months, years, our lifetime. It is an ongoing conversion. What does that journey look like for you? When were moments you felt great love? When were moments that you felt alone? What about your faith gives you hope, comfort, joy? What are some holes, gaps or questions you have experienced?

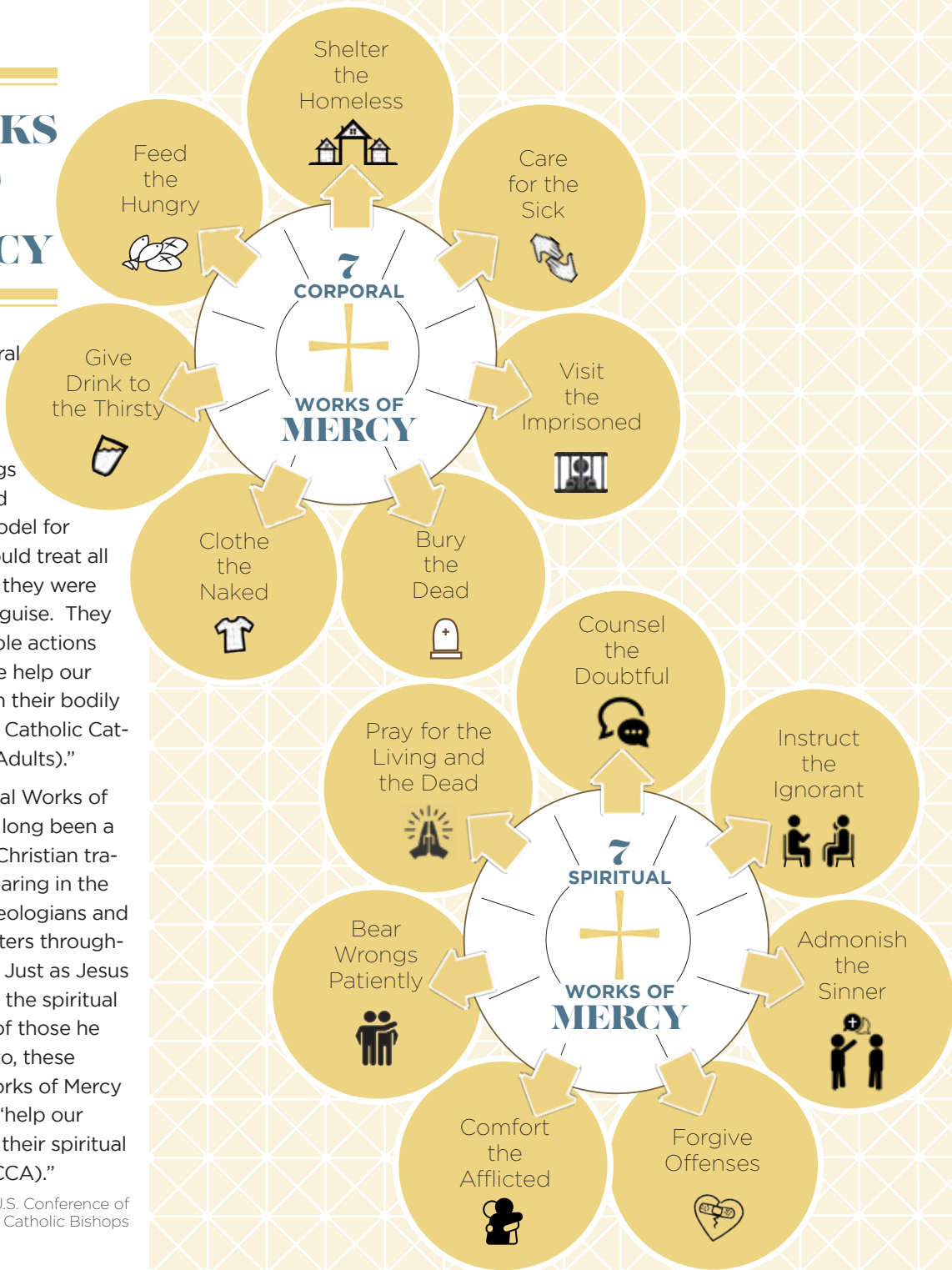


WORKS OF MERCY

“The Corporal Works of Mercy are found in the teachings of Jesus and give us a model for how we should treat all others, as if they were Christ in disguise. They ‘are charitable actions by which we help our neighbors in their bodily needs’ (U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults).”

“The Spiritual Works of Mercy have long been a part of the Christian tradition, appearing in the works of theologians and spiritual writers throughout history. Just as Jesus attended to the spiritual well-being of those he ministered to, these Spiritual Works of Mercy guide us to ‘help our neighbor in their spiritual needs’ (USCCA).”

—U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops



As the Father has sent me, so I send you

A Pastoral Letter

+Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.
Bishop of Saint Cloud

In light of the National Eucharistic Revival, an initiative of the U.S. bishops aiming to inspire, educate and unite the faithful in a more intimate relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist, St. Cloud Bishop Patrick Neary, C.S.C., was moved by the Holy Spirit to write his very first pastoral letter, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

The letter, which has an introduction and four sections, takes a synodal approach, emphasizing the theme of listening. Individuals are invited to delve into the letter on their own or in small faith-sharing groups. Instructions for optional ways to use the guide are included inside.

With each section beginning with Scripture and a personal story from Bishop Neary, readers have the opportunity to learn, reflect on questions, pray, respond and develop their own eucharistic love story with Jesus.



Diocese of Saint Cloud • P.O. Box 1248 • St. Cloud, MN 56302-1248
www.stclouddiocese.org

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