

# Led by the Spirit on Mission

## A Pastoral Note on Families of Parishes

### Introduction

Little more than three years ago, I invited us all to call upon the intercession of Mary, the Star of Evangelization, “that the Lord may bring about an unprecedented harvest in the Archdiocese of Detroit.”<sup>1</sup> She has been a protagonist for the work of evangelization in many ages and places. She should be the guiding light for our work as we continue to live the graces of Synod ‘16 and seek to unleash the Gospel in southeast Michigan and beyond. This year has provided more than its share of challenges, setbacks, and disappointments. In fact, discouragement can harden our hearts to the work of evangelization we committed to just a few years ago. But we cannot turn from our mission; it would be infidelity to the grace of God.

The Blessed Mother remains our guiding star, shining always for us, and shining all the brighter when our surroundings are darkest. She points us always to Jesus, directing us to “do whatever he tells you.”<sup>2</sup> She is our companion in the work of evangelization. When we keep her close, she brings us with her “in haste” to share the Good News, just as she hurried to Elizabeth, bringing the unborn Christ-child with her, to share the Gospel for the first time in human history.<sup>3</sup>

### Part I: Our Missionary Identity

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, we see the final earthly exchange between Jesus and his Apostles. He gathers them with him and gives him (them) encouragement, a charge, and a promise before ascending to heaven:

*“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.’” (Mt 28: 16-20)*

This final conversation between Christ and his disciples is meaningful to us because, like those first disciples, we too have been asked to unite and go on mission together in Families of Parishes, enhancing each other’s strengths and working collaboratively to unleash the Gospel around us. In this Pastoral Note, I will begin by offering an account of some of the ways I see these words providing a kind of interpretative key for understanding where we have been over the past few years, where we are right now, and the way we are being called to follow going forward.

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<sup>1</sup> *Unleash the Gospel*, Marker 10.1 “The Star of Evangelization.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn. 2: 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:39-45.

As you read, know that this Pastoral Note is not meant to stand on its own but rather to come from the fuller vision for our path forward in *Unleash the Gospel*. That Pastoral Letter, which flows from Synod '16 should help guide us and shape our understanding of all that I will say here.

***The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them.***

After all the teachings of Jesus and all his miracles, including his triumphant victory over sin and death on the Cross, Jesus ascends into heaven with only eleven people standing by. This number is reduced from “the twelve” he had chosen as the foundation stones for his Church.<sup>4</sup> The numbers would hardly have made a passer-by turn his head. But it is never the size, political influence, or earthly power of the disciples of Jesus by which his ministry is measured. It is measured in faithfulness. Therefore, the eleven are enough.

They are enough because they are obedient to him. Their meeting point was not randomly chosen nor was it a place where they providentially arrived. Rather, they go where “Jesus had ordered them.” This small band of disciples is obedient to Jesus. They are witnesses to the Resurrection and, while there is much they do not yet know, they obey. The Church of Christ is always marked by those who are willing to go where Jesus leads.

And Jesus leads them to a mountain. Anyone who has climbed a mountain – and Jesus had his disciples climb a number of them – knows that it is not done haphazardly.<sup>5</sup> It requires effort, dedication, and purpose. Scripture often points to mountains as places where man can encounter God — and this is most perfectly exemplified by Moses encounter with the Lord on Mount Sinai.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in obedience to Jesus, the disciples climb this mountain to encounter their last worldly glimpse of the Savior.

***When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted***

After all their effort, the disciples meet Jesus again. But they still do not know entirely what to make of him. Even though they worship him, there is something they still lack. We hear that doubt fills their hearts. For some reason, they are not able to give themselves completely over to him in trust. Perhaps they are worried about his leaving and what will happen to them. Perhaps they are ashamed of their having abandoned him during his Passion, or they fear that if they surrender this last part of themselves, they will lose control of their own lives. We do not know why they doubted, but we know they have not yet received the Holy Spirit who will fill them with all knowledge from on high.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the reason, they doubted.

How often do we allow this doubt to creep into our own hearts? Doubt is the gateway to bad habits which can worm their way into our lives. We need to reject these bad habits and, once again, commit ourselves to rooting them out.

As we make plans, decisions and strategies for the future, we need to put aside a **worldly notion of the Church**. We must remember that “it is Christ who directs the mission and activity of

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<sup>4</sup> See Rev. 21:10-14.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:1, 17:1, 21:1; Mk. 9:2, 11:1; Lk. 6:12, 9:28, 19:29, 22:39; Jn. 4: 19-22, 6:1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 3: 1-5, 12. For other examples of this in Scripture, see Jos. 8:30; 1Kg. 18:36-39; Ps. 68:15-16; Is. 2:1-5, 40:9-11, 56:6-7; Joel 3:17; Micah 4:1-2; Mt. 15:29; 2Pt. 1:16-18; Rev. 21:9-11.

<sup>7</sup> See Lk. 24:49 and Jn. 14:25-26.

the Church and who will bring her without fail to her final destiny.”<sup>8</sup> Opening up our minds, our hearts, and our plans to trust in Jesus, even in this moment in our local Church, is a concrete way to reject this bad habit.

The challenges we face are immense and numerous. We can easily feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped for the work. We begin to doubt God’s grace and we allow the bad habit of **spiritual lethargy** to take root in our lives and our plans. I know that for many of us, the long weeks and months of the pandemic have felt “as if we are pushing a rock up a steep hill.”<sup>9</sup> Prior to the pandemic, we have for years faced a priest shortage that stretched our pastors between many responsibilities. By God’s grace, many of our faithful have not experienced a diminishment in the level of priestly care they receive, even with fewer priests in ministry. This can only come at the cost of great personal sacrifice. But that personal sacrifice can, at times, be built on sand. If our prayer life suffers, if our devotion cools or if we become isolated and begin to take the weight of the world on our shoulders, spiritual lethargy is not far behind. This is not God’s plan for the flourishing of his Church or of his priests.

Another of the bad habits is a **status quo mentality**. This resistance to change is at odds with the words of Christ who came to “make all things new.”<sup>10</sup> If there is one lesson from these past several months, it is that we need to adapt to circumstances we cannot control. God permits these times of great challenge and discomfort with an eye toward bringing new life. He wants us to be co-workers in the great task of sharing the Gospel with every person in Southeast Michigan, using new methods and new expressions, imbued with a new ardor.<sup>11</sup>

Among those things which can keep us from this great task is **fear**. We do not know what the future will hold. None of us can be certain how things will play out with our pastoral strategy over the years to come. But we know that fear cannot be our guiding principle. Jesus desires something far greater for us than to be paralyzed by fear. “Whenever we become aware of fears and anxieties influencing us, we can bring them before the Lord in all honesty and ask him to replace them with apostolic courage.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally, among the bad habits mentioned in *Unleash the Gospel* is a **complaining attitude**. It is no accomplishment to find something about which to complain, especially in the midst of a difficult journey. Things will never be precisely to our own liking, or as we each think they need to be ordered. People will not always react in the way that we believe best. But complaining does not build up the Kingdom of God. It sows seeds of doubt, discouragement and even despair.

The Apostles stand before Jesus worshipping him outwardly but doubting him inwardly. Their actions matter greatly, but their interior attitudes and dispositions matter as well. They needed something – or Someone – to change their hearts. As we prepare for Families of Parishes, seeking to cast away doubt and put off our bad habits, we have to beg for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful in the Archdiocese of Detroit and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And You shall renew Southeast Michigan.*”

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<sup>8</sup> *Unleash the Gospel*, 3.4 “Good and Bad Habits.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Rev. 21:5; See *Unleash the Gospel*, 1 “Introduction.”

<sup>11</sup> St. John Paul II marked the New Evangelization as new in methods expressions, and ardor.

<sup>12</sup> *Unleash the Gospel*, 3.4 “Good and Bad Habits.”

***Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”***

Amid their doubt, we hear that Jesus approaches them; he draws close to them. Jesus does not shy away from our weaknesses or our faults. When we seek him out and stay by his side even when we falter, we can have confidence that he will draw near.

Here I think particularly of my brother priests. How indispensable it is that we always draw close to Jesus. We are not merely functionaries of the grace of redemption, like ecclesiastical civil servants or sacramental vending machines. Like all the faithful, we are infinitely loved by Jesus! We have been most closely configured to him in our priestly ordination. Therefore, it is our right and our duty to be men of prayer. There is nothing more important we will do for our parishioners than to more deeply fall in love with Jesus Christ. There is no task of more salutary and of lasting efficacy than to pray daily, best in front of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to be more configured to Christ in our heart, our words, and our actions. Brothers, our efforts to unleash the Gospel will succeed or fail to the degree that we recommit ourselves to regular, serious, and deep prayer.

This invitation to intimacy in prayer is offered to each member of the faithful as well. Have confidence that your time in prayer – whether this manifests itself in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, recitation of the Rosary, reading Sacred Scripture, or any other form of authentic Catholic prayer – is never wasted. It is the antidote to our overly functional and active world. Jesus wants to draw close to you, too!

As Jesus approaches the Apostles, he manifests why they should take confidence in what he will soon command them. “*All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” There is no goal, plan, dream or aspiration we can have which is not under the authority of Jesus Christ. Whatever plan you have for yourself, your family or your parish — whatever plans we may have for our archdiocese — Jesus has the power to accomplish it.

The account of Jesus’s ascension in the Gospel of Luke includes the command to “stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”<sup>13</sup> He commands the Apostles to wait until they receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We see throughout the Acts of the Apostles the ways in which the Holy Spirit directs the Church on the path she should follow. The early Church was radically **docile to the Holy Spirit**. This good habit is no less important for our local Church, especially at this time. We need to let the Holy Spirit teach us; we need to stand in a posture of receptivity “obeying his promptings and inspirations.”<sup>14</sup>

Jesus’ power over all things on earth should give us a great measure of **confidence in God**, even as we face significant challenges and undergo a renewal of our parish structures. He has conquered sin and plundered the strong man of his possessions.<sup>15</sup> He has entered into death itself and emerged victorious in his Resurrection. Therefore, nothing is stronger than Jesus Christ. We are invited to take the unshakably confident words of St. Paul into our own lives:

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these things we

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<sup>13</sup> Lk. 24:49.

<sup>14</sup> *Unleash the Gospel*, 3.4 “Good and Bad Habits.”

<sup>15</sup> Mk. 3:23-27.

conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>16</sup>

***Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.***

After Jesus tells the disciples of his authority, he gives them a command: the Great Commission. This is not some off-hand passing remark of our Lord. This is his charter for the first generation of disciples and their successors. It is the charter for the Church in Detroit — and for you and me.

It begins with a simple word: Go! The Church can never be satisfied that we have done enough. This word of Jesus is a perpetual command for the Church to go out. This missionary thrust has always been at the heart of what it means to be Catholic. While it has been diminished in certain times and places — especially where the culture had been leavened by the Gospel — Christ has raised up great saints to remind each generation of this need. For us, St. John Paul II was one of these saints. His **apostolic boldness** in proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples is a shining witness for each of us.

Jesus demanded apostolic boldness from his disciples when he called them to make disciples of all nations. Their plans and hopes needed to be expanded. They were not called simply to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus or even to share the Gospel with those around them. They were called to *go out* to all nations. This is a profound reminder to us. Amid the challenges of this past year — including a health crisis and ringing calls for racial equality — we are reminded that all people have a right to hear the Gospel proclaimed. We are called to find ways by which we can boldly and lovingly invite every person in southeast Michigan into a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ.

A task of this magnitude is not accomplished by anyone working alone. We need a new **spirit of cooperation** and a commitment to working together. This must be coupled with a **spirit of innovation**. Having a missionary mindset requires a willingness to try new things, even to fail at times, in an effort to advance the Gospel. We are being invited into a time of greater innovation for our parishes, exploring how they can work together and finding new and uncharted ways to unleash the Gospel.

Primary among the commands of the Great Commission was Jesus' instruction to his Apostles to share the Sacraments and to teach the faith — what we call the *munus sanctificandi* and *munus docendi*, two of the key duties of the priesthood. The third duty, the pastoral governance of a parish or the *munus regendi*, is an important aspect of the priesthood but it is not mentioned in the Great Commission. Rather, Jesus focused on the other two *munera*.

That third duty of governance often proves to be among the chief challenges faced by priests in our times. I often hear from priests who find themselves spending disproportionate amounts of time and energy each day on the “worldly” tasks of running their parishes. While I am

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<sup>16</sup> Rm. 8:35, 37-39.

grateful for their selfless attention to these important details, I cannot help but notice the increased need we have for priests to be free to recommit their efforts more fully to teaching and to administering the sacraments. During Synod '16, we clearly heard the need for more opportunities for the Sacrament of Confession, support for families in their living out the faith, and a transformational Sunday experience, including preaching which brings about a life-changing encounter with Christ, the ability to grow as his disciple, and the zeal to witness to his love and mercy in the world.<sup>17</sup> We cannot continue to operate as we have – with greater demands on our priests – and simultaneously expect better results from their ministry. A new approach is needed.

**And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.**

These final words of Our Lord should give us confidence to face head-on the challenges we see. Whether they are challenges within the Church or in our culture, we need only to remember Jesus' promise. When I was made a bishop almost 25 years ago, I chose the words "*Aspicientes in Jesum*" as my motto: "Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus."<sup>18</sup> They express this same sentiment: confidence that Jesus keeps his promises. The great virtue of the Christian life is perseverance in the midst of trials and uncertainty. Jesus has promised to remain with us. Jesus is trustworthy because he died for us. Jesus is all-powerful because he rose from the dead. Therefore, keep your eyes on him and trust him.

The last good habit from *Unleash the Gospel* is an **attitude of gratitude**. It is easy to be grateful when we readily see things going our way, but it is much harder when we are faced with many changes and uncertainties. A disciple trusts in God's providence so he has a disposition, an attitude, which receives everything as a gift from God.<sup>19</sup> Our Father, who knows how to give us gifts of unparalleled richness, deserves to be repaid with gratitude.<sup>20</sup> The news we proclaim is Good News indeed. How could we be anything but grateful?

**Part II. Families of Parishes**

Our call to make disciples of all nations has its origin in the Great Commission our Lord bestowed upon the Eleven in the final moments before his Ascension. It is a call which has echoed and re-echoed down the centuries to every bishop, priest, deacon and member of the baptized. It is a call which needs to be rooted in each age and in the specific circumstances of each local Church.

In our local Church, we received this call when we were created a diocese in 1833 and again when we became an archdiocese in 1937. The call became more acute at Synod '69, held in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Our most recent moment of renewal to this call took place at Synod '16. More than four years ago, I convened priests, religious and lay faithful from across the Archdiocese of Detroit to assist me in discerning what it meant for us to be an evangelizing archdiocese.

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<sup>17</sup> See *Unleash the Gospel*, Action Step 1.2 "Family Mentoring and Accompaniment," Action Step 2.1 "Parish Culture," and Action Step 2.2 "Parish Functions."

<sup>18</sup> Heb. 12:2.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 1Cor. 4:7.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 2Cor. 9:10-11.

The three days of November 18–20, 2016 set us on a course which would reveal the Holy Spirit’s call for a renewal of parishes and archdiocesan structures “to make them spirit-led and radically mission-oriented.”<sup>21</sup> When *Unleash the Gospel* was published on Pentecost of 2017, I committed our local Church to follow wherever the Holy Spirit would lead us in the coming years. We subsequently have been transformed. It has been edifying to see so many priests and laity respond generously to this movement.

There have been many moments for putting into action the work of the Synod, and now we reach an especially critical time for the implementation of the Synod’s work. Our new model of **Families of Parishes**, announced at Pentecost of this year, is a continuation of the fruits of Synod ‘16 and *Unleash the Gospel*. This is part of the next chapter in the Archdiocese which we are calling “Sent on Mission.” Our focus is on the renewal of our parishes and schools to align all resources to our mission of sharing Christ in southeast Michigan.

As archdiocesan lay leaders and pastors took their first steps this summer planning and preparing for our transition to Families of Parishes, the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy released a document entitled, “The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of Evangelizing Mission of the Church.” This document, a call for parishes to become evangelizing communities, confirmed much of the work to which we had already committed. We are instructed in the letter to resist the temptation to view parishes as inward-focused (places for those already initiated to gather) and instead to ensure they are outward-focused (places from which to *go out* on mission). Evangelization must be the driving focus of parish life and all of our structures must flow from this mission. In the Vatican’s document, we are called in this work to “identify perspectives that allow for the renewal of ‘traditional’ parish structures in terms of mission.”<sup>22</sup> With Families of Parishes, we seek to address this challenge, renew our parish structures and continue our transformation into a missionary archdiocese.

A Family of Parishes is a grouping of three or more parishes that collaborate in deeper and more intentional ways than parishes have ever done before. Each parish in a Family will retain its own unique identity, similar to how each sibling has his or her own unique role in the family. This is not a parish cluster or merger as we have done in the past. Rather, Families of Parishes share similarities to other models that have been successfully implemented in other dioceses in the United States and Canada, with new parish structures to support mission. The structures we inherited for our parishes served us well in the past, but we know from Synod ‘16 — and it was confirmed by the Vatican document discussed earlier in this section — that parishes need to be realigned for mission. These new Families of Parishes will collaborate by sharing resources — including priests, deacons, and staffs across parish lines — to further advance the mission Christ has entrusted to his Church.

Every parish will participate in this renewed structure. Since Pentecost Sunday of this year, our Regional Bishops and Vicars have been working with priests to determine which parishes will come together to form Families. We have more than 200 parishes in the Archdiocese of Detroit, including those designated for particular ethnic or cultural communities, under the care of religious orders, and in urban, rural and suburban areas. We have parishes which are growing and others which have seen their communities decrease in number. Each parish – like each member of our

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<sup>21</sup> *Unleash the Gospel*, 2 “Foundational Conviction.”

<sup>22</sup> “The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish,” 20.

Church – has gifts which contribute to the full flourishing of our archdiocese. I am grateful to our priests for their active involvement in this process.

Our collaboration has extended to include many talented lay people who have helped with this process, both in the “nuts and bolts” as well as in the discernment of the strategy and the groupings of Families. Our Church is all the richer for the way we work together – clergy and laity – for important initiatives such as Families of Parishes. Lay co-workers and volunteers bring essential gifts which I have come to rely on for the exercise of my ministry as your Archbishop.

While Families of Parishes are certainly new to our archdiocese, the required commitment to collaboration and cooperation is not. In the past four decades, we have seen parishes coordinating Advent Reconciliation Services, Lenten Missions and Mass schedules. Some of our parishes have shared staff positions, faith formation programs or pastors. A few have shared buildings and worship sites. In the months and years ahead, new and innovate ways to work together will strengthen the bonds that already exist and will build new bonds everywhere else. For many of our parishes this will be an entirely new process which will require everyone to let go of a status quo mentality and to choose trust over fear. For all of us, this new reality will require a renewal of our confidence in Jesus’ power and his presence among us.

### ***Priestly Renewal***

The spiritual strength of a diocese is only as strong as the holiness of its priests. We are blessed to have a tremendous presbyterate in our archdiocese, ready for whatever the mission requires. I have heard this repeated by countless members of the faithful, especially when I must reassign a beloved pastor or associate pastor. As in dioceses around the country and elsewhere in the western world, we know the number of available priests continues to decline here from the highwater mark of the 1950s and 1960s. I know that our priests are working harder, covering more territory and are increasingly at risk of being overworked.

Priests are consecrated body, soul and spirit for the mission. This is one of the primary reasons for their consecration to take the form of chaste celibacy. A priest’s commitment to pastoral charity must be rooted in a deep relationship with Christ. He cannot give what he does not have. If a priest’s primary role is to make his people holy – to help them become saints – he, too, must be committed to a life of holiness.<sup>23</sup> This is why one of the earliest fruits of *Unleash the Gospel* was the creation of a new position of Director of Priestly Mission dedicated to accompanying our priests in their work. I remain grateful to Monsignor Patrick Halfpenny for generously agreeing to take up this work.

As we look forward to establishing Families of Parishes in the Archdiocese of Detroit, I am confident one of the goods which will come from this new reality is greater mutual support for our priests. It can be a great temptation in priestly ministry to become a “lone ranger,” isolated from other priests. Working together as a team will help them build each other up: “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”<sup>24</sup> While priests will not necessarily be living together as a result of Families of Parishes, they will be working together, praying together, and planning together for their parishes. I am certain that happier, healthier and holier priests will make happier,

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<sup>23</sup> “I charge pastors to recommit to a daily practice of personal prayer and intercession as their highest priority and to lead the parish to do the same.” *Unleash the Gospel*, Action Step 2.1.

<sup>24</sup> Prv. 27:17.



healthier and holier parishes, which in turn will ensure a happier, healthier and holier Archdiocese of Detroit.

### ***Mission Direct: A renewed effectiveness***

We will match our archdiocesan transformation to Families of Parishes with a corresponding renewal of our parish staffing structures into two distinct and complementary categories: Mission Direct and Mission Support. This staffing reality already exists for those serving in the archdiocesan Curia who provide central services to our parishes, schools and ministries. Now our parishes will benefit from this new approach as well.

Mission Direct staff positions are those ministries which touch most directly the mission of our parishes: to create a band of joyful missionary disciples.<sup>25</sup> These positions are the ones we might already term “ministry positions” or “lay ecclesial ministers,” such as catechists, youth ministers and pastoral associates. For decades, the Archdiocese of Detroit has been blessed by the tireless work and unique gifts of countless lay parish staff members and volunteers. They have made us a richer and more diverse local Church. God has not bestowed all his gifts on any one group of individuals and ordination does not contain gifts for every work of ministry.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is essential that our Families of Parishes continue to utilize the gifts of our talented lay co-workers.

These staff positions will experience a renewal to better reflect the priorities of Synod '16 as expressed in *Unleash the Gospel*. As parishes come together into Families, their staffs will begin to work together to more effectively help all people within their boundaries encounter, grow, and witness to Christ. We will adopt new positions, new titles and new organizational structures for parish staffs in the months ahead to help all our Families of Parishes flourish. Furthermore, we will provide formation for those in new positions to assure that we are not simply changing titles but are effectively focusing on being more missionary.

### ***Mission Support: a renewed efficiency***

While “moving from maintenance to mission” has become a catchphrase to express our commitment to the New Evangelization, I know our parishes cannot function without expert support for the mission. Pastors rely heavily on business managers, bookkeepers, human resource professionals, IT experts, maintenance staff and others to do work for which they often are not equipped. While the governance of parishes must always ultimately reside in the pastors, they must have competent and trustworthy collaborators in this work.<sup>27</sup>

Mission Support positions will provide mutual support to the parishes within a Family to allow for a renewed efficiency. The more resources we can dedicate to the missionary work of our parishes, the better they can be mobilized for evangelization, to which “every activity and resource of the parish must be in alignment.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “The Synod’s foundational conviction is that the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit is resolved to obey the Holy Spirit and be made by him a band of joyful missionary disciples.” *Unleash the Gospel*, 2 “Foundational Conviction.”

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 1Cor. 12:4-28, *Lumen Gentium*, 32-35, 37.

<sup>27</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, 129, 131.

<sup>28</sup> *Unleash the Gospel*, Action Step 2 “Parishes: Vision.”

Each Family of Parishes will have a Mission Support Director who will oversee those ministering “behind the scenes” in support of the mission. This position will report to the lead Pastor or Moderator of the Family. Priests and other staff will be more able to commit themselves whole-heartedly to the work of mission direct ministries and evangelization efforts.

As we begin this transition in our Families in the months ahead, we will need to pray especially for a spirit of collaboration. Change, especially change in one’s work, can present stress, doubt, and uncertainty about the future. I ask each of you to pray for a new openness to this renewal and collaboration, knowing that God is particularly generous when we pray for graces to better evangelize.

### ***Missionary strategic planning***

Families of Parishes will begin to take shape on July 1, 2021. By July 2022 all of our parishes will be part of their new Families. I am certain that there will be both challenges and opportunities for growth during this time. I am also confident that we are on the right path forward for our Church.

Each Family will be asked to develop its own Family Missionary Strategic Plan in the not-too-distant future. These plans will empower Families to discern how best to accomplish the work of unleashing the Gospel in their communities. In addition, the Plans will be something around which the parishes within newly formed Families can collaborate and thus grow closer together. Synod ‘16 gave us the daunting task of transforming our entire archdiocese and committing all our resources for mission. This is not something we can look at once and then put up on a shelf. Rather, we have been presented with the work of a generation.

Each Family’s Missionary Strategic Plan will look to *Unleash the Gospel* for inspiration — taking up the heart of Foundational Conviction, addressing the Roots of the Crisis, and seeking to fulfill the parish and family-level Action Steps outlined in the pastoral letter. There will be much more shared about these plans later in 2021 and into 2022. While the details are still in development, we can be confident that God will use them to mold us into a more missionary diocese. We may be intimidated by this work, but we should fear not; Jesus is with us!<sup>29</sup> There is nothing good that you or I could dream of accomplishing which Jesus does not already want more ardently for us.

### **Part III: Conclusion**

Mary led the disciples in prayer from the time of Jesus’ ascension until the coming of the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> She was the unwavering star around which they gathered in those days before Pentecost. But her role is not diminished after they received the Holy Spirit. She continues to guide the Church as she “inspires us with a sure confidence that the Lord hears and will not fail to answer.”<sup>31</sup> I have great trust that Mary will guide us, too, through this Families of Parishes

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Mt: 14:27.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Acts 1:14.

<sup>31</sup> UTG, Marker 10.1.

initiative. Entrusting this work through her intercession, I would like to conclude with a short excerpt from the Holy Father's prayer to Mary, Star of the New Evangelization.

"Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith:  
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own 'yes'  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus."<sup>32</sup>

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron  
Archbishop of Detroit

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<sup>32</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 288.