



Convocation of Parish Leaders

EVANGELIZING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

Participant Guidebook and Journal

Convocation of Parish Leaders Prayer

*“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed?
And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone to preach?
And how can people preach unless they are sent? – Romans 10:13-15*

Heavenly Father,

Pour forth your Holy Spirit to inspire us
with these words from Holy Scripture,
so that we might be strengthened to go forth
and witness to the Gospel in our daily lives
through our words and actions.

Give us the grace
that we might hear the call of the New Evangelization
to deepen our faith, grow in confidence to proclaim the Gospel
and boldly witness to the saving grace of your Son, Jesus Christ.

In moments of hesitation, remind us:
If not me, then who will proclaim the Gospel?
If not now, then when will the Gospel be proclaimed?
If not the truth of the Gospel, then what shall I proclaim?

O Mary, our Immaculate Mother, pray for us.
May the Convocation of Parish Leaders,
inspire us to imitate your example
as the first disciple of your son, Jesus,
who is Lord for ever and ever.

Amen.

Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.
St. Joseph, pray for us.
St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us.
St. John Paul II, pray for us.

Adapted from the USCCB “Prayer for the New Evangelization”

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Purpose of this Guidebook and Journal

The Convocation of Parish Leaders

From July 1–4, 2017, bishops in the United States along with Catholic leaders from around the country, gathered in a historic meeting called the “Convocation of Catholic Leaders: The Joy of the Gospel in America.” The bishops and their diocesan delegations reflected on key points of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis’ 2013 document on evangelization. Throughout the event, each delegation discussed the question, “What could missionary discipleship look like in our dioceses and parishes?” In order to more fully explore this question, the Dioceses of Crookston and Fargo are co-hosting an event in Fargo called the “Convocation of Parish Leaders: Evangelizing Missionary Disciples,” November 30–December 1, 2018. Bishop Folda and Bishop Hoeppner have invited pastors to form delegations from their parish(es) to explore the Church’s teachings on evangelization and missionary discipleship, in order to form mission-oriented parishes that seek out the lost and strive to be Jesus’ mercy and love in a world marred by sin.

Preparation Prior to the Convocation of Parish Leaders

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us: “we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). As delegates, we come together at this Convocation as “many parts” of the mystical Body of Christ. We were chosen by our pastors and our leaders for our commitment to our Catholic Faith and our desire to share the Joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We enter this process understanding that God has graced each and every one of us with spiritual gifts that he intends to use for the spiritual welfare of the community. The Convocation be an opportunity for each delegate to discern those gifts and be awakened to what John Paul II called “the new springtime of evangelization.”

As parish a delegate called by your pastor, it is important to devote time to spiritual preparation through prayer, reflection, and discussion, prior to the Convocation and continue that process during and following the Convocation. Below are some tools to help you and your delegation team with formation and collaboration.

Your Role as a Delegate

Preparation

This “Guidebook and Journal” will serve as a resource, not just in the academic sense, but it more so something you can and should take to prayer with you through the upcoming months to ponder and pray through, asking, “Jesus, what do *you* desire for our parish and the people in our community?”

To Prepare for the Convocation:

- Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Devote significant time and space for prayer (see suggestions below). Pray the Convocation Prayer (found in the inside front cover).
- Read, reflect on and discuss the teachings of the Church on evangelization (given later in this Guidebook), most especially Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*.
- Take time to share and affirm each other's gifts, strengths, and charisms (complete the "Personal Reflection Questions" worksheet, below).
- Prepare to share your parish community's strengths, challenges, hopes, and dreams at the Convocation (complete the "Parish Reflection Questions" worksheet, below).

During the Convocation

At the Convocation, you will have the opportunity to listen to keynote speakers and panelists, and have the chance to share your comments, questions, and insights during the breakout sessions. On Saturday, delegations will meet in order to begin brainstorming ideas for your parish / parish cluster. You will have many opportunities to meet people from parishes across both dioceses, which will enable you to hear ideas from parishes who are in similar situations as your own. You will be able to discuss what you have found to be fruitful in your own parish and to share ideas of how to address common struggles.

During the Convocation:

- Be open to new ideas and the points of view of other delegates and speakers.
- Take notes during the sessions, with the intention of sharing ideas with the other members of your delegation.
- Discuss ideas while they are fresh. Take time as a group to discuss how this applies to your parish community.

Following the Convocation

After the Convocation, our hope is that you would share what you have received with your parish. Overall, the goal is that the Convocation would not be a "one and done" event, but that it begin conversations at the parish level to address the question, "How can we help our parishioners, and those *outside* of our parish, not only to grow in their faith but share it with others?"

After the Convocation:

- Debrief as a group. Include parish leaders who were unable to attend the Convocation.
- Create an evangelization plan moving forward.
- Connect with diocesan leaders for support, guidance, and encouragement moving forward.

Prayer

As we prepare for the Convocation of Parish Leaders, it is important that each delegate make spiritual preparation a priority. Spiritual preparation, through regular, intentional prayer, is our perpetual “yes” to God’s call to be missionary disciples.

The Word of God

Read, reflect and pray with the following passages from the New Testament. Each of these passages speak to one or more aspects of our call as missionary disciples.

- Matthew 4: 18-20.....Jesus calls his first disciples.
- Matthew 11: 28-30.....Christ’s invitation to all who labor.
- Matthew 28: 16-20.....The Great Commission
- Mark 6: 7-13The mission of the twelve
- Luke 5: 1-11Jesus calls Simon Peter.
- Luke 10: 1-12.....Jesus sends out the 72.
- Luke 15Parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son
- Luke 24: 13-35.....Jesus accompanies two men on the road to Emmaus.
- John 3.....Jesus speaks with Nicodemus
- John 4: 1-42.....Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.
- John 13: 34-35.....Love one another as I have loved you.
- John 17: 6-26.....Jesus prays for his disciples and all believers
- Acts 2: 1-11Pentecost
- 1 Corinthians 12: 1-31Unity and diversity in the Body of Christ
- 2 Corinthians 5:20.....Christ’s ambassadors
- 1 Timothy 4.....Paul’s advice to Timothy

Read [Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization](http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/living-as-missionary-disciples), a document published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/living-as-missionary-disciples).

Mary, Star of the New Evangelization

Unite yourself to Jesus, through Mary by praying the **Rosary** and by reflecting on her life as our first and most perfect evangelizer. You can use the Convocation image of Mary at Pentecost as an aid for prayer. As Pope Francis reminds us, “today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 287).

Spend time with your favorite **saints**, blessed, or holy people. Take time to let their stories, writings, and their lives inspire you as a missionary disciple. Pray with their words and invite them to pray for you, for the Convocation, and your parish.

Another key way of preparing for the Convocation is to spend time in **Eucharistic Adoration**, if possible. Sitting at the feet of our Lord helps us to become more attentive to his will and his guidance in our own lives and in our parishes. Along with personal prayer, remember it is also important to pray and reflect with your group of delegates throughout this process.

The Holy Spirit, Evangelization, and You

The Holy Spirit continues to guide parents, clergy, farmers, engineers, etc., and each one of us to be radical witnesses of the love of Jesus Christ in order to share him with others. God has a particular mission for *you*. However, keep in mind, that while we are coworkers in this mission, it is the Holy Spirit who brings about conversion of hearts. As St. Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6).

You know people in your life that are hurting, are searching, and in need of hope. There are people in your life that *need* to hear about hope and salvation in Jesus Christ. We each have family members and friends who have left the practice of their faith. We all know of people in our communities who are desperately in need of the love God in their lives. And the way God wants them to hear about him, is through *you*. This is the challenge of the Convocation. As the Convocation prayer says:

*If not me, then who will proclaim the Gospel?
If not now, then when will the Gospel be proclaimed?
If not the truth of the Gospel, then what shall I proclaim?*

You might be thinking, “But how do I do that? I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to say. What if they say no? What if I try and fail? I don’t feel comfortable talking about my faith with others.” These fears can cripple us to the point of inaction. How do we overcome these fears? These are some of the questions the Convocation of Parish leaders will begin to address. This is why we are all gathering: To help our parishes and each of us as individuals recognize the mission that has been entrusted to us and to become more equipped to live out that mission.

Personal Reflection Questions

Below is a list of questions that will help you pray and reflect as you prepare for the Convocation.

1. How do you encounter Jesus Christ regularly in your life? _____

2. What keeps you active in your Catholic faith? What are your greatest joys? _____

3. What are your greatest struggles in being Catholic? _____

4. What are the greatest gifts you bring to ministry in your church? Are there any gifts that you have that you think could benefit your parish, but do not yet have the chance to do so?

5. Is there anything from preventing you from sharing your faith with others Do you have any hesitations about evangelizing? If so, what are they? (fears, obstacles, objections)

6. What are your hopes and dreams for your family, your community, and your church?

7. Who in your life would you like to experience a conversion and know Jesus Christ and his Church? Write their names below.

8. Make a commitment to pray for the people in the previous question daily from now until the Convocation of Parish Leaders. How will you pray for them? When will you pray for them?

9. On a scale of 1 to 10 ("1" being not comfortable at all, to "10" being "I'm basically the next St. Paul"), how comfortable are you to share your own story of God's love in your life with others (that is, your testimony)? Why or why not?

10. What are your expectations for the Convocation of Parish Leaders? What would you like to learn? How would you like to grow?

Parish Reflection Questions

As a parish delegation, reflect of the following questions about your parish “landscape.”

Be prayerful and honest, staying mindful of the possibilities and realistic about resources and abilities. Be encouraged and let the Holy Spirit guide you through this process as parish leaders.

See the parish statistics sheets to help you reflect on the first 4 questions.

1. What are the trends of the number of registered parishioners over the past 15 years? Discuss and write down why this is.

2. What are the trends in Mass attendance? For example, how have the ages of those who attend Mass changed? How do the number of parishioners compare to Mass attendance? Who is *not* in the pews? Why not?

3. What are the trends in the sacramental numbers? (Baptisms, Confirmations, Weddings and Funerals) If these numbers are not in sync with the number of parishioners, list a few reasons why this may be.

4. What are the trends in faith formation/religious education program numbers? What does it say about families and children?

5. Who is our local “mission field”? Who is on the margins in our community? What groups might see themselves on the outside, looking in?

6. What are our parish’s strengths? What ministries or aspects of our parish are bringing forth spiritual fruit? How can those areas be strengthened in order to continue to grow in spiritual fruitfulness?

Before you respond to the next two questions, discuss your answers to the questions on the “Personal Reflection Questions” worksheet.

7. What are our challenges in our parish and community? What are areas that need to be addressed or improved?

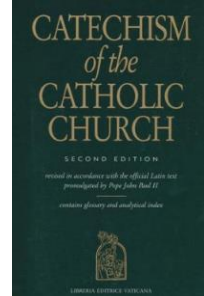
8. What are sources of hope? What are some ideas that would make our parish more spiritually fruitful and vibrant?

The Church and Evangelization

In recent Church history there has been an increased refocusing on evangelization and discipleship within the life of the Church. Why? Because even though evangelization has always been at the heart of the mission of the Church, it is especially relevant in the historical and cultural landscape of our day.

The Plan of Salvation

In St. John Paul II's opening remarks to *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, he stated how its purpose was to help with the task of "proclaiming the faith and calling people to the Gospel life."¹ But what is being proclaimed? The opening paragraphs of the Catechism answer this question and give the lens through which the rest should be understood.



1² God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life.

2 So that this call should resound throughout the world, Christ sent forth the apostles he had chosen, commissioning them to proclaim the gospel: "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 lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Strengthened by this mission, the apostles "went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it."

3 Those who with God's help have welcomed Christ's call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world. This treasure, received from the apostles, has been faithfully guarded by their successors. All Christ's faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer.

Reflection Question

What does the passage reveal about God's plan for humanity and the role of evangelization?

¹ *Fidei Depositum*, 3

² The numbers before the paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as the encyclicals and apostolic exhortations below, refers to paragraph numbers within the text, not page numbers.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...”

After the resurrection and immediately before Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave the Apostles their guiding mission of how to continue after his departure. He entrusted the continuation of his mission to them. Spend some time reflecting on this passage.

Praying with Scripture

Slowly read *Matthew 28:16-20*. Picture yourself in the scene with the Apostles. Imagine that Jesus is speaking directly to you. Re-read the passage.



¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Matthew 28:16-20

What words or phrases stuck out to you? _____

What might God be trying to tell you through those words / phrases? _____

What would you like to say to Jesus in response? _____

In this passage, Jesus commissioned the Apostles to continue the mission of proclaiming mercy and salvation in him. The Apostles were sent as his heralds of Good News to a world that desperately needs a message of hope. They were sent to evangelize and to be missionaries in order to lead people to Jesus Christ and his Church.

Jesus didn't just *suggest* that the disciples do this by saying "this would be good for you to think about doing if you have some free time. But if not, no big deal." No. He gave them the command to go out. However, he did not say they had to do it alone.

⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Acts of the Apostles 1:8-9

Pentecost and the Early Church

At Pentecost, the disciples were filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Previously filled with fear, they left the upper room with courage and conviction. As shown by Peter, they were able to preach about Jesus Christ without fear or constraint. They were filled with God's help to do the mission to which he called them.

Praying with Scripture

Read the story of Pentecost and Peter's preaching in *Acts of the Apostles* 2:1-42.

Write down any words or phrases that stuck out to you? _____

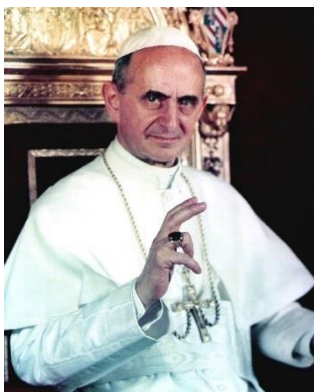
Why is the story of Pentecost important for the work of evangelization today?

And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:33

Pope Paul VI: Evangelization, the Deepest Identity of the Church

Throughout history, the Church has seen multiple waves of missionary efforts. Each marked by the needs of the historical context. The goal was still the same: to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, throughout the world. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*, Pope Paul VI emphasized how evangelization is at the core of who the Church is and what she does.



[Evangelization] is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. **Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize**, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.

Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14 (emphasis added)

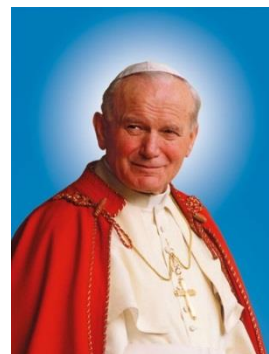
Reflection Questions

What do you think Pope Paul VI meant by saying evangelization is the “grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity”? How does and can the Church and her members live this out?

Because the Church “exists in order to evangelize” how can we make evangelization more of a natural occurrence within parish life? How can I make it more natural in my personal life?

St. John Paul II: The New Evangelization

Even though the theme of evangelization and the new evangelization were the underpinnings of many of St. John Paul II's encyclicals (which are letters from the pope to the universal Church), exhortations, and speeches, this booklet will highlight *Mission of the Redeemer (Redemptoris Missio)* which focused on the "permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate." The Catholic Church and its members are called to a continual state of mission, proclaiming Jesus Christ and the message of salvation to the world.



Urgency of Missionary Evangelization

Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support. But what moves me even more strongly to proclaim the urgency of missionary evangelization is the fact that it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself. "Christ the Redeemer," I wrote in my first encyclical, "fully reveals man to himself.... The person who wishes to understand himself thoroughly...must...draw near to Christ. ... [The] Redemption that took place through the cross has definitively restored to man his dignity and given back meaning to his life in the world.

Redemptoris Missio, 2

Reflection Questions

What do you think it means when St. John Paul II said, "Faith is strengthened when it is given to others"?

What are examples from your own life that reflect this?

No believer in Christ,
no institution of the Church
can avoid this supreme duty:
to proclaim Christ to all peoples.

St. John Paul II,
Mission of the Redeemer, 3

Three Situations for Evangelization

The fact that there is a diversity of activities in the Church's one mission is not intrinsic to that mission, but arises from the variety of circumstances in which that mission is carried out. Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization, we can distinguish **three situations**.

First, there is the situation which the Church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is **mission *ad gentes*** ["to the nations"] in the proper sense of the term.

Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. **They bear witness to the Gospel** in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care.

Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "**new evangelization**" or a "re-evangelization."

Redemptoris Missio, 33 (emphasis added)

Reflection Question

Can you think of an example from your community of each of the evangelization "situations" listed in the passage?

Pope Francis: The Joy of the Gospel

In November 2013, at the conclusion of the Year of Faith and following the “Synod for The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”, Pope Francis wrote the first Apostolic Exhortation of his papacy, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*). An Apostolic Exhortation is one way for the Holy Father to communicate conclusions he has reached from the discussions, reflections and recommendations of a Synod of Bishops.

Such documents are important for the faithful to read, pray with and discern how the words of the Holy Father affect their lives. Becoming familiar with this document will provide a better understanding of the hopes and desires of Pope Francis for the universal Church.

Below are some passages from *The Joy of the Gospel* for you to read and reflect on. Find a passage, section, or paragraph (of those listed below) that particularly strikes you and bring it to prayer. Let your selected passage(s) sink in, and come back to them multiple times. You may also want to discuss it with colleagues, friends, family members or the members of your parish delegation.



Consider these questions:

What is striking about these words of Pope Francis? What is challenging about this passage?
How does this passage apply to you or your mission? How is Christ asking you to change or grow in response to this passage?
If you could respond directly to Pope Francis about this passage, what would you say to him?

Introduction to “The Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*)

1. The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.

I. A joy ever new, a joy which is shared

3. I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace”. How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (*Mt 18:22*) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this

boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!

5. The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. "Rejoice!" is the angel's greeting to Mary (*Lk* 1:28). Mary's visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother's womb (cf. *Lk* 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (*Lk* 1:47). When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: "For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled" (*Jn* 3:29). Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (*Lk* 10:21). His message brings us joy: "I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (*Jn* 15:11). Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises his disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (*Jn* 16:20). He then goes on to say: "But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (*Jn* 16:22). The disciples "rejoiced" (*Jn* 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, "there was great joy" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52). The newly baptized eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (8:39), while Paul's jailer "and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God" (16:34). Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

6. There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress: "My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is... But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness... It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (*Lam* 3:17, 21-23, 26).

7. Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy". I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".

8. Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we

find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

Reflection Questions

What is the role of Christian joy in my life? Have I sometimes lived as a “Lent without Easter?” If so, why?

In light of paragraph seven, how is it possible to find true joy in today’s society?

II. The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing

9. Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor 5:14); “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).

10. The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others”. When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment. For “here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means”. Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ”.

Reflection Question

What does Pope Francis mean when he says that evangelization is “the source of authentic personal fulfillment”? Is that how you view evangelization? Why or why not?

Eternal newness

11. A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practicing, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization. The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ. God constantly renews his faithful ones, whatever their age...Or as Saint Irenaeus writes: "By his coming, Christ brought with him all newness". With this newness he is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always "new".

12. Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord's work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is "the first and greatest evangelizer". In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that "he has loved us first" (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone "gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.

Reflection Question

What words or phrases stuck out to you in the previous paragraphs? _____

III. The new evangelization for the transmission of the faith

14. ... [The] new evangelization is a summons addressed to all and that it is carried out in three principal settings.

15. In first place, we can mention the area of *ordinary pastoral ministry*, which is "animated by the fire of the Spirit, so as to inflame the hearts of the faithful who regularly take part in community worship and gather on the Lord's day to be nourished by his word and by the bread of eternal life". In this category we can also include those members of faithful who preserve a deep and sincere faith, expressing it in different ways, but seldom taking part in worship. Ordinary pastoral ministry seeks to help believers to grow spiritually so that they can respond to God's love ever more fully in their lives.

A second area is that of "*the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism*", who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith. The Church, in her maternal concern, tries to help them experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel.

Lastly, we cannot forget that evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel *to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him*. Many of them are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but “by attraction”.

John Paul II asked us to recognize that “there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel” to those who are far from Christ, “because this is the first task of the Church”. Indeed, “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church” and “the missionary task must remain foremost”. What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*. Along these lines the Latin American bishops stated that we “cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings”; we need to move “from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry”. This task continues to be a source of immense joy for the Church: “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk 15:7).

An ecclesial renewal which cannot be deferred

27. I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion”.

28. The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.

Reflection Question

Describe the “missionary option” that Pope Francis would like to see in the Church.

We are all missionary disciples

120. In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. *Mt* 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (*Jn* 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (*Jn* 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (*Acts* 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?

121. Of course, all of us are called to mature in our work as evangelizers. We want to have better training, a deepening love and a clearer witness to the Gospel. In this sense, we ought to let others be constantly evangelizing us. But this does not mean that we should postpone the evangelizing mission; rather, each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are. All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others. Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing. The witness of faith that each Christian is called to offer leads us to say with Saint Paul: "Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (*Phil* 3:12-13).

Reflection Questions

What does it mean to be a "missionary disciple"?

How can I live as a missionary disciple? What would this look like in my own life?

Planning Your Trip

Avalon Events Center

2525 9th Ave S
Fargo, ND 58103

Off 25th Street, just north of Big Top Bingo.

Free Parking: There are parking lots on the west, north, and east sides of the Avalon. The main door to the event is on the west side of the building.

Handicap Accessibility: The entire facility is handicap accessible.

Meals: The following meals are included in the registration cost:

- Friday lunch and supper
- Saturday lunch

Lodging

A blocks of rooms have been reserved at the Expressway Suites and the Ramada. They will go on a first-come-first-served basis.

Both hotels are offering discounted rates of \$65 for Thursday night and \$79 for Friday night for either Single King Suites or Double Queen Suites. Both hotels offer complementary hot breakfast.

** For the discounted rates, you need to mention **Convocation 2018** when reserving your room.*

Expressway Suites

4303 17th Ave S
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 239-4303

Ramada

3333 13th Ave S
Fargo, ND, 58103
(701) 235-3333



Questions?

For a list of speakers, the schedule and other resources, visit your diocesan website. If you have any questions about this Participant Guide, planning your trip, or any other questions related to the Convocation of Parish Leaders, contact your diocesan coordinator.

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Website: www.crookston.org/convocation

Coordinator: Bob Noel at (218) 281-4533, ext 439, or bnoel@crookston.org.

Diocese of Fargo:

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