

February 5, 2022

Dear brothers in Christ,

The Sunday Gospel readings throughout this past January articulate well the whole meaning of the Epiphany. The visit of the Magi to the Christ Child, the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, His first miracle at Cana, and Jesus' proclamation of His identity as Messiah at Nazareth all reveal the culmination of God's intention. A word meaning "revelation" or "manifestation," the Epiphany is God fully showing forth His identity as a Trinity of Persons, His desire to save the human race from the throes of sin and death, and His loving plan to unite Himself completely with each of us for all eternity. The Good News of our Faith is that Jesus Christ reveals, fulfills, and accomplishes the Father's plan perfectly.

As a diocese, we have engaged in *Go Make Disciples*, our evangelizing initiative, since Pentecost of 2020. This movement is not a three-year plan or a temporary project, but rather, our ongoing effort to live out the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ—to proclaim the Gospel to every creature, to make disciples, and to lead everyone into a deep, fruitful, and saving relationship with the Lord.

I asked each pastor to form an evangelization team in 2020 and begin meeting regularly to pray together, share their personal faith stories, and to learn more profoundly the beliefs and teachings of the Church. Resources provided by the diocesan Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, as well as ongoing support from mentors, supported this Phase I of *Go Make Disciples*. Particular focus on the primacy of Sunday Mass, daily personal prayer, monthly confession, and Friday penance as four holy habits gave some consistent and practical form to this effort. Jesus praying with and forming the Twelve Apostles is the Scriptural image for Phase I.

Phase II is the plan to expand this prayer, formation, and faith-sharing to the laity of the parish who are already engaged in the Faith, or at least are attending Mass. Each pastor was asked to formulate a written plan, articulating how he and his team/staff would offer more opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with the Lord, by inculcating the four holy habits mentioned above and to go deeper in the understanding and practice of Catholicism. The other dimension of Phase II is that each parish create or build upon a small group dynamic of formation, inviting those parishioners who are eager and ready to live discipleship and evangelize others into a personal process of spiritual growth. In this way, perhaps a small, but highly motivated group within the parish, becomes a dynamic influence and a spiritual leaven which the pastor can utilize to evangelize others. The Scriptural image of Phase II is Jesus sending forth the seventy-two disciples.

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

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Both in regional gatherings with the priests last spring and the video sessions I had with each pastor and his parish lead last autumn, I have been greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm, effort, and goodwill evidenced both by our priests and our lay leaders. I fully understand the challenges presented by the pandemic, the difficulty of beginning something this extensive and ongoing, and the fact that every priest, lay leader, and parish have their unique spiritual approach and perspective; so again, I am grateful and heartened at the effort made thus far. The imagination, ingenuity, and breadth of many parish plans are signs of hope. I have personally heard many anecdotes from our leaders of renewed energy and vision among parish staff, a greater fidelity to the sacraments, the effectiveness of the small group experience, and a deepening desire for a fuller relationship with Christ as early fruits of our *Go Make Disciples* initiative.

Part of my purpose in offering this reflection is simply to encourage everyone to persevere in the full implementation of Phase II. To create a pastoral plan and to implement it fully are two different exercises. The latter requires consistent hard work, faithful effort, and some courage to keep moving forward. So many unexpected challenges and needs emerge in the life of a parish that this fundamental dedication to the central mission can easily go to the back burner. The spiritual results of our efforts will not always be immediately apparent, so we can become disheartened. Some of the particular things we try may not succeed at all. I simply urge you to continue to call on the Holy Spirit and to be faithful in our sustained effort to grow our parishes and people as missionary disciples on fire with the holy desire to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone.

I am proposing that we organize some simple actions and events around the Ascension and Pentecost this spring, as a way to ask the Holy Spirit to animate us and our people in this evangelizing effort.

1. A parish novena of prayer to the Holy Spirit leading up to Pentecost with materials suggested by the diocese (May 27–June 4).
2. A gathering for priests to spend time in prayer, reflection and discussion, as we continue to seek to know the Lord's plan for us in this great endeavor and to share the spiritual fruits already received. I am wondering if Friday, May 20 would be a possibility for us to gather at Holy Name Heights. I welcome feedback from you regarding this date.
3. Preaching in every parish about Jesus' call to go and make disciples on Ascension Sunday (May 29) and/or Pentecost (June 5).
4. A gathering of lay *Go Make Disciples* leaders on the Vigil of Pentecost (June 4), with a Mass, a meal and time to share successes and victories.
5. A Mass on Pentecost (June 5) at St. Bernard's in Madison where I will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation for Catholic adults (non-RCIA initiates) from around the diocese.

I encourage all of you to invite your adult parishioners (non-RCIA initiates) who have not been confirmed to do so on June 5 at the diocesan celebration. Of course, they would need some formation on the parish level before receiving the sacrament. Such an effort would be a wonderful expression of our *Go Make Disciples* initiative.


As an extra resource for you and your teams, as well as the diocese as a whole, to understand what is working well, success stories, conversion stories, and the like, I asked the diocesan staff to put together an online resource to share among parishes. This will be found under

www.madisondiocese.org/gmd and the “Resources for Mentors” button at the bottom of the webpage. Many of these stories and best practices will be featured in the *Catholic Herald*, as well as online and on social media. I pray this will serve as a tool for us to share and learn from these best practices. Additionally, it will permit the fruit of this initiative to be easily seen, offer us further motivation, and encourage us to work together as a unified diocese.

As we move forward in this evangelizing endeavor, I entrust you, our leaders, our people and the whole diocese to the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her ardent prayer in the Upper Room during the nine days leading up to Pentecost was most efficacious in the sending of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. As we continue to embrace the mission of *Go Make Disciples*, we call on God’s transforming power, poured out in the death and resurrection of Christ, to use us to transform the culture of our parishes and institutions from maintenance to mission, and to move every heart into a stance of missionary discipleship. This effort is the worthy work of our entire lifetime, but we trust will bear great fruit in the salvation of our people and the abundance of grace given in Christ.

I am most grateful to all of you for everything you do in love and sacrifice for our people and pledge my support, prayers, and love to each of you. May the prayers of Mary, the Mother of the Church and of priests, sustain you and your ministry

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald J. Hying".

+Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison