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

### ***Pastoral Letter on Evangelization***

***Bishop James Powers***

***Diocese of Superior - Pentecost 2023***

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#### **Section 1 - A Call to Move from Maintenance to Mission**

*“As a diocese, and indeed as a Church around the world, we are at a turning point. We live in such a time that God in His Providence seems to have offered us a choice: we can either continue to watch the decline of the Church or we can take up our mission anew with faith, courage and passion. For me, the choice is clear. We must rouse ourselves out of complacency. We must courageously move past simply maintaining our programs and structures and allow the Lord to lead us into a deep renewal of our identity and purpose.”*

1. How would you describe your parish? Is it vibrant and growing, simply maintaining, or declining in active members? How motivated is your parish to draw new people in?
2. How in your life have you experienced the painful reality of friends and family leaving the Church?
3. What are your perceptions of the word ‘evangelization’? Have you ever heard this word used in relation to the mission of the Catholic Church?

#### **Section 2 - Our Cultural Moment: ‘From Christendom to Apostolic Mission’**

*“We will continue to lose members -- and at what cost to them and us! -- unless we begin to offer a clear and attractive alternative to the secular vision that our culture is promoting. To put it simply, if Christendom is over, then it is up to us -- all of us -- to become apostles -- to become evangelists.”*

1. Where are you in your faith journey? Do you find yourself away from your faith? Going through the motions? Active, but without a clear purpose? Or are you on mission?
2. What would making this a second ‘Apostolic Age’ look like? Where could you see yourself in that mission?
3. What factors do you think led our society away from the widely practiced and accepted cultural Catholicism of previous centuries? How are those forces at work in your life?

### **Section 3 - Call for the New Evangelization**

*"If we are promoting evangelization merely as a means to keeping our parishes or religious education programs or Catholic schools open, we are deeply misguided. Authentic evangelization can only be an overflow of the love of God that we have personally received, pouring itself out in a desire for that love to be received by those around us."*

1. Have you ever experienced God working powerfully in your life? How so? What does this experience make you want to do in your relationships with others?
2. How can you "proclaim Christ to all peoples" in your current state in life? Who is in your sphere of influence that you can bring Christ to? What would that look like?
3. Bishop Powers says that a 'healthy detachment from our structures and schedule' is needed to recapture the mission of making Jesus known and loved. This is a big change for most parishes. What are a few simple things that your parish/parish cluster could do in this regard to better pursue the mission of evangelization?

### **Section 4 - The Kerygma: Encountering the Good News of the Gospel**

*"When we encounter the truth of the kerygma and respond, we embark on a path of profound beauty and meaning. Despite the obvious decline of Christianity, the Gospel is just as timely and relevant to humanity today as it was fifty years ago or two thousand years ago."*

1. Where (if ever) have you heard this basic Christian message proclaimed so succinctly?
2. Where in the life of your parish is this message clearly and frequently proclaimed and intentionally taught?
3. Do you personally live in the reality that God formed you, knows you, loves you, and has a deep desire to be in relationship with you? If not, what obstacles are keeping you from experiencing this reality?
4. What does the thought of 'surrendering your life to the Lordship of Jesus' evoke in you? Fear? Excitement? Peace? Freedom?

### **Section 5 - Evangelization and Holiness: A Fully Integrated Christian Life**

*"My invitation to us all is to re-encounter the Gospel as good news of salvation and ask for the grace to humbly acknowledge any ways that we have settled for a 'tamed' or 'broken-in' version that is merely useful for us."*

1. Have you ever seriously considered the fact that God calls you personally and individually to become a saint? How does that make you feel?
2. In the diagram, which of the three circles are you currently living in? If you find yourself in the first or second circles, what is holding you back from putting Christ at the center of your life?
3. Are there any 'third circle Catholics' in your life? How would your parish look different if there were 20, 50 or more third circle Catholics?

## **Section 6 - The Call to Be Apostles**

*"The central task of our mission is to make disciples, but even discipleship is only a means to the deeper aim: reconciliation in our relationship with the Father. We must acknowledge, therefore, that the heart of evangelization is relationship: our own relationship with God pouring out into our relationships with other people."*

1. What are some ways that you could (or already do) personally evangelize in your spheres of influence because you "genuinely believe that Jesus is the answer to the longings, ills and sufferings that you encounter in others?"
2. Do you see your personal prayer life as being the foundation required to be able to evangelize the people in your life? Why or why not?
3. Practically assess the four steps Bishop laid out. What can these look like for you?
  - i. **Pray every day.**
  - ii. **Invest in Christian friendship.**
  - iii. **Invest in relationship in your spheres of influence.**
  - iv. **When someone opens up to you, respond.**
4. What are three to five things that are essential for our parish to be doing to move us from maintenance mode to mission mode - leading us into holiness and mission?

## **Section 7 - Two Tendencies to be Avoided: Isolation and Worldliness**

*"Many of the faithful, indeed probably all of us, will gravitate toward one of these responsibilities: either investing more and more in our Catholic identity or investing more and more in relationships in the world. The true apostle must be committed to both and always with an eye toward mission."*

1. What fears or apprehensions are keeping you from living deeply counter-culturally?
2. In what ways do people in my life see joy, purpose, and love in the witness of my words and actions? Are there ways that they see judgment and rejection?
3. Am I genuinely interested in sharing the fullness of the faith with the people in my life or have I settled into the comfort of simply co-existing, not wanting to rock the boat?
4. Think of someone you see in your community that is hurting and is in need of Jesus. Take them and their needs to prayer. Then, with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, what is one concrete step you can take in sharing the joy of the Gospel with them?

### **Section 8 - A New Pentecost**

*“When we abide in this place of trust and dependence there is no telling what the Lord will be able to do in and through us. We must constantly entrust ourselves to Him. When we do, He will lead us down paths we would have never dreamt of.”*

1. A simple way of inviting the Holy Spirit to lead you in your desire for this mission is to simply pray ‘Holy Spirit, I’m available. Use me as you will!’ How does the thought of genuinely praying this make you feel?
2. What outcomes might you subconsciously desire, or even feel like you must have, when you think about evangelizing people in your life?
3. Who are your favorite Saints that have lived out this radical trust in God’s provision? Is there anyone in your life that exemplifies this?

### **Section 9 - A Diocesan Church of Apostles**

*“I hope, dear brothers and sisters, as this letter concludes that this vision is clear. It is quite simply that our diocese becomes a diocese of apostles. Like the first apostles we need to rally close to each other in genuine Christian community. Like the first apostles we need to be animated by the Holy Spirit. Like the first apostles we need to depend utterly on the provision of God especially in and through the Holy Eucharist. I take no credit for this vision -- it is the vision of all of the popes of recent memory and of the Church Fathers in the first apostolic age. Nevertheless, it is my vision too.”*

1. What can you add to your daily prayer and/or daily routine to help nurture your own unreserved “yes” to receiving the love of God in a fruitful way?
2. What are you feeling compelled to commit to as you finish this letter? Be specific.