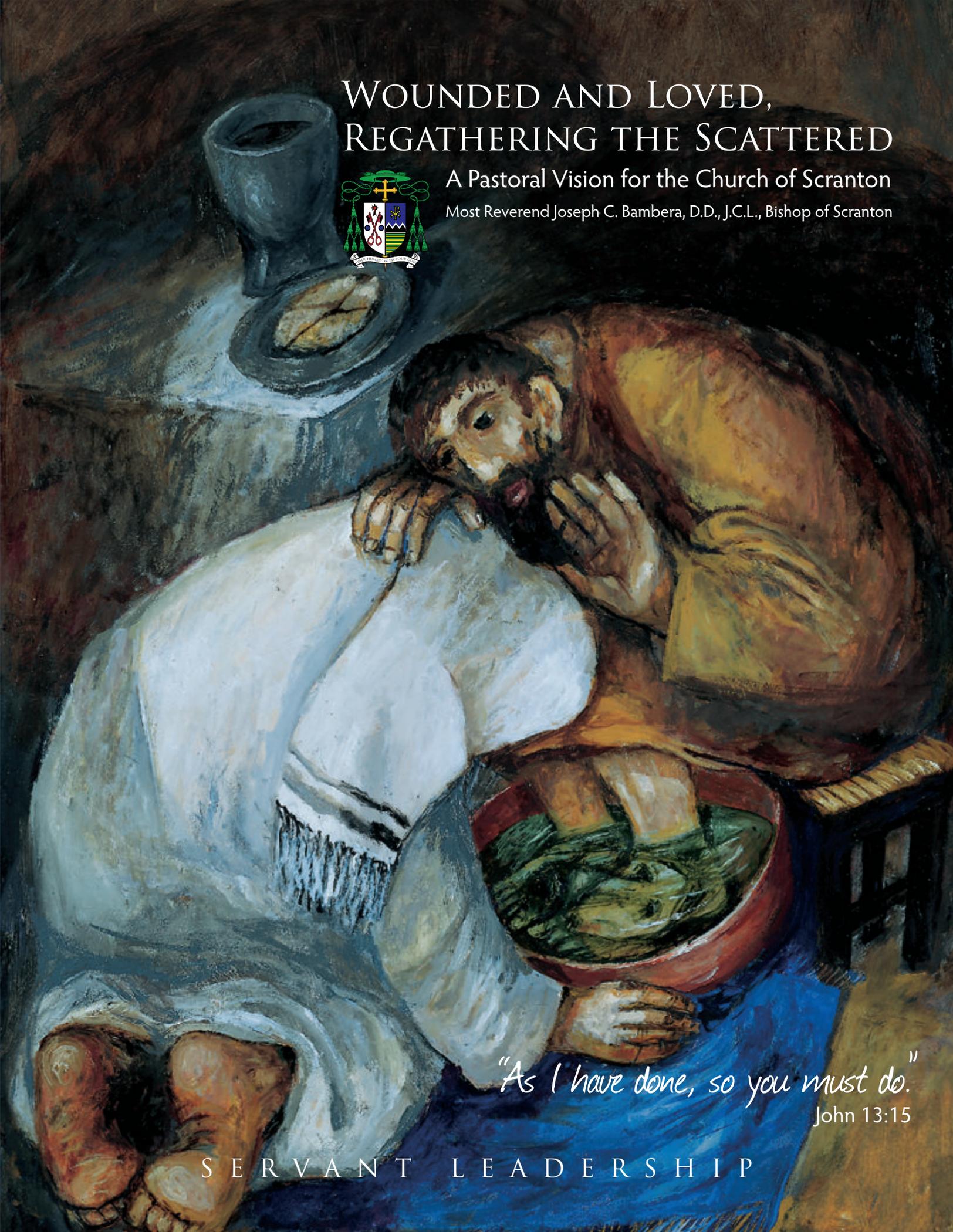


WOUNDED AND LOVED, REGATHERING THE SCATTERED

A Pastoral Vision for the Church of Scranton

Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L., Bishop of Scranton



"As I have done, so you must do."
John 13:15

S E R V A N T L E A D E R S H I P

THE PEACE OF OUR RISEN SAVIOR BE WITH YOU!

June 12, 2011, Pentecost Sunday

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends In Christ,

My heart is filled with gratitude as I write this letter to you, the Catholic community of the Diocese of Scranton. Today is Pentecost, the great feast of the Holy Spirit and the Church, which brings to an end our 40-day Lenten pilgrimage and 50-day celebration of Easter. Together we have had the opportunity to reflect on the heart of our faith and the mystery of God present in our lives through the gift of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Two days after Easter, I marked the first anniversary of my ordination as Bishop. In recalling all that has occurred during the past year, I spent Easter reflecting on my call to serve among you and praying about all that I have seen and heard during my visits throughout the Diocese. My reflection has resulted in this pastoral letter: *Wounded and Loved, Regathering the Scattered*. Through it, I share with you my hope for our local church in Scranton, to inspire us to return to our Spirit-filled roots as the Church founded by Jesus Christ, and to call us to renew our trust in the Spirit's companionship as we unfold God's universal mission and together serve God's people in the eleven counties of northeastern and north central Pennsylvania that make up our diocese. My hope lies in you, and our recommitment to the Eucharist and parish life.

Allow me to begin with an old tale which I believe leads us into the heart of our renewal as an instrument of God's compassion and healing in the modern world:

"There is a boy, who wants a drum, but his mother can't afford a drum, and so, sadly, she gives him a stick. Though he doesn't know what to do with it, he shuffles home and begins to play with the stick. Just then, he encounters an old woman trying to light her chilha, her wood-stove. The boy freely gives her the stick. She lights her fire, makes some bread, and in return she gives him half a loaf. Walking on, the boy comes upon a potter's wife whose child is crying from hunger. The boy freely gives her the bread. In gratitude, she gives him a pot. Though he doesn't know what to do with it, he carries it along the river, where he sees a washerman and his wife quarreling because the wife broke their one pot. The boy gives them the pot. In return, they give him a coat. Since the boy isn't cold, he carries the coat until he comes to a bridge, where a man is shivering. Riding to town on a horse, the man was attacked and robbed of everything but his horse. The boy freely gives him the coat. Humbled, the man gives him his horse. Not knowing how to ride, the boy walks the horse into town, where he meets a wedding party with musicians. The bridegroom and his family are all sitting under a tree with long faces. According to custom, the bridegroom is to enter the procession on a horse, which hasn't shown up. The boy freely gives him the horse. Relieved, the bridegroom asks what he can do for the boy. Seeing the drummer surrounded by all his drums, the boy asks for the smallest drum, which the musician gladly gives him."

Tell These Secrets: Tales of Generosity from Around the World



INTRODUCTION

What inspires me about this story is how one needs to read it to the end and look beyond the outward poverty and dilemma to see the compassion, generosity, and growth of true human community. This is a time for us to look to the end, reflect deeply within, be patient, and allow the fabric of parish life to embrace us as *Called to Holiness and Mission* continues to unfold.

Each of us, at some point, has struggled to understand God's will in our lives. We've experienced events and wondered how they might possibly fit into a larger plan. We have all prayed to accept the word of God spoken to Abraham at the beginning of the patriarch's long and incredible journey of faith: "*Fear not*" (Genesis 15:1). And we are all challenged to trust the goodness of God and allow life to unfold, even in unexpected ways. Saint Paul's words encourage us to look beyond the immediacy of our lives to that which lies ahead: "*We know that all things work for good for those who love God*" (Romans 8:28).

This has been true in my life. Two years ago this coming August, I had just completed my second year as pastor of the parishes of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Archbald and Saint Mary of Czestochowa in Eynon. After two different tours of duty serving in diocesan ministry, I had finally returned to parish life and ministry. I was deeply at peace and experiencing rich fulfillment as a priest. Little did I understand the tapestry that God was weaving at that time. On August 5, 2009, you will remember, the ceiling of Saint Thomas Aquinas Church collapsed. In what could have been a real tragedy, miraculously no one was hurt. It should have been the beginning of a tedious task of repair and reconstruction of the church building for me as its pastor. However, August 6 instead found me receiving a telephone call from Cardinal Justin Rigali, the Archbishop of Philadelphia. The Cardinal informed me that with the unexpected retirement of Bishop Martino, he was being appointed Apostolic Administrator of the diocese and I was being asked to serve as his on-site delegate in the day-to-day operations of the Church of Scranton. I still find these events difficult to believe. I am in awe of the unexpected, challenging, and consoling ways in which God chooses to unfold his plan for each of us and for His Church.

I invite us as a people of God in the Diocese of Scranton to accept this moment in our history as the story proposes: as but one exchange along the way home to the Father, an exchange rooted in our rediscovery of how we are all connected across time and place. When we assume that our journey of faith is just about personal holiness and generosity alone, we forget that the mission of Jesus is to bring the good news of salvation to the ends of the Earth. We forget that there is one God and Father of us all. We neglect a critical mystery of faith that in giving we receive; that in dying to self we are born to eternal life.

The parable of generosity, when read to the end in its fullness, reveals how **staying as one** and **staying open** to a continual practice of giving and receiving opens the mystery of abundance that will bless us all, even when things get tough.

I offer to you that, when things are at their worst and we feel that we are not getting what we need and want in life and it is hard to hold

on, this is exactly the moment of faith; exactly the kind of moment for which Jesus came to Earth, to release us from what binds from within, to unlock our fear, to reveal the mercy and forgiving power of God, so that we might preach good news to the poor, liberty to captives, and justice to the oppressed. We, the Catholic community of Scranton, need to return ourselves to this larger view of our communion and mission: a vision of life together that restores our sense of being part of something larger than ourselves and greater than our personal inadequacies.



Before I explain *Wounded and Loved, Regathering the Scattered*, which is my personal Pentecost prayer for us, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude, first to God, without whom I am nothing. I am grateful for the abundance of blessings that have been showered on each of us as we continue to follow our Risen Lord. I am grateful as well for the blessing that is our local Church throughout our four regions and eleven counties. I am grateful for all our parishes, schools, and other institutions of goodness. I am grateful to have been raised in this faith-filled Diocese and to have the opportunity to serve among you as priest and bishop.

I want also to say, from my heart, that I am humbled and full of gratitude for the warm welcome you have given to me as bishop and for so many honest and meaningful responses to my Advent Pastoral Letter which solicited your input on our diocesan *Called to Holiness and Mission*: our strengths, weaknesses, and areas you perceived as needing attention and growth. I have learned much from reflecting on and praying about the many and different perspectives you so generously shared with me. *Wounded and Loved, Regathering the Scattered* is my prayerful and obedient response as your bishop to what I have heard among you, as one of you, as one called to Jesus' servant leadership.

Let us together serve the mission of Jesus Christ to gather the scattered back into God's loving embrace. This mission is not our own, nor is the power to achieve it. Let us rely on the power and grace of the promised Spirit of Jesus!

I. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: WOUNDED AND LOVED, REGATHERING THE SCATTERED

So many of you have profound hopes and dreams for the Church of Scranton. We are a people of hope precisely because we are not too proud to admit that we are wounded and broken and in need of a

power bigger than ourselves to help us make sense of our lives. We believe that such a power is rooted in our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

WOUNDED *"We proclaim Christ crucified. ...Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." 1 Corinthians 1:23*

When I first shared the idea of including the notion of a wounded people in the title of this pastoral letter, some wondered if it might not convey a tone that is too pessimistic for a Christian community of believers. Yet, to side step this reality would have been to dismiss so much of what I have heard from you. Indeed, on Easter Sunday, I received the affirmation that I needed to move forward. As I was walking into the Cathedral for the celebration of Mass, a gentleman approached me and was effusive in his gratitude to me for the homily that I preached at the Chrism Mass earlier in the week. I asked him what he appreciated about the homily. His response: "You talked about all of our wounds. You talked to me. You made me feel that I didn't need to be perfect to be welcome in the Church."

My friends, the Church is a gathering of the wounded. It always has been, and it always will be. In the very lives of the earliest followers of Jesus, we discover the results of the brokenness and sin of our world. Two of Jesus' closest disciples, James and John, miss the point of service and sacrifice that lie at the heart of Jesus' ministry and instead look for places of honor in God's kingdom. And who can forget the great saint, Peter, who so often misunderstood and mis-spoke as a result of his own narrow mindedness and selfish ways, even to the point of denying the Lord as he walked to his death?

Many of you have shared a sadness that comes from loss: the personal losses due to death and sickness and all of the questions about God and faith that emerge from such moments. But you have also shared

a sadness and pain that come from the closing of church buildings and parishes that have meant so much to so many of us. You've expressed disappointment at the closing of schools and the upheaval that it has created for you and your children.

I've heard many of you share confusion and pain due to the sex abuse crisis that sadly continues to unfold in our Church: a crisis that has robbed many of the most vulnerable in our midst of their innocence and peace; a crisis that has rightfully shaken the confidence that so many have had in their priests and bishops.

I've heard many of you express the struggles that you face as you seek to embrace Catholic values and live in a Christ-like manner in the midst of a world that is also changing and challenging the basic beliefs that we Christians have sought to maintain down through the ages.

While the heart of the message of the Gospel has always been to call believers to embrace the life of Jesus, we can't do so without first acknowledging the reality of our human condition. We simply cannot embrace the hope of Easter without first experiencing Good Friday and the wounds of our lives and brokenness of our world. Indeed, to embrace our brokenness and wounds is not to wallow in self-pity or bitterness. It is to reveal an honesty that leads to reconciliation and hope. It is to take the first step to healing, wholeness, life and authentic faith. It is to proclaim Christ Crucified, the power of God who is our hope!

LOVED *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

This powerful scripture passage that we have seen and heard time and again captures why we Christians can boldly assert that we are loved. God could have chosen to relate to His creation in anyway he wanted. Yet he chose to relate to it – to us who are made in His very image and likeness – through His Son Jesus, who took on human flesh. And Jesus carried a cross so that we, in our suffering – pain – and grief might discover a God who understands – because he too carried a cross – and a God who reminds us that we do not suffer alone.

What underlies this motivation on the part of God to relate so intimately to His creation – to me and to you? It is Love, caritas. God

loves us with an utterly pure and generous love. God doesn't become greater or happier because we love him. God doesn't love us because we have somehow merited this love. God loves us only because He is pure unbounded love. Nonetheless, the scriptures teach that God loves passionately. God showers us with gifts: creation itself, the talents we've been given, the relationships entrusted to our care, and so, so many other blessings.

But you know as well as I that passionate love also includes a readiness to suffer with and for the one we love. In Jesus, God has loved us to the point of suffering and dying. The cross – the central image of our



I. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: WOUNDED AND LOVED, REGATHERING THE SCATTERED

lives as Christians – is the supreme proof of God's love for us, the supreme demonstration that "God is love!"

Pope John Paul II reminds us that we cannot live without love. *"Our life is senseless, if love is not revealed to us, if we do not encounter love, if we do not experience it and make it our own, if we do not participate in it."* (Redemptor Hominis, 10)

Yet, the first step in understanding God's love is first to consider the many facets of forgiveness that affect our lives: to be humble enough to ask for forgiveness when we've wronged another; to meditate on the words of Jesus as he hung upon the cross, *"Father, forgive them"* (Luke 24:34); to realize that being forgiven is intimately linked with our willingness to forgive others, *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"* (Matthew 6:12); and to let forgiveness be our way as it is the way of Jesus, *"Has no one condemned you? ... Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."* (John 8:10, 11)

REGATHERING THE SCATTERED

"Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and made one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom." The Didache

The Church, in its biblical roots, is a gathering of the scattered. If "wounded" is the description of the diocese at this time, and "loved" is our faith's assurance and hope, "regathering the scattered" offers a clear direction for us as we move forward together in faith.



The image of "regathering the scattered" is poignant. How often in the course of our lives have we discovered ourselves confronted by change? How often have we found ourselves in a new and unfamiliar situation or circumstance? How often have we faced a challenging situation and felt lost, abandoned or hopeless? And yet, for those of us who have come to appreciate God's love in the midst of the brokenness of our lives, there exists that ever present desire and

My brothers and sisters, once we begin to appreciate that we are loved by God, the desire to embrace the life of the One who loves us also begins to grow. Indeed, an essential aspect of the Church is the gathering of those who seek to do what Christ has done. When we look at the mystery of Christ, His suffering, death and resurrection and our participation in that mystery through Baptism, we begin to realize that our wounds are not the end. Out of the ashes of human sin and suffering, goodness and life can emerge when we embrace the life of Jesus who has loved us first. Our very gathering around the table of the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our lives as Christians, beckons us to become the mystery we receive. *"Do this in memory of me."* The Lord's challenge to us who receive His very body and blood is that we not only repeat a ritual but that we allow our lives to be broken and poured forth in loving service of our sisters and brothers.

need to respond. Our response to that love can never remain simply a private or partial acknowledgement. As *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: *"From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to 'evangelize' and to lead others to the 'yes' of faith in Jesus Christ."* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #429)

As a Church enlivened by the very power of the Spirit of God, it is possible to move beyond the wounds we bear and to see through them to the promises given to all who open their lives to the Gospel of Jesus. In and through Christ, it is possible to create lively parish communities in which all are welcome and all can find meaning, purpose, and peace in their lives. In and through Christ, those who have walked away because of scandal or anger or laziness can find welcome and honest care and concern. In and through Christ, new immigrant communities can be made to feel at home. In and through Christ, each of us can walk hand in hand to the Eucharistic table as brothers and sisters despite the economic, racial and cultural barriers that the world can often set between us. Indeed, all things are possible when we make the pattern of Jesus' life our own, when we begin to love and serve with the same selfless spirit that led Jesus to his cross.

Your willingness to meet, talk and share with me has allowed me to listen and to learn from you. As a result, *"Wounded and Loved, Regathering the Scattered"* emerged. It highlights the depth and direction of this pastoral letter which then translates into a vision of ourselves as we continue the journey, planning for our future together as a community of believers in the Diocese of Scranton. I share this vision with you now.

II. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: SERVANT LEADERS

Consider this Holy Thursday reading, when Jesus commissions His disciples to servant-leadership in the world:

Jesus – fully aware that he had come from God and was going to God, the Father who had handed everything over to him – rose from the meal and took off his cloak. He picked up a towel and tied it around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and dry them with the towel he had around him. Thus he came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You may not realize now what I am doing but later you will understand." Peter replied, "You shall never wash my feet. "If I do not wash you," Jesus answered, "you will have no share in my heritage." "Lord," Simon Peter said to him, "then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus told him, "The one who has bathed has no need to wash, he is entirely cleansed just as you are, though not all." After he had washed their feet, he put his cloak back on and reclined at table once more. He said to them: "Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet – I who am Teacher and Lord – then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do." (John 13:3-15)

These powerful words and images from our Sacred Scripture speak directly to my heart and, I hope, to your hearts as well. Can you see Our Lord bending down to wash the feet of his disciples? Can you imagine their astonishment at this unexpected and extraordinary gesture of service? How might all of us better appreciate the important message Jesus offers to us, His followers, "as I have done, so you must do?"

I believe that Jesus in this passage offers each of us a way forward as His disciples. We are called to lead lives deeply rooted in service – service to our God, neighbor, self, and creation. This is certainly not an easy path, though it is one that will bring us together as God's people who are on mission together, living hope-filled lives.

By our baptism, translated to our time and place, I firmly believe that we are called to servant leadership here in the Diocese of Scranton. We are called to a servant leadership that helps us to transform our hurting world through compassion, solidarity, justice, and love.

Rooted in Jesus' washing of the feet, I want to commend a framework of servant leadership to guide our diocesan administration and parishes. It begins with a basic distinction between a leader who serves and a servant who leads. We must be *servants who lead*. Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling, really the love of Christ within, which summons one to want to bring others to know, love, and serve God. Serving, one comes to realize that service to God and neighbor is also an act of leadership that differs in kind and orientation from what normally counts as leadership. Christian disciples lead as a result of faith, not because of personal success or institutional commitment. Christian disciples make sure that the neighbor's needs – someone poor and marginalized, a family

member, a friend, a stranger, an immigrant, an enemy – are being served. The servant leader, as Pope Benedict XVI said in *Deus Caritas Est*, "seeing with the eyes of Christ ... can give to others much more than their outward necessities: I can give them the look of love which they crave." (#18)

My brothers and sisters, I am confident that as we all grow in our understanding of, appreciation for, and commitment to servant leadership, we will find ourselves on a faith-filled path to a future filled with hope and new life.



III. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: ENVISIONING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

In my Advent letter I shared with you a number of important items which I envision about our future as a local Church. I said at that time that I envision:

- Every member of the Diocese of Scranton working together to become a beacon of hope as we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and seek to build strong faith based communities.
- Our worshipping together to celebrate the Eucharist and the other Sacraments with joy in our hearts, faithful to our Catholic tradition and adjusting to the changes in the new edition of the Roman Missal.
- Our responding passionately and compassionately in service to the hurting and struggling members of our community and our world, especially to the cries of those living in poverty or those on the margins of society.
- Our continued support of clergy, deacons, religious and laity in their ministries as well as our praying for and welcoming new vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life and lay ministry.
- Our parishes focusing less on structural changes and more on profound spiritual and community renewal, honoring the principle of stability and giving our new network of parishes the time needed to deepen their commitment to living out the mission of the Church and to build a greater sense of unity among the diverse members of our Diocese.
- Our shifting the task of pastoral planning from present parish Implementation Teams to Parish Pastoral Councils in a slow but deliberate fashion.

took the time to offer these thoughtful responses to my six questions. I am greatly heartened by your deep faith and commitment to our local Church as we move into the future as one people with one mission and one hope.

1. I heard you say that the past few years of restructuring our parishes and schools have been painful and challenging. Yet, through it all your deep desire is to grow in faith as individual Catholics and as families. Thank you for your perseverance. I view this as a sign of the Spirit's presence, and I am committed to help create as much stability as possible throughout the Diocese.

2. I heard you say that belonging to a parish where you are known, valued and invited to share your gifts is central to your identity as Catholics. Since many of you now belong to new parish communities in different buildings, I know there is much work to be done to build vibrant communities of faith. I ask you to join me in this important work.

3. I heard you say that you want to continue to learn about your faith and also to teach your children and grandchildren the rich tradition of our Catholic heritage. You clearly understand that this is one of the primary tasks of all Catholic schools and parish faith formation programs. I share this conviction and believe that we must fortify our Catholic schools and parish faith formation programs and find new and creative ways to hand on our faith for generations to come. This includes meaningful and engaging adult formation programs.

4. I heard you say that we are not doing enough as Church to reach out meaningfully to our youth and young families. We all understand that young people today are being raised in new and challenging times. I am committed to help us bring forth the richness of our tradition in new wineskins.

5. I heard you say that our spiritual renewal must be grounded in meaningful liturgy, inspiring preaching and strong devotional practices. Our Church offers an abundance of spiritual practices drawn from many wonderful ethnic traditions. I challenge each of us to greater participation in this important part of our communal life.

6. I heard you say that you are grateful for the witness of faith and quality of service provided for generations by countless priests, religious, deacons and lay leaders. I share your gratitude and pledge my support for our current ministry leaders. I also believe we must work together to invite new vocations from within our Catholic community.

7. I heard you say that you are worried that too many of your family, friends and neighbors are no longer actively practicing their faith. I recognize that this reality saddens you and also threatens our future as Church. All of us must reach out respectfully in Christian hospitality to spread the Good News.

Again, I am most grateful for your thoughtful responses. As you will see in what follows, I have incorporated much of the feedback I received from you in our Pastoral Plan.

- Our Diocese offering religious education to our children, teenagers and adults through parish and diocesan programs and through a sustainable and stable Catholic school system encompassing elementary, middle and high schools as well as in our Catholic colleges and universities.

And here is a list of important thoughts that you have shared with me and lessons that I have learned in the prayerful reading of them. Let me again thank those hundreds of individuals and groups who



IV. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: OUR PASTORAL PLAN

Catholic life begins and ends in the parish, or local Church. Some parish communities still hurt from the painful events of abused trust, closed church buildings and schools, the decline of religious and priests, and a diminishing youth population. *The future of the diocese lies in the renewal of parish life, and our hope lies in the generous servant leadership of priests, religious, and laity who, wounded but loved, freely give themselves to Christ's good news mission of gathering those scattered from the love of God and the Church.*

The parish is, first, a people. It is a people called together by God. It is a people empowered by the Spirit to make increasingly true and obvious their response to God through Christ. We have learned through *Called to Holiness and Mission* in all of its complexity and grace that the parish community does not exist in isolation. Each parish is but a piece of a greater whole. A parish is part of a diocese, and a diocese is part of the universal Church, whose tradition and teaching guide it. A parish is led by a pastor and his team, the diocese by the bishop and his staff, and the universal Church by the pope and the college of bishops. But it is also true that the parish is part of a neighborhood with all of its ups and downs. No parish is truly a Christian community without these links to the local neighborhood, the diocese, the universal Church and the world.

The parish, then, exists not only for personal holiness and salvation but Christ's mission of salvation for the whole world. The Good News we bring is that there is One God who is Father of All, who sent His Son to show us the way to true human fulfillment in love of God and neighbor, who in turn gives us the Spirit who is revealed, as the story at the start of this pastoral letter suggests, in generous communion of resources, gifts, and person. *The mystery of parish life lies in generous self-giving, or servant leadership, in the way of Jesus.* In view of this mission of oneness, we must constantly work together toward greater unity amidst our rich diversity of perspectives, traditions, and generations.

What I am speaking about, of course, is the call of the parish to evangelize in the name of Jesus. It is, as Pope Paul VI said in the days after Vatican II, the Church's "essential function." *"It is a task and mission which the great and fundamental changes of contemporary society make all the more urgent. Evangelization is the special grace and vocation of the Church."* (Evangelii Nuntiandi #15) I think you will agree that the call of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI for a "new evangelization" is of the utmost importance here and now, among us. We must search together for new opportunities to heal, console, listen to, and help people in need. Evangelization seen in this light is not a program, but a way of life for each member of the Church. By baptism, we are called to be evangelizers or, as Saint Paul said, *"ambassadors for Christ, God as it were appealing through us."* (2 Corinthians 5:20) Through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ, each of us is called to grow in holiness and grace. Each of us is called to evangelize others with zeal and joy through the witness of one's life in word, worship and service that builds up the community.

I am impassioned on this Pentecost Day to invite you to take up with me our servant leadership. God has given us this moment to make

the Gospel real with *"new ardor, new methods and new expression,"* to borrow a phrase from Pope John Paul II. Our task is to make our parish life new by discovering together how to proclaim the gospel and live Eucharistic communion in a way that our brothers and sisters in the region of our diocese can comprehend and be inspired. *"As I have done, so you must do."* (John 13:15)

LET THIS BE THE MISSION
IN THE DIOCESE OF SCRANTON:



We, the Catholic community of the Diocese of Scranton, are called through Baptism to imitate the servant leadership of Jesus Christ. In union with our Holy Father, the Pope, we proclaim the Gospel faithfully, celebrate the sacraments joyfully, and boldly promote life, justice and peace in northeastern and north central Pennsylvania.



IV. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: OUR PASTORAL PLAN

So anchored in Christ and the power of his cross and resurrection, I call the Diocese of Scranton to seize this moment to make the gospel new:



I CALL us to be servant leaders who are people of the WORD, preaching, teaching, evangelizing and cherishing the Gospel message throughout our entire lives.

One of the privileges that I've been given as Bishop is to travel to the parishes of our eleven counties for the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation. It has been a time honored tradition that those preparing to be confirmed become well acquainted with a series of questions and answers that reflect the heart and substance of the sacrament. While invariably candidates are able to articulate responses to each and every question, what is far more encouraging to me and others is the manner in which these candidates live out what they've learned in their lives. The many and varied service projects embraced as a part of the candidates' preparation for the sacrament give ample evidence of the ultimate purpose of faith formation. Even more encouraging, however, than the many examples of structured service projects was an experience that I had in a particular parish. One of the candidates had special needs that posed some challenge not only to the candidate herself but to others. Yet, throughout the entire ceremony, the candidates situated on either side of this special young lady helped her at every important step. These young candidates, possessing a wisdom and sensitivity beyond their age, were quite capable of articulating what they had been taught. Yet, more importantly, their lives gave testimony to the power of the Spirit and to the faith that had been nurtured within them.

The parish as the local community of faith constitutes a primary environment in which faith is shared and formation takes place. Educational efforts in the parish are intended to provide formation for Christian life. Before ascending to the Father, Christ gave the apostles a final command – to make disciples of all nations and to teach and observe all that he has commanded. (Mt.28:18-20) The process of forming disciples very soon received the name of catechesis. *"Catechesis further specifies evangelization. It is a moment in the evangelization/conversion process. Being a form of the ministry of the Word, catechesis aims at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in light of God's word."* (The Relationship between Evangelization and Catechesis, NCDD Study Paper, page 2)

Thus, from the earliest days of the Church until now, we find a consistent and continuing call to include the four-fold dimension of parish life: word, worship, community and service, in all our ongoing faith formation efforts just as in all of evangelization. The challenge for Catholic formation in our parishes is to make the baptized aware of the universality of Christ's mission. We must educate the faithful to their responsibility for justice and ecumenism; we must facilitate the development of moral judgments and Christian decision-making; and we need to offer opportunities for the study of Scripture, and ways to grow in prayer and service to others.

Meeting this challenge calls for reflection and study around the following practical considerations:

- A. Promote on-going family-centered Christian formation through cooperative catechetical programs for all ages and groups with the special needs of individuals and families in mind;
- B. Use the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in all parishes as a primary means of fulfilling our mission to evangelize;
- C. Promote full incorporation of youth and young adults into the life of the parish through ministry programs and the inclusion of young people in parish activities, organizations, and structures;



- D. Develop and support teachers, catechists and others involved in Christian formation;
- E. Provide the opportunity for all the faithful to participate in ongoing programs of catechesis with special attention to lectionary based methods of learning in order to develop a greater understanding of Scripture and its application in our lives and world;
- F. Engage a life-long Faith-Formation Minister to coordinate religious education and or youth ministry for the parish or regional partnership;
- G. Incorporate Catholic colleges and universities more fully into the life of the diocesan parishes;
- H. Impress upon all of the faithful our membership in the domestic, parish, diocesan and universal Church through catechetical initiatives;
- I. Re-focus our educational ministry or catechesis on events such as birth, marriage, death or other personal celebrations of joy and loss.
- J. Promote an ecumenical attitude by encouraging prayer and cooperation among various religious traditions.

IV. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: OUR PASTORAL PLAN



I CALL us to be servant leaders who WORSHIP our God and celebrate the Sacraments in union with the universal Church.

Each visit that I make to a parish, school or institution in the Diocese of Scranton seems to find our people giving the very best that they have to offer to the Lord in worship. Sometimes the worship is filled with pomp and splendor and orchestrated to the last detail. Sometimes the gathering is characterized by a spontaneity, honesty and warmth that only a child or an elderly resident of a nursing home is able to bring. Recently, I received a letter from a parishioner who was in the assembly gathered at St. Peter's Cathedral for Palm Sunday. The letter recounted an incident that occurred as palms were blessed in the Cathedral prayer garden. A familiar "downtown" friend very obviously made his way through the crowds and positioned himself next to me for most of the ceremony of blessing. A unique individual by most any standard, he quite deliberately processed with me into the Cathedral, singing "off key," yet with great enthusiasm and excitement. His presence was appreciated by the letter writer who noted that the Lord must have been pleased by his simple, yet very genuine act of worship. ... I was pleased as well.

Basic to the faith life of the local parish community is its great act of worship, the liturgy. It challenges and celebrates our relationship with God, one another, and the world. According to the Second Vatican Council, baptized believers fulfill their liturgical role at worship through "that conscious and active participation ... which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people ... have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism." (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Chapter 1, Paragraph 14a)

Pope Benedict in his most recent book, *Jesus of Nazareth* defines Eucharist as a visible process of gathering. He writes, "In each locality, as well as beyond all localities, it involves entering into communion with the living God, who inwardly draws people together. The Church comes into being from Eucharist. She receives her unity and her mission from the Eucharist." (Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict XVI)

The new translation of the Roman Missal will soon be introduced. Now is the time to provide a catechesis on celebrating Eucharist! Implementing the translation of the Roman Missal demands that we roll out the new texts in the most effective way. We must take every advantage to emphasize that at the heart of our mission to be evangelizers is the Paschal Mystery of Christ celebrated in the Eucharistic liturgy. It is into Christ's dying and rising that we were baptized. And here it is that we faithfully strive to understand and appreciate our own daily dying and rising. This Paschal Mystery lies at the heart of our hope for one another.

Meeting this challenge calls for reflection and study around the following practical considerations:

A. Present Sunday as the "weekly Easter," an expression of the identity of our community and the center of its life and mission;

B. Develop a comprehensive catechesis of the Eucharist including the implementation of the Roman Missal;

C. Find ways to promote: liturgical catechesis in the parish, an improved quality of participation by parishioners of all ages in Sunday Mass, the calling of men and women to liturgical ministries, the training of liturgical ministers, both spiritually and functionally, and improved use of music and art to enhance liturgical celebrations in a way that the world can comprehend;

D. Help parishioners to understand that the same "Spirit" of God transforming the bread and wine at Eucharist is also breathing life into our scripture readings at Mass;

E. Provide for the needs of new immigrants in the context of our liturgical celebrations; and

F. Engage a Director of Liturgy in each parish or cluster of parishes to coordinate worship for the community.



I CALL us to be servant leaders who build COMMUNITY through hospitality, respect, inclusion and holiness.

Following my installation as Bishop of Scranton just over a year ago, a priority for me was to arrange to celebrate a Mass in each of the eleven counties of our diocese. These pastoral visits provided me with a unique opportunity to experience the lives and ministry of so many of our people and parishes. In addition to celebrating the Eucharist, meeting new brothers and sisters in the Lord and visiting with old friends as well, a highlight of these gatherings for me was simply watching faith communities in action. For many of the celebrations, choirs joined together from all of the parishes in a given region. Rehearsals created opportunities for the establishment of new friendships. Receptions were generally held following the celebration of the Eucharist with all sorts of collaboration regarding what was to be served, who was to prepare it and how many people needed to be fed. People came from near and far to celebrate their faith and unity as Church.



IV. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: OUR PASTORAL PLAN

In short, communities of believers joined together, one with another, for worship, fellowship and service. What made these gatherings unique, however, was the very heart and soul of what bound them together as communities in the first place. They weren't simply organizations working for a common purpose. They were people of



faith devoted to prayer, committed to one another, and enlivened by the living God in their midst. In so many ways, such communities that abound in the Church today reflect the life of the early Christian community that we hear of in Acts 2:42-47. *"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. ... And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."*

The great Church of Scranton as it gathers in word, worship and service seeks to reflect a call to be a people with a mission saved in hope. This is impossible outside of community. Community life is our great strength for the future. *"God has willed to make people holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness."* Constitution of the Church, Chapter 2, Paragraph 9)

For the believer, faith is not a private affair acted upon in isolation; it is a call to holiness with a community of people; it means living out a faith commitment with a community of people. The ultimate expression of this community is in its gathering for word, worship and service.

Meeting this challenge calls for reflection and study around the following practical considerations:

- A. Nurture the personal relationship of our members with God;
- B. Deepen everyone's knowledge of God's saving ways;
- C. Encourage and empower members to be evangelizers at home, school, in the workplace, neighborhood, marketplaces, and places of leisure;
- D. Reach out to the unchurched, inactive and alienated, inviting them to join in the Church's belief and worship and life of discipleship;
- E. Strive to promote the consciousness that we are all part of a global community and our actions often have broader implications than just within our local community.



I CALL us to be servant leaders who engage in SERVICE to our neighbors near and far and who work for justice and stewardship to hasten the Reign of God.

SOCIAL JUSTICE & STEWARDSHIP

Shortly after I was installed as Bishop, I was invited by a pastor to dedicate a new parish facility and to experience the parish's social justice ministry. It was explained to me that the ministry was essentially an outreach to the poor in the community with some provisions for health care. The ministry was to take place in a building owned by the parish which was once the site of a Catholic high school that had since closed. I didn't think much more of the event until I arrived for the dedication.

Much to my surprise, the building was transformed and the ministries were far more comprehensive than I would have ever imagined. "Provisions for health care" meant two adult clinics and a state-of-the-art pediatric clinic complete with a play area for children in the waiting room. The clinics would be opened at least once a week and staffed by volunteer physicians, nurses and aides. Once treated in the health clinics, if the individual or family needed food for themselves or their families, they could make their way to another former classroom transformed into a supermarket of sorts with all types of staple food products. Across the hall from the food area was a clothing store with new and slightly used clothing displayed like one might expect in a fine department store. Where once a closed school building sadly stood as a daily reminder of a bygone era in the parish, now stands the same building infused once again with a dignity of purpose. Faithful parishioners recognized their gifts and sought to give back to God in gratitude for all that they had received in life. Service to the poor and those in need abounds and the mission of the Church is not only acknowledged in words but thrives due to faithful and generous hearts committed to living out the Gospel of Jesus. The

IV. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: OUR PASTORAL PLAN



more people realize that service is a constitutive dimension of the gospel, the more they will see their outreach as being the living presence of the risen Christ today.

As God's people, we participate in the social mission of the Church primarily in the marketplace. It is within the context of everyday life in the home and workplace that men and women of faith live out their call to ministry and work for a just society. We are all challenged to envision a world described in the Sermon on the Mount presented in Matthew's gospel. This mission is called forth, enlivened, and focused primarily in the parish.

Parish social ministry responds to human needs, whatever and wherever they may be, whether with parishioners or other members of the community, whether the need be hunger, housing, illness, loneliness, employment, fair wages, physical disabilities or ecological sustainability. Parish social ministry must respond to issues of respect for human life at every stage of existence. We must encourage broad group action on behalf of those who hunger for righteousness and peace. However it is done, parish social ministry needs to be organized and deliberate. It must be communal, planned and directed by a group, and not a simple individual response.

As Bishop, it is my great privilege to proclaim our responsibility to carry out the mission proclaimed by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry when he stood up in the synagogue and quoted Isaiah 61: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for God has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord."*

Nothing supports the social mission of the church more than a true spirit of Stewardship. The U.S. bishops in their 1992 pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, presented an eloquent definition of Christian stewardship. They describe it as *"one who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord."* This vision was and continues to be at the heart of all our reorganizational efforts. It is the very reason why *Called to Holiness and Mission* leads us now to exciting new beginnings. Together we can dream for the vibrant parish that is prayerful, welcoming, and Eucharist-centered with a common vision.

Meeting this challenge calls for reflection and study around the following:

- A. Involve all parishioners in social ministry and include awareness of human needs into all aspects of parish life and worship;
- B. Promote initiatives rooted in the Gospel of Life that both acknowledge and treasure all forms of human life as created in the image and likeness of God;
- C. Identify and act on local social concerns and educate parishioners in the common call to justice;
- D. Form regional or partnership "assessment teams" that determine strategies of service in the area;
- E. Include in our teaching and preaching an understanding of the Church's social teaching and the responsibility of all Christians of every age to be involved in the work of justice, especially bringing the principles of justice and peace into their everyday life and work;
- F. Encourage all of the faithful to embrace fully their vocational calling as baptized Christians and to promote a deeper awareness of and appreciation for vocational calls to the priesthood, diaconate, consecrated life and lay apostolates;
- G. Take seriously the need to care for the Earth to create a sustainable future for the world;
- H. Address from a local and global perspective those in need by supporting opportunities provided by the diocesan office of the Pontifical Mission Society, Catholic Relief Services, and other efforts;
- I. Form parishioners in an understanding of stewardship as a responsible personal and communal use of time, talent and treasure within the Church and all of life.



IV. THE CHURCH OF SCRANTON: OUR PASTORAL PLAN

LEADERSHIP

Essential to the development of an evangelizing community is clear leadership. Parish leadership challenges all parishioners to recognize and accept responsibility as members of the evangelizing community. This implies not only openness to ongoing conversion and growth in holiness but also witness within and outside the Church, as stewards of God's kingdom.

To accomplish the task at hand, pastoral leadership encourages the fullest possible collaboration of clergy, religious and laity, men and women in the common mission of the Church. This participation is possible only with the support of appropriate structures which both insure participation in decision making and facilitate involvement in the ministry areas of community, word, worship and service.

To this end, I believe we need to reinvigorate our Parish Pastoral Councils and we need to create a Diocesan Pastoral Council. Because of all that we have learned during the past several years, our Parish Pastoral Council guidelines are being enhanced and during the course of the next few years, together we will implement these revised guidelines. Our Parish Pastoral Councils will be fruitful as long as the proper steps are taken. These steps will insure that our Parish Councils are grounded in faith and worship; they are formed and trained for their responsibilities; and their work is enhanced with the support and encouragement of the foremost leader of the parish, the pastor.

Putting evangelization at the center of our pastoral agenda was clearly the intention of the bishops when they wrote *Go and Make Disciples*. This plan and strategy was meant to be used as an effective tool to align all of our resources, activities, and energies with three evangelization goals: to live our faith fully, to share it freely with others, and to transform the world in Christ. I invite you to find new strategies by applying an evangelizing lens to all of your current ministries. There is no need to create entirely new programs.

Vital to this call for renewal is our appreciation for strategic pastoral planning. We must adopt an effective pastoral planning process that puts evangelization squarely at its heart as the essential mission of the Church. The pastoral plan for each parish within a regional partnership or deanery needs to be a prayerful and participative process by which members acknowledge their purpose, their goals and their priorities, then devise accountable ways to ensure the realization of their pastoral plan. Consideration towards collaboration with other parishes is an important part of pastoral planning. All parishes must develop formal ties around pastoral issues in a local region. Areas of ministry to be addressed should be those which could be better accomplished together than separately, and which enhance the spiritual life of all in an area. The plan must encompass all the important facets of Church life: word, worship, community and service. The new guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Scranton are being developed to reflect this dynamic process.

The major impetus for structural reform to broaden consultation and councils in the Church derives from the word which catches the spirit of the definition of the Church as a communion in heart and mind in a common mission and in sharing the common life of God. In a word: co-responsibility. I believe in my heart that we remain co-responsible for this wonderful mission called evangelization.

For many of us, the notion of co-responsibility in parish life and ministry is still somewhat of a challenge. The Church is hierarchical, and some in pastoral leadership fear that co-responsibility for the life and ministry of the Church will do little more than destabilize its theological underpinnings. Moreover, for others in the Church, it is simply easier to step back and allow someone else to do the work of evangelization.

Neither approach reflects the teaching of the Second Vatican Council or the Code of Canon Law. The principle of communion which is foundational to the Church and which permeates papal teaching, particularly since the time of Vatican II, conveys an ecclesiology that reflects the common mission of all the Baptized, while not negating the special roles of service which some fulfill for others.

In a time and era in which so many of the Baptized are searching for ways to discover deeper meaning in their lives through faith and service to God's people, ironically, many in roles of leadership positions in the Church feel overwhelmed and burdened. How appropriate it is that we call forth the Baptized to assume positions of leadership and service provided for them by the Church herself. I encourage our priests, in turn, to renew their call to service in light of these diocesan priorities and to work to revitalize parish life less from a position of presbyteral authority and more in terms of sacramental servant-leadership.

To support, enliven and direct pastoral life and ministry in parishes that are viable communities committed to evangelization in word, worship, community and service, I challenge all of the faithful to embrace their call to vocation as the Baptized. In particular, as a Church centered on the Eucharist, I ask that special care be given to nurturing vocations to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. I also ask that, in time, should there be a dearth of priests to provide both sacramental and administrative leadership in viable communities, we be open to other opportunities for pastoral leadership, as provided for by the Church (Code of Canon Law, canon 517, §2).

Finally, I pledge to do all that I can to work with the priests and people of the Diocese of Scranton, to listen continually to your hopes and dreams, to respond to your needs – particularly through the ministry of service shared through the Office of Parish Life and Evangelization, and to enable Christ's ministry to "regather the wounded and scattered" to unfold in our midst.

V. CLOSING THOUGHTS

I am excited by what we can achieve together. The hopes and dreams for the Church of Scranton that you have shared during the past months have been deeply encouraging to me. Yet, if we are going to gain profound spiritual renewal, we will need to change some priorities and reallocate resources. With this Pastoral Plan, I call myself and all of you to renewal. I pray that it will direct our energies in the parish, guide programs of formation for ministry, and help to identify priorities for the reorganization and re-tooling of diocesan services. *My greatest hope is that by bringing together strong parish structures and well-formed parishioners, the result will be more growing, life-giving and vibrant parishes in the future.*

St. Gregory the Great once offered these words to the community of believers regarding the authenticity of their lives as followers of Christ, *"Ask yourselves whether you belong to his flock, whether you know him, whether the light of his truth shines in your minds. I assure you that it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love; not by conviction, but by action."* It is not by mere conviction that we will be assured of a relationship with God but by the action of our lives poured forth in love.

The motto that I chose for my episcopal coat-of-arms comes from the Old Testament prophet Micah. The words of the prophet capture well both the theme of this pastoral letter and the notion of servant-leadership. Micah asks the question raised by so many of us who often seek an easier path to discipleship, *"With what shall I come before the Lord and bow before God most high? Shall I come before the Lord with holocausts, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams and myriad streams of oil? ... You have been told what is good and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:6-8)

Through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was with the Church when the Spirit was poured forth on Pentecost, let us begin this journey of faith and servant leadership mindful of the abiding presence of the Resurrected Christ in our midst. May we find in the Eucharist both the strength that we need for the task at hand and the pattern for living that we are called to embrace as followers of the Crucified and Risen Lord. Let us patiently allow God's wondrous love for us to empower our Church with the peace that is beyond all understanding, the peace only Christ can give, the remarkable peace that the whole world knew on that first Pentecost Day, the peace we as church hope in and seek to give to our world, on behalf of the One risen from the dead.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton



WOUNDED AND LOVED, REGATHERING THE SCATTERED

A Pastoral Vision for the Church of Scranton



DIOCESE OF SCRANTON
www.dioceseofscranton.org

Cover Image: "Washing of feet" by Sieger Köder
Used with permission