

UNLEASH THE GOSPEL

- [En Español \(PDF\)](#)

A PASTORAL LETTER FROM *The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit*

FROM *The Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament*

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INTRODUCTION

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

[Acts 2:1-4](#)

Jesus Christ makes all things new! He himself is at work to renew his Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit. He is pouring out his Holy Spirit anew so that every member of the Church may be formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple, so that the Gospel may be unleashed in southeast Michigan.

Just as in the Upper Room at Pentecost, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms Christ's disciples from ordinary people into Spirit-filled evangelizers. Before the coming of the Spirit, the early Christians did not seem a particularly impressive group of people. They had good reason to be filled with fears, concerns, and feelings of inadequacy as they contemplated the awesome task Jesus had given them: to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. They were still struggling to

comprehend the events of recent days: the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord. But when the Spirit fell upon them, their hearts were set ablaze with the fire of God's love and they could no longer keep the good news of Christ to themselves. They went out from the Upper Room overflowing with the joy of the Gospel. Through their witness, the Gospel was unleashed in Jerusalem and from there throughout the ancient world.

Today no less than two millennia ago, there is no limit to what the Lord can do in our midst. His part is to clothe his Church with "power from on high" (*cf. Luke 24:49*) for the accomplishment of her mission. Our part is to give him our wholehearted "yes"—to let ourselves be transformed, guided, and sent forth by the Holy Spirit, who is the "principal agent of evangelization."¹¹

Over the last three years we, God's family in the Church of Detroit, have already been experiencing a spiritual renewal as we have prepared and strategized for a missionary transformation of the Archdiocese. It began in March of 2014 with my announcement of a year of prayer for a new Pentecost. During that year the whole Archdiocese was united with Mary, the Twelve, and the other disciples in the Upper Room, praying for and expectantly awaiting a new coming of the Holy Spirit. People from all over the Archdiocese began to tell me of signs that this prayer is being answered. In 2015-2016 the "Come, Encounter Christ!" missions held around the Archdiocese with Eucharistic adoration, spirited music and preaching brought many into a renewed encounter with Jesus. In April 2016 the Amazing Parish Conference provided a powerful impetus for local parish leaders to reimagine and fortify the mission-centered focus of our parishes. Throughout 2016 parishes across the Archdiocese hosted "parish dialogue gatherings," in which parishioners freely expressed their hopes, concerns and suggestions for the Church in Detroit.

A profoundly significant step along this itinerary was the Mass for Pardon on October 7, 2016, in which I came before God with my fellow priests and hundreds of lay people to repent on behalf of the Archdiocese for the sins committed over the generations by our bishops, priests, lay ministers, institutions, and all the faithful—sins that all too often had become embedded in our church culture. Asking and receiving God's forgiveness for the failings of the past enables us to move forward with new hope and courage.

Finally, the archdiocesan-wide Synod 16, held November 18-20, 2016, was an historic occasion during which representatives from all corners of the Archdiocese—clergy, religious and lay people—gathered to pray and reflect together on what will make the Church in southeast Michigan a joyful band of missionary disciples. The Synod was the ignition spark that is to set the Archdiocese ablaze. Its goal was nothing less than a radical overhaul of the Church in Detroit, a complete reversal of our focus from an inward, maintenance-focused church, to an outward, mission-focused church.

This pastoral letter is to serve as the charter for implementing the fruit of Synod 16. The letter includes a statement of our foundational convictions (Part 2), an explanation of the basis in Catholic teaching for the Church's missionary focus, and a reading of the "signs of the times" in our part of the world (Part 3). Parts 4 and 5 are the heart of the letter. Part 4 is a series of ten guideposts, each with some specific markers, to guide our implementation of the Synod. Part 5 lists the specific propositions and action steps that, following the recommendations of the Synod, we will take in order to become a missionary Church. Finally, in Part 6, I reaffirm that unleashing the Gospel is the work of the whole Church in the Archdiocese empowered by

the Spirit of the risen Lord, and I describe how I aim to lead us in this mission in my remaining years as Archbishop.

FOUNDATIONAL CONVICTION

It is [Christ Jesus] whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Colossians 1:28

The Synod's foundational conviction is that the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit is resolved to obey the Holy Spirit and be made by him a band of joyful missionary disciples.^[2]

This means that the Archdiocese, following the call of Pope Francis, is resolved to undergo a “missionary conversion,” a change in our culture, such that every person at every level of the Church, through personal encounter with Jesus Christ, embraces his or her identity as a son or daughter of God and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple. For families this means that every family embraces its role as the domestic church and, in connection with other families and single persons, actively seeks the spiritual and social renewal of its neighborhood, schools and places of work. For parishes and archdiocesan services it means the renewal of structures to make them Spirit-led and radically mission-oriented. For everyone in the Archdiocese it entails making one's relationship with Jesus and alignment with his will the central guiding principle of every aspect of life. This missionary conversion entails a strikingly countercultural way of living grounded in prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments; unusually gracious hospitality; a capacity to include those on the margins of society; and joyful confidence in the providence of God even in difficult and stressful times.

CATECHETICAL EXPOSITION

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.

Matthew 28:19-20

The missionary conversion to which the Lord calls us is new, yet it is also a return to the roots of our identity as the Church of Jesus Christ, manifested to the world on the day of Pentecost. It is the Church becoming young again! It is a reawakening to our foundational calling, applied in a new way to the specific circumstances and challenges of our time.

The Missionary Nature of the Church

The very last words Jesus spoke to his disciples before he ascended into heaven were the commission to evangelize all people: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).^[3] This mandate defines the Church for all time. As Blessed Pope Paul VI wrote, “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”^[4] Evangelizing is therefore a responsibility not only of bishops, priests, and religious, but of every individual Christian.

Evangelization is, very simply, proclaiming the good news of Jesus to those around us. This proclamation is to be both in word and in deed.^[5] If we share the good news of Christ's love in words only, not demonstrably living what we preach, people will rightly suspect us of

hypocrisy, and we may even give Christianity a bad name. On the other hand, if we share the good news in deeds only, people will not learn of the One who is the source of the joy and divine love we carry within us. Those around us are thirsting for the Gospel, the words of eternal life, even if they do not realize it. How can we fail to share generously what we have freely received?

Over the centuries, as the Church became accustomed to existing within almost entirely Christian societies, it became all too easy to lose sight of Christ's mandate. Parishes and dioceses slipped almost imperceptibly into a mode of maintenance rather than mission. Many Catholics came to think of evangelization as a special calling, primarily for priests and religious in the foreign missions. But in the last half century, even as the western world has become increasingly secularized and countless people have abandoned the faith into which they were baptized, the Church has been ringing out a call for all Catholics to awaken to their baptismal identity as missionary disciples. All are being summoned to engage in a new evangelization—a renewed proclamation of the good news of Christ to the people of our time.

The term “new evangelization,” coined by Pope St. John Paul II, takes account of the fact that the Church in our time exists in a vastly changed situation. It is not that the Gospel has changed, but that we are called to a renewed effort that is “new in its ardor, methods and expression.”^[6] The new evangelization is directed not only to those in distant lands who have never heard the Gospel, but to those around us in our own post-Christian society. The new “mission territory” is our own neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and even our own homes.

Reading the Signs of the Times in Southeast Michigan

Synod 16 was an occasion for representatives from every part of the Archdiocese to listen to each other and discern together “the signs of the times” in southeast Michigan. The Synod participants noted the many opportunities for unleashing the Gospel. Our local Church is rich in lay involvement; there is a wide variety of flourishing movements, ministries, and initiatives. In the half century since Vatican Council II, we have been responding to the Council's call for lay participation in the life of the Church (the primary focus of our last Archdiocesan Synod, in 1969). We are ready now to build on that foundation. If our first response was to change our way of thinking about ourselves as the people of God, our response now is to make use of the fruit given in these past five decades in order to go outward with the Gospel. Our internal renewal is for the sake of mission.

In our civil society as well, there are many signs that our communities are ready for renewal. There is a recognition that we are in a new social situation, a readiness to move beyond the way we have always done things and to think about new ways.

At the same time the Synod participants recognized the many challenges facing the Archdiocese of Detroit. For several decades the number of practicing Catholics has been in steady decline, a significant factor leading to many painful closings and mergings of parishes and schools, which has in turn caused more people to drift away in discouragement or frustration. The number of active priests has also dropped considerably. In the last half century our metro area has suffered from urban blight, economic decline, racial tensions, family breakdown, substance abuse, and crime. The Archdiocese covers a wide range of geographic and demographic settings—inner city, suburban and rural—each with its own

unique characteristics and needs. These multiple challenges have contributed to a widespread pessimism regarding the possibility of authentic renewal.

Some might say that the Archdiocese of Detroit is a most unlikely setting for a large-scale revitalization of the Church. But is it not in the most unlikely settings that the Lord loves to show forth his divine power? Our acknowledgement of our own spiritual poverty is precisely what can lead us to rely wholly on God. Then it becomes clear that success belongs to him alone and not to any human ingenuity. If we have become spiritually dry, we need not fear. Dry wood is perfect for being set on fire!

We also recognize that Catholics are not the only ones who are seeking to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in southeast Michigan. We honor and support the efforts of our brothers and sisters in other Christian communions to bear witness to Christ. God is at work in them, and there is much we can learn from their evangelistic fervor. Wherever possible we should work together with them to bring the light of Christ into our city and region, although without ceasing to proclaim the fullness of Catholic teaching. As Pope Francis affirms, because the disunity among Christians is a counter-witness to the Gospel, commitment to unity is “an indispensable path to evangelization.”^[7]

The Roots of the Crisis

The roots of the present crisis of faith go far beyond the boundaries of our local Church. For the last several centuries the western world has been gradually abandoning its Christian foundations. As John Paul II candidly wrote in 2001, “Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a ‘Christian society’ which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone.”^[8] Pope Benedict XVI gave a similar diagnosis: “The real problem at this moment of our history is that God is disappearing from the human horizon, and, with the dimming of the light which comes from God, humanity is losing its bearings...”^[9] Even among those who affirm that God exists, many are living a “practical atheism”—that is, they are living as if God did not exist.

Underlying the rejection of Christian faith at a deep level are often false or pseudo religions, belief systems based on profoundly misguided assumptions. Many people hold these beliefs unreflectively, not aware of their underlying premises. Some of the most common false religions today are the following.

Scientific fundamentalism. Scientific fundamentalism is a belief that all questions about human existence and the world can be answered by experimental science. The universe is regarded as a closed system in which everything can be explained by the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, and evolution. God, if he exists at all, does not intervene in the world. Anything that cannot be proven scientifically is assumed to be false or at least unimportant. In reality, such a belief attributes to science a role that is far beyond its competence, since there are vast domains of existence that experimental science cannot account for, including ethical goods, aesthetic values, love, friendship, sacrifice, knowledge, and even science itself.

Moralistic therapeutic deism. This term was famously coined by two sociologists to describe the amorphous set of religious beliefs to which many American young people subscribe.^[10] This belief system is moralistic in that it emphasizes moral behavior, vaguely

defined as being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, responsible, and so on. It is therapeutic in that it envisions God as on call to take care of problems that arise in our lives, but not otherwise interested in us nor holding us accountable for our choices. It is deistic in that it views God as having created the world but not personally involved in it. Such views fall far short of the Christian understanding of God, who does hold us accountable, who gave his Son for us to save us from the devastating consequences of sin, and who desires to be deeply involved in our lives.

Secular messianism. Secular messianism is a politicized version of Christianity that makes the Gospel subservient to a human agenda. It comes in various forms (both liberal and conservative), but in every case it reduces Christianity to a program of social progress in this world. Such an outlook has lost sight of the eschatological vision of the Gospel—the fact that what we believe and do in this life has eternal consequences, because the world as we know it will one day come to an end and Christ will return as the Lord before whom every knee will bow ([Phil 2:9-11](#)).

All these false answers to the deepest questions of life are not reasons for discouragement but for hope, because they show that people are hungry and searching for truth even if they are knocking on the wrong door. As St. Augustine wrote, “O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.”^[11] The absence of God in our culture has not quenched the thirst for God in the human heart. It has only misdirected it. Every human being, even if they are not aware of it, longs to be known and to be loved unconditionally. Everyone yearns for authentic happiness. Everyone wants to be secure in their identity, to be fulfilled as a human being, and to matter to others in some way. God himself has placed these desires in the human heart, and they can ultimately be fulfilled in Christ alone; anything less will fail to satisfy. That is why we who belong to Christ can never cease to propose him to those who do not yet know him. Jesus Christ is the desire of the nations, and his Gospel is the answer to the deepest aspirations of the human heart.

Good and Bad Habits

At Synod 16 many frank discussions were held in which the participants discerned and evaluated together the present state of the Archdiocese of Detroit. The discussions brought to light what might be called the “capital vices” and “core virtues” of our local Church—those bad habits and good habits that affect our witness to Christ. A look at these good and bad habits will help us identify both what has to change and what we are called to become.

Our bad habits are those attitudes, misunderstandings, or deceptions that hold us back from unleashing the Gospel. Five of these stood out in particular at the Synod.

A worldly notion of the Church. Too often the Church is viewed, even by Catholics, as simply a human institution, and the Catholic faith as merely a lifestyle enhancer. In this outlook the Church’s value is based primarily on its contributions to society, whether in education, health care, advocacy, or service to the poor. The priest is seen as a kind of ecclesiastical civil servant. When this outlook prevails the Church’s mission can become captive to human plans, and the clarity of our witness to the Gospel is compromised. Cardinal John Henry Newman observed that perhaps one of the reasons Christ’s disciples in a particular time and place seem to escape being persecuted is that they have conformed themselves to the thinking and behavior of their society. They “have taken the world’s pay,

and must not grudge its yoke.”^[12] What is lacking in such a worldly mindset is a humble recognition that the Church belongs to Christ as his body, his beloved bride. It is Christ who directs the mission and activity of the Church and who will bring her without fail to her final destiny. All of us, clergy and laity alike, are servants of the Lord who will one day render an account of our service to him.

Spiritual lethargy. The second vice is closely related to the first. If the Church is viewed as a human institution, then it is easy to become overwhelmed by the challenges that face us. The feeling that we have to carry the burden of a struggling Church contributes in turn to weariness, discontent, and defeatism. It may seem as if we are pushing a rock up a steep hill and getting nowhere. Where there has been such lethargy, dear brothers and sisters, let us repent! It is a little like a marriage that has become stale: it is time to “return to our first love” (cf. *Rev 2:4*), to go through a “marriage encounter” between ourselves and Jesus—or perhaps to fall in love with him for the first time. If our ardor has cooled, let us ask the Lord to touch us once again with a burning ember from his altar (cf. *Isa 6:6*) that we may be rekindled in our zeal for him.

Status quo mentality. There can be a kind of institutional hardening, a resistance to change. We may consider that certain institutional forms, customs and practices have carried us in the past and we do not want to put in the effort to reform them. Pope Francis speaks of “the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’” Instead he urges all local Churches to “be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” ^[13]

Fear. The fourth bad habit can sometimes be more hidden. We can be subtly influenced by a combination of fears: fear of taking risks, fear of failure, fear of losing control, fear of going beyond our comfort zone. But yielding to fear keeps us in spiritual bondage (cf. *Heb 2:15*). How often Scripture tells us, “Fear not!” How often the Lord assures the fearful of his steadfast love and his help (cf. *Isa 43:1-2*). We must choose not to be guided by fear. Whenever we become aware of fears and anxieties influencing us, we can bring them before the Lord in all honesty and ask him to replace them with apostolic courage.

A complaining attitude. A common temptation in reaction to problems is to lament that we no longer have the power or prestige we once had. We don’t have as many priests, as many resources, as much money, as much support. Like the Israelites in the desert, we can take on an attitude of “murmuring,” finding fault with God and others. But complaining leads only to discouragement and paralysis. God thinks we have enough, because we have him. “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (*Phil 4:13*).

Our good habits are those dispositions of mind and heart that we must take on in order to become a radically mission-oriented Church. They are in fact a participation in the mind and heart of Jesus. “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus...” (*Phil 2:5*). The following good habits are particularly crucial to the cultural change we are seeking to effect in the Archdiocese.

Docility to the Spirit. Throughout Acts it is evident that the Holy Spirit was the initiator, guide, and driving force of the Church’s evangelizing mission.^[14] So today the new evangelization can only be carried out through a radical openness to the leading of the Spirit:

preceding every initiative with prayer for his guidance, constantly allowing ourselves to be led by him, and obeying his promptings and inspirations.

Apostolic boldness. A quality that stood out among the early Christians was their boldness in proclaiming the Gospel, even in the face of hostility and persecution (cf. [Acts 4:29, 31; 28:31](#)). They did not hesitate to proclaim Jesus as the one Savior whom God offers to the whole human race, and to call their listeners to repentance and conversion. Their boldness was not a human personality trait, but a result of their intimate union with Christ (cf. [Acts 4:13](#)).

A spirit of innovation. The rapidly changing cultural situation in which we find ourselves requires that we think in new and creative ways. We need to be willing to jettison some old structures that no longer work and to experiment with new ones. As St. Paul tried different missionary strategies in different settings (cf. [1 Cor 9:19-23](#)), so we need to be innovative, flexible, adaptable, unafraid to make mistakes, and willing to learn from the good ideas of others.

A spirit of cooperation. There can be no competition in the body of Christ, because we have one Lord and one united purpose ([Eph 4:1-6](#)). The whole Archdiocese has embarked on the new evangelization together, and any victory for one is a victory for all. As Christ's apostles had to put aside rivalry and learn to work as a team ([Lk 9:46-48](#)), so we are called to a spirit of generous cooperation and sharing of resources.

Confidence in God. St. Thérèse teaches us the way of spiritual childhood, which is the way of simplicity and utter confidence in God. We give the Lord the best of our effort, but it is he who will bring the increase. We can trust in him, for the renewal of the Archdiocese of Detroit is not our work but his divine work in which we are cooperating. "Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth" ([1 Cor 3:7](#)).

An attitude of gratitude. The best antidote to discouragement is to praise God continually for who he is and to thank him for what he has done. "We thank you, God, we give thanks; we call upon your name, declare your wonderful deeds" ([Ps 75:2](#)). Gratitude puts us in a right posture before God and opens us to his further work in our lives.

The prophet Ezekiel, who lived in a time of trouble and discouragement not unlike our own, was given a vision of God's people as a vast plain filled with dry bones.

[God] asked me: Son of man, can these bones come to life? "Lord GOD," I answered, "you alone know that." Then he said to me: Prophesy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: See! I will bring spirit into you, that you may come to life." ([Ezekiel 37:3-5](#))

As your shepherd, exercising the prophetic office of Christ, I speak in the name of Christ to you, the Church of Detroit: "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! The Lord is breathing his Spirit into you to bring you to life! He is awakening you to what Christ came to give you, the fullness of life that comes from knowing him and receiving the free gift of his salvation. He is

renewing his Church in her identity as God's beloved people, the bride of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit, sent forth to transform the world in the light of the Gospel."

GUIDEPOSTS

The word "synod" is composed of two Greek words: syn ("together") and hodos ("road"). The very name "synod" says that all of the members of the Church of Detroit are "on the road together" toward the goal of becoming a band of joyful missionary disciples. Smart travelers look for directional signs on their road. One of the most precious fruits of the Synod experience was the disclosure of these signs to mark out the way for us to take in our efforts to unleash the Gospel. Having listened to the testimony of the Synod members about what the Holy Spirit is saying to our local Church, I affirm the following "guideposts" and "markers" that will serve as standards for all the steps we take to advance the new evangelization. Specifically, they serve as the guides for plotting the action steps set out in Part 5 in order to implement the propositions endorsed at the Synod.

The New Pentecost

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.

[Acts 1:8](#)

Synod 16 has definitively set the Church in Detroit on the path of the new evangelization; we are living in our own time the Gospel mysteries of the Great Commission and Pentecost. What Scripture reveals about the Holy Spirit's activity in the evangelizing Church is not only a challenge and a guide, it is what the Lord is continuing to do in our midst.

After giving his disciples the Great Commission, Jesus told them to "stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" ([Lk 24:49](#)). As the first evangelization could not have taken place without the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, so the new evangelization cannot be accomplished without a new Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is God's love poured into our hearts (cf. [Rom 5:5](#)), revealing to us the Lordship of Jesus and our own exalted identity as beloved sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit is the "new wine" of divine life (cf. [Lk 5:38](#); [Acts 2:13](#)). It is he who fills Christ's disciples, then and now, with a compelling zeal to go forth and announce the good news of salvation.

The transformation caused by the Spirit was most visible in the apostle Peter. Before Pentecost, Peter had left everything to follow Jesus and was earnestly seeking to live by his teaching. But his ability to fulfill his apostolic mission was compromised by his own fears and failings. He vehemently resisted Jesus' prediction of his passion, which seemed senseless to human reasoning. Then after boasting of his loyalty to the Master, he came face to face with his own weakness and cowardice.^[15] But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter was filled with an unshakable inner conviction of the truth of the Gospel and a love that compelled him to share that good news with all who would listen.^[16] Even under persecution, his evangelical boldness and joy were uncontainable ([Acts 4:12-13](#); [5:40-42](#)). It was because of such a transformation in Peter and all the members of the Church that "The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly" ([Acts 6:7](#)).

For the Church in Detroit, reliving the Gospel mysteries means that we continually return to the Upper Room, asking for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us and on the whole region. We seek to bring every member of the Church, insofar as possible, into a personal and life-transforming experience of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing that we cannot give what we do not have, we continually seek to be refreshed in God's presence and filled again and again with his love, so that it is his own love we are giving away.

Acts 29

The book of Acts ends in chapter 28 with Paul under house arrest in Rome, still boldly preaching the Gospel. Luke ends without finishing the story because the story of the Church's mission continues in every age. We are living the 29th chapter of Acts! The ecology of the New Testament by which the Gospel was unleashed in the ancient world is the ecology of the Church today. It thus includes the same elements of repentance and faith; signs and wonders.

Repent and Believe in the Gospel

Just as when Jesus himself began the work of evangelization, so today the good news involves both a call to repent and a call to believe: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" ([Mk 1:14-15](#)).

To repent means to "change one's mind"—to make a life-altering decision to turn away from sin and toward God. There is no true offer of the good news that does not also call for repentance. And calling people to repentance requires that we speak of sin and its consequences, including the ultimate consequence of eternal separation from God.^[17] The apostles' preaching always included this summons: "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away" ([Acts 3:19](#)).^[18] To speak of repentance is not fashionable today in a world that prefers to ignore sin, yet we who belong to Christ can testify that repentance is the way to forgiveness and freedom. It is the key that unlocks the mercy of God! The call to repentance is always addressed to ourselves first, since all of us are continually in need of deeper conversion.

To be effective in today's context, our proclamation and teaching must contextualize the moral demands of the Gospel, showing why they are not arbitrary limitations on our freedom but the perfect plan of our loving God for human flourishing. We must provide our pastors, catechists and others with practical help and a systematized approach to presenting Christian morality. In particular, priests and deacons need training and resources for successfully preaching on the "hard topics." Our presentation of the Gospel's demands must be pastorally wise, meeting people where they are at and avoiding "truth bombs" that will only turn them away. It must honestly engage the culture, looking for "seeds of the Word"—partial truths and inklings of the Gospel even where mixed with error and confusion.

To believe means to accept the free gift of salvation that God gives us in his Son, which far surpasses anything we could deserve or accomplish (cf. [Eph 2:3-10](#)). Our life in Christ is always a response to God's initiative. Grace comes first; our part is to receive. "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](#))."^[19]

The invitation to believe in the Gospel is always personal: it is not a moral program but the offer of communion with a person, Jesus. “Heart speaks to heart,” as Cardinal John Henry Newman put it. The invitation is effective if it is made by a joyful disciple, one who has found joy in responding to the Lord’s demands. The evangelist presents the challenges of the Gospel not as the word of a superior to an inferior, but of a friend to a friend. Relationships are key to this whole process. We prepare the ground by first establishing trust, and then we offer accompaniment to the sinner along the challenging road to life in Christ.

Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well ([Jn 4:5-42](#)) is a paradigm of evangelization. When the woman came to the well for her daily task of drawing water, Jesus engaged her in conversation, showing that he cared for her as a person. He spoke to her of “living water” that would quench her deepest thirst. As the conversation went on, he exposed areas of sin and woundedness in her life, implicitly calling her to repentance: “you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.” Yet looking into his eyes, she saw no condemnation, only a love and mercy she had never experienced before. By the end of their encounter she forgot all about her bucket, because she had now drunk of the living water—that water that is the Holy Spirit ([Jn 7:37-39](#)). Because of that encounter the woman herself became an evangelist. She ran back to her village, exclaiming to everyone who would listen, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” Her message was neither eloquent nor complete, yet it was spectacularly effective. The joy of her new life was evident to all who saw her. This formerly isolated, outcast person was now forgiven, healed and reconciled to God. So powerful was her testimony that, as a result, the entire town came to faith in Jesus ([Jn 4:39](#)).

Signs and Wonders

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel not only in words but in healings, miracles, signs and wonders that visibly demonstrated the message: in him the kingdom of God had truly become present ([Lk 9:11](#); [Acts 2:22](#)). When he commissioned his disciples to continue his mission, he commanded them to preach the Gospel both in words and in deeds of power ([Lk 9:1-2](#); [10:8-9](#); [Jn 14:12](#)). “They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs” ([Mk 16:20](#)). Often it was these signs that moved the hearers to believe the Gospel ([Acts 8:6](#); [Heb 2:4](#)). So today we look for the proclamation of the good news to be accompanied by signs and wonders that visibly demonstrate God’s love and convince people that Jesus Christ is truly alive. We have been given a prison-shaking Savior, a deliverer who sets captives free! Signs, small and great, are a normal part of the Christian life. Our focus is not on the signs themselves, but on the risen Lord Jesus to whom they point. “By the power at work within us [he] is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine” ([Eph 3:20](#)).

With Eyes Fixed on Jesus

Let us... persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.

[Hebrews 12:1-2](#)

The task of evangelizing is to propose Jesus Christ as the Savior whom God the Father offers to every human being. The new evangelization is not a membership drive, nor is it an effort to shore up a code of conduct. Rather, it is a love affair. All are invited to encounter Jesus and let their hearts be captured by him.

Encounter with Jesus

Evangelizing aims to lead others to life-changing encounters with Jesus, with the result that he becomes the Lord of one's life. An encounter is a person-centered form of contemplation; it is two people being present to each other with no utilitarian purpose. For some people the encounter with Christ is a cataclysmic "Damascus road" kind of experience; for others it is more gradual. In either case, encountering Jesus is like meeting the person you are going to marry: you are overwhelmed by this encounter and cannot imagine going forward in life without that person. The Christian life becomes not just one but a series of encounters with Jesus, especially through prayer and the liturgy, which continually deepen our relationship with him.

Preaching and catechesis in our local Church must foster such encounters, especially by explaining our love relationship with Christ as the purpose of the liturgy. Whenever possible we should invite people to respond to Jesus by surrendering their lives to him, and give them concrete opportunities to do so.

For many of us, even for clergy, there is need for a renewed encounter with Jesus. In the time of the prophet Hosea, Israel needed such a rekindling of their romance with God, so God promised that he would allure them into the desert and speak tenderly to them: "I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the LORD" (*Hos 2:21-22*). Whenever we feel spiritually fatigued, arid, or battle-worn, it is this return to our first love (*Rev 2:4*) that lifts us up again and revives our hearts. "We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. Standing before him with open hearts, letting him look at us, we see that gaze of love which Nathaniel glimpsed on the day when Jesus said to him: 'I saw you under the fig tree'" (*Jn 1:48*)."^[20]

The Kerygma

The "kerygma" is the New Testament word for the simple, radical, countercultural and joyful message of the Gospel—that "initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith."^[21] After two thousand years of development of doctrine, we are used to focusing on the need to transmit Catholic teaching on faith and morals in its fullness. This is indeed essential, but it does not come first. The proclamation of the kerygma must precede catechesis, because people are ready to receive the Church's doctrine only after they have heard the kerygma and responded in faith. As Pope Francis has reminded us:

The kerygma... needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal.... On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: 'Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.' This first proclamation is called 'first' not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways....^[22]

The kerygma is often described in terms of four essential elements: (1) the loving plan of God for human beings; (2) sin and its devastating consequences, especially separation from God;

(3) God’s answer to our predicament in the sending of his Son for our salvation; and (4) the response this gift calls for from every person: to repent of our sins, believe in Jesus and be baptized, so we can be filled with his Holy Spirit and live a new life in his family, the Church.

It is essential for all preachers and catechists to learn the art of proclaiming the kerygma and to reflect on how to make all their preaching and teaching more kerygmatic. The kerygma can be proclaimed effectively only by a firsthand witness, one who has met the Lord personally and can speak of what he is doing in one’s own life. Priests and deacons, in particular, should consider how to make use of opportune moments to preach the kerygma, especially to those who are not practicing the faith—occasions such as weddings, funerals, parish social events, baptismal preparation for parents, and sacramental preparation for children and families.

Testimony

Personal testimony has an indispensable role in evangelization. Testimony has a unique power to touch hearts, since it is almost impossible to ignore the witness of someone who has encountered Jesus personally and whose life has been transformed by him. The townspeople of the Samaritan woman at the well came to faith in Jesus because of her testimony, which eventually led them to encounter him themselves ([Jn 4:39, 42](#)).

There is a wide variety of appropriate occasions for the giving of personal testimonies, not only in church but also in less formal settings; for instance, at the end of Mass, during times of informal prayer, in catechetical settings, RCIA programs, marriage preparation, small groups, Bible studies, etc. There is need for prudent discernment of whom to invite to give testimony, and it is wise to have them practice and receive guidance beforehand.

The Word Made Flesh

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[John 1:14](#)

By the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, the eternal Word has taken on flesh: the invisible God is now able to be seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, even touched with our hands (cf. [1 Jn 1:1](#)). So in this age of the new covenant the Creator communicates himself to us through the created means he himself has chosen. In our efforts to unleash the Gospel, we proceed with the firm conviction that the Holy Spirit brings about life-changing encounters with the Lord Jesus in his Mystical Body the Church, particularly in fellowship with one another, in Sacred Scripture, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and most especially in the Holy Eucharist.

The Communion of the Church

The Church is the context given by God in which we encounter Jesus Christ. Although it is common for people today to say they are “spiritual but not religious,” or that they believe in Jesus but not in the Church, in truth there can be no relationship with Jesus that does not include his Church. God relates to his people not as isolated individuals but as a people, a family, united with one another in deep bonds of love ([Eph 4:1-6](#)). We learn to give and receive God’s love in and through our relationships with one another. As St. Augustine taught, when we say “amen” before receiving Holy Communion, we are saying “amen” not only to Christ the head, but to all the members of his body.^[23] So profound is this communion

that it endures beyond death: we have fellowship not only with the members of the Church on earth but with the saints in heaven, who are cheering us on and helping us draw closer to Christ (cf. [Heb 12:1](#)).

Pastors and other leaders should reflect on how to deepen the experience of communion among their parishioners. Do some people attend Mass in isolation, not knowing or being known by others? Do some have the impression that relating to God is sufficient and relating to others in the parish is unnecessary? Are all aware of their responsibility to encourage and build up the faith of others? Do all recognize the need to forgive the offenses of others, to bear with their faults and failings, to avoid cliques and factions, to overcome social and cultural barriers, and to reach out to those who may feel lonely or neglected? Our parishes must be places where people's "hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love" ([Col 2:2](#)).

One effective way to foster communion is to form well-planned small groups in which the members meet regularly for Bible study or faith formation as well as mutual support, encouragement, and growth in holiness. Social events can also go a long way toward building relationships. It is important to keep in mind that fellowship in the Church is not for its own sake, but is always centered on the Person of Christ.

Scripture

Listening and responding to God's word in the Sacred Scriptures must be at the heart of our efforts to unleash the Gospel. One who is in love desires to know more and more about the beloved. Since all Scripture speaks of Christ, immersing ourselves in the word is a way to deepen our initial encounter and grow in our relationship with him.

God's word is "living and active" ([Heb 4:12](#)); it renews our minds and changes us. The more grounded we are in Scripture, the more we are able to understand God's marvelous plan and to see the events in our lives with the eyes of faith. Through Scripture we learn to hear God speaking to us personally: "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them."^[24] As God's word is dynamic, so must our response be: we take the word to heart and apply it to our lives.

An evangelizing parish is one in which parishioners continually study, talk about, and pray with the Scriptures. To this end, parishes must make Bible study resources available, particularly to put the Scriptures in context for those who know them only through the readings proclaimed at Sunday Mass. Parishioners also need to be taught how to do *lectio divina*, reading Scripture in prayerful conversation with God. As Pope Benedict XVI stated:

Since "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," making the Bible the inspiration of every ordinary and extraordinary pastoral outreach will lead to a greater awareness of the person of Christ, who reveals the Father and is the fullness of divine revelation. For this reason I encourage pastors and the faithful to recognize the importance of this emphasis on the Bible.^[25]

Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation was given to the Church by the Lord Jesus himself as the preeminent place for the baptized to respond anew to his call to repentance and to receive the

Father's mercy. The renewal of this sacrament in our local Church is an essential part of our efforts to unleash the Gospel.^[26]

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus reveals God's joy over returning sinners. The younger son, who insulted his father and wasted his inheritance, is reduced to starvation and decides to come home, hoping to be hired as a servant in his father's house. But "while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (*Lk 15:20*). Before the young man even finishes his confession, the father commands that he be clothed in a robe, ring and sandals—signs of restoration to full sonship—and that a feast be held to celebrate. Such is God the Father's heart toward his lost sons and daughters.

A sign of a thriving parish community is a culture of sharing in the "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (*Lk 15:7*). This entails both clear preaching about the consequences of sin and generous availability and use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. "[God's] mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (*Lam 3:22-23*). For those who have fallen away from their faith and the Church, Reconciliation is an open doorway for return. No sin is unforgivable, and through the sacrament the Father's embrace and a fresh start await them. For those already practicing the faith, being cleansed of sin is crucial for opening themselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Just as the sins of each individual have a negative spiritual effect on the whole community, so even more the spiritual healing and forgiveness received through the sacrament cause grace to flow through the whole community.

The Holy Eucharist

In the Holy Eucharist we reach the summit of our participation in the victory of Christ over sin and death—the triumph we proclaim in the new evangelization. In this Most Blessed Sacrament we have the source of our zeal and strength to unleash the Gospel.^[27]

Evangelization leads to the Eucharist, since the Eucharist is the fullness of communion with Jesus and his whole Church. On the other hand, the Eucharist leads to evangelization, since our ability to announce the Gospel springs from the passion and resurrection of Christ which is made present anew in the Eucharist. This is why the Latin liturgy traditionally ends with the words *Ite, missa est*: "Go, she is sent." At every Mass the Church—that is, all her members—are newly empowered and sent forth to bring Christ into the world. Through the Eucharist we become stamped with the pattern of Christ's own self-giving love so that we can reproduce that pattern in our own lives. Thus the goal of the liturgy is never just to receive the sacrament and go home; it is to become a living tabernacle through which Christ is made present to others. As Pope Benedict XVI stated:

The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God's love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him. The Eucharist is thus the source and summit not only of the Church's life, but also of her mission: "an authentically eucharistic Church is a missionary Church." We too must be able to tell our brothers and sisters with conviction: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (*1 Jn 1:3*).^[28]

The members of our local Church need to be regularly rekindled in "Eucharistic amazement"^[29] by preaching and catechesis that helps to deepen their understanding and faith in this immeasurable gift and moves them to make a gift of self in return. Adoration of the

Blessed Sacrament, since it brings people directly into the presence of Jesus, is a powerful means of revitalizing a parish and equipping it to transform the culture.

Parishes must also focus sustained attention on the quality of the Sunday liturgy experience, especially from the perspective of newcomers and newly returning Catholics.^[30] Do people who show up for Mass enter into a friendly, hospitable environment where mutual love is evident? Does the music help them to lift up their minds and hearts in worship of God? Does the preaching break open the word of God and help them apply it to their lives? Is there an atmosphere of faith in which people's attention is truly focused on the Lord? These qualities are not the responsibility of the pastor alone but of the entire congregation. If improvement is needed, let us strive for it with patience and perseverance.

Equipping for the Service of the Gospel

He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-12

For Christ's disciples in the Church of Detroit to be able to answer his call to evangelize, they need to have the appropriate formation. As Paul shows in this passage in Ephesians, the role of leaders in the Church is not to do all the ministry but to "equip the holy ones for the work of ministry"—that is, to mobilize, form and train all the members for carrying out their mission of building up the Church. Implementing this Guidepost entails a paradigm shift such that every parish becomes a school of evangelization in which all members are being equipped to be witnesses of Christ.

Evangelizing the Evangelizers

To become an effective evangelizer one must first be evangelized, since we cannot give away what we do not have. Thus an urgent priority is to ensure that those who are to invite others to Christ have a deep personal relationship with Christ themselves. Some signs of this relationship are: receiving the sacraments regularly; engaging in personal prayer every day; reading Scripture daily; constantly learning more about the faith and seeking to live by it; and engaging in long-term regular service activities.

There is a tendency to think "once converted, always converted." But in fact we are all in constant need of evangelization, because we are in need of deeper conversion. Being a disciple of Christ is never static; it is always dynamic, always a process of growth and of "following him on the way" (*Mk 10:52*). All members of the local Church should examine themselves to ensure that they have not stalled in their discipleship and thus become unable to give credible witness to the power of the Gospel. The Lord always has more for us than what we have yet received. Every one of us is called to, and capable of, sainthood.

Equipping the Evangelizers

Since evangelizing does not come naturally for most people, being effective evangelizers also usually requires the development of some practical skills. A parish that is a community of missionary disciples is one that provides regular opportunities for parishioners to learn and practice skills such as the following:

- Discernment of the “seeds of the Word”—that is, the recognition of how grace is at work, often in hidden ways, in the lives of those who are not currently practicing the faith.^[31] This includes the ability to listen well and to recognize the unexpressed hopes, fears, and longings in a person’s heart, and to show how the Gospel responds to them. It also includes the ability to affirm a person’s sincere spiritual seeking, even if some of their beliefs are misguided.
- Ability to explain the kerygma, the core message of the Gospel (see Marker 2.2). This may include practical training for evangelizing in different contexts (in the extended family, in the workplace, in sports settings, on the street, and so on).
- Ability to offer personal testimony to what Christ has done in one’s life (see Marker 2.3).
- Basic apologetics on common topics, especially topics where there is widespread skepticism or misunderstanding of Catholic beliefs.
- Growth in virtue, since those who are living a life of virtue are credible witnesses and their lives are attractive to unbelievers.^[32]

Charisms

Christ’s disciples were never meant to carry out her divine mandate to evangelize on the basis of human resources alone. Christ has endowed his bride with an abundance of supernatural charisms, gifts of the Holy Spirit that equip every member of the body of Christ to do his or her part in bearing witness to Christ and building up the Church.^[33] These gifts range from the simple and humble to the extraordinary (*Rom 12:6-7; 1 Cor 12*). The foundation and standard for using these gifts is always love (*1 Cor 13*).

As Vatican Council II stated,

For the exercise of this apostolate [of the laity], the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the people of God through ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts also (cf. *1 Cor. 12:7*), “allotting them to everyone according as He wills” (*1 Cor. 12:11*) in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (*1 Peter 4:10*), to build up the whole body in charity (cf. *Eph. 4:16*). From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who “breathes where He wills” (*John 3:8*).^[34]

The Council also instructed that priests, “While testing the spirits to see if they be of God (cf. *1 John 4:1*), ... should uncover with a sense of faith, acknowledge with joy and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity.”^[35] Discerning and pastoring the use of charisms is one of the most challenging and yet rewarding aspects of ecclesial leadership. Priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers in the Archdiocese should consider how to foster the use of charisms and to make all their evangelistic and pastoral endeavors “charism-based.” When discerning to whom the leadership of a particular ministry should be entrusted, or who should be called upon to volunteer, we must seek as much as possible to match people’s responsibilities to their charisms. Let us also give people room to grow and flourish in the use of their gifts, as St. John Chrysostom counsels: “The most basic task of a church leader is to discern the spiritual gifts of all those under his authority, and to encourage those gifts to be used to the full benefit of all. Only a person who can discern the

gifts of others and can humbly rejoice at the flourishing of those gifts is fit to lead the Church.”^[36]

No Bystanders

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! [*1 Corinthians 9:16*](#)

Christ calls every priest, deacon, religious and lay person in the Archdiocese to embark upon the new evangelization, to employ new methods and a new fervor in unleashing the Gospel. “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.”^[37]

The Laity

The special calling and privilege of the lay faithful is to bring Christ into the secular world. “Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.”^[38] Their role is to transform every aspect of the culture through the Gospel—family life, education, government, business, the media, entertainment, sports, science, the arts. They do so both by “engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God” and by “revealing Christ by word to those around them.”^[39]

The engagement of every lay person, according to their gifts and state in life, is essential for the mission of the Church to be fulfilled. “Each member of the lay faithful should always be fully aware of being a ‘member of the Church’ yet entrusted with a unique task which cannot be done by another and which is to be fulfilled for the good of all.”^[40] Each one should reflect on how the Lord is calling them to bring the Gospel into their particular spheres of influence both through their deeds and their words.

Priests and Deacons

The leadership of our priests and deacons in unleashing the Gospel is crucial for this mission; every pastoral work must make a contribution to the new evangelization.

As priests, we must resist the idea that we are ecclesiastical civil servants whose primary task is to maintain the organization. Rather, the organization is always at the service of the Gospel. Our role is to be spiritual fathers who bring God’s children to birth and nurture them to maturity in Christ ([*1 Cor 4:15*](#); [*Gal 4:19*](#)). We lead the sheep to green pastures where they can be fed, refreshed, and spiritually built up so that they themselves can then be sent out into the harvest.

A priest is a servant of the word of God. “The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith...”^[41] Although a priest’s highest role is the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, it is preaching the Gospel that draws people to Christ in the first place and enables them to receive the full saving benefit of the sacraments. Priests and deacons need to be bold in proclaiming all the elements of the Gospel, not only those parts that people want to hear. Preachers need ongoing formation in how to do so with compassion, conviction and clarity.

Consecrated Life and Movements

The Lord has raised up in our local Church men and women in consecrated life, as well as lay people who belong to ecclesial movements, so that they can employ their unique charisms in the new evangelization. We thank God for every religious order, congregation, society, and movement that is present in the Archdiocese, each with its particular gifts.

Consecrated men and women bear witness by their lives to the priceless treasure of Christ—“the pearl of great price” that is worth selling everything to attain ([Mt 13:46](#)). Their lives of prayer, service and self-sacrifice cause the fragrance of Christ to fill the atmosphere, so that others are drawn to him (cf. [Jn 12:3](#); [2 Cor 2:14-15](#)). Those in contemplative life are particularly indispensable to our local Church. If our mission is fruitful, it is largely because of their hidden prayers and sacrifices. Those in active apostolates make the good news of Christ visible and tangible to those they serve. I entreat all those in consecrated life to pray fervently and frequently for the success of our efforts to unleash the Gospel.

The ecclesial movements, many of which have sprung up since Vatican Council II, kindle fervor in lay people and bring fresh creativity and dynamism to evangelization. As John Paul II noted, “There is so much need today for mature Christian personalities, conscious of their baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the world! ... And here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities: they are the response, given by the Holy Spirit, to this critical challenge.”^[42] I invite each of the movements to reflect on how they can contribute, in accord with their specific charisms, to our archdiocesan effort to unleash the Gospel.

Youth and Young Adults

The youth and young adults of our local Church have a particular call, which the Church wholeheartedly supports, to bring the light of the Gospel into southeast Michigan.

On the day of Pentecost St. Peter proclaimed, quoting the prophet Joel, that the Holy Spirit gives to both young and old the ability to prophesy ([Acts 2:17](#))—that is, to speak God’s word under the influence of the Spirit such that it touches people’s hearts and brings conversion. We address our preaching of the Gospel to young people, but we must not forget that they themselves are also agents of the new evangelization. They have a unique ability to reach the people of their own generation, and they can help us think in new ways. We must make every effort to encourage, challenge, mentor, and raise up the young to take up their rightful roles in the mission of the Church, entrusting responsibility to them as appropriate. As Pope Francis wrote, there is an “urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership.”^[43]

Person-to-Person Engagement

Whatever you do, do from the heart. [Colossians 3:23](#)

The Gospel is most effectively shared in person-to-person encounters. Such personal, on-the-spot evangelization can be prepared for and enhanced by programs and processes and media, but it cannot be replaced by them. “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”^[44]

Going Out

Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled. [Luke 14:23](#)

In his Great Commission, Jesus did not direct his disciples to stay inside and simply welcome those who show up at the Church's door, but to go out: "Go and make disciples of all nations..." ([Matthew 28:20](#)). The new evangelization cannot be accomplished from within the walls of our churches. Jesus himself did not remain in the synagogues where there were already devout people; he also went out to places where tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners could be found. As Pope Francis has urged,

Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ.... I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.... If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ...^[45]

In recent history our way of sharing Christ has been primarily through the Church's institutions. Now is the time for our evangelization to become more intentional and more person-to-person. Every individual in the Archdiocese, especially lay people, are called to consider how the Lord may be calling us to go out, beyond where we may have gone before—even to the most unlikely places—to share the good news of Jesus with those who may never have heard it. Wherever the time and circumstances are right, sharing the Gospel also includes inviting people, both fellow parishioners and outsiders, to join in the activities of the Church.

Accompaniment

While they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. [Luke 24:15](#)

Accompaniment of those being evangelized is an essential part of unleashing the Gospel. When Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he did not immediately begin to instruct them. Instead he first listened to them and allowed them to share their hopes and disappointments, winning their trust. He met them where they were in their faith and helped them to go further.

Sharing the Gospel is only the beginning of evangelization. Those who are being evangelized, including our own parishioners, often need time to assimilate the Gospel and bring their lives into conformity with it. They may have developed worldly habits and ways of thinking that need to be gradually transformed. This is not always an easy process, especially for those who have spent many years living apart from God. They need others to walk by their side and lead them closer to God with patience, compassion, and wisdom. "The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. [Ex 3:5](#))."^[46] It is an art that will require the involvement of many lay people who are mature in their own faith, disciples who can disciple others.

Healing

An intrinsic part of accompaniment is healing. Many people today are deeply wounded by contemporary social ills such as the breakdown of the family, abuse, poverty, or racism. Jesus, quoting from the prophet Isaiah, described his own mission as a work of healing and liberation: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad

tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free..." ([Lk 4:18-19](#)). He also instructed his disciples to make healing a part of their proclamation of the Gospel: "Whatever town you enter and they welcome you... cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you'" ([Lk 10:8-9](#)).

The Church today continues the ministry of the apostolic Church, which continued the ministry of Jesus. So we must prayerfully discern how the healing work of Christ can be incorporated into our announcement of the good news. This includes making the two sacraments of healing, Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, easily available. It may also include the establishment of healing prayer ministry teams or providing prayer for healing on a regular basis after Mass. The use of the gift of healing requires discernment, but such discernment is not to be confused with the skepticism of our age. Nor is healing a substitute for the hard work of growing in discipleship; rather, it is a gift to encourage us on that path. Being a minister of healing requires a rich prayer life, wise discernment, and being on guard against the enemy's snares.

Media

If evangelization is to be "new in method," to the fullest degree possible we must use new media in unleashing the Gospel. Just as St. Paul used the highly developed Roman road system and St. Maximilian Kolbe used the latest printing technologies to spread the Gospel in their times, so we recognize the advances in social media and information technology as God-given opportunities for spreading the Gospel in our time.

Strong support and gratitude are owed to those members of our local Church who are using the media to spread the Good News. I encourage the media experts among us to share their expertise and help train others in using the media for evangelization. I encourage all Catholics who use social media to recognize it as a powerful platform to engage others in conversation about the faith. At the same time, we must studiously avoid the temptation to lower our standards of charity when using social media. When people see our posts, let them see not only good content but a tone that is respectful, charitable, joyful, peaceful, and hopeful. Every member of the Church is an ambassador of Christ, and some people may form their views of Catholicism based on our conduct. "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear" ([Eph 4:29](#)). Our goal is not to win arguments but to win souls.

Families

These words that I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children. [Deuteronomy 6:6-7](#)
Families are at the very heart of our archdiocesan efforts to unleash the Gospel, because they are the first and most important setting in which evangelization takes place.

The family is the "domestic church"—the primary social unit in which life in Christ, the life of the Church, is experienced and lived. Through the sacrament of matrimony and through their love for one another, a husband and wife make visible the love between Christ and his Church.^[47] By welcoming children into the world and raising them faithfully, they bear witness to God's unconditional love. "The triune God is a communion of love, and the family

is its living reflection.”^[48] For the members of a Christian family, discipleship is lived out concretely in the rhythms of their day-to-day interaction. Family life is a daily “liturgy” of prayers, sacrifices, acts of love, service, forbearance, and forgiveness—all nourished and transformed by participation in the sacraments. Thus it is impossible to overestimate the centrality of the family in the passing on of faith from one generation to the next. “The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought” (*Ps 22:32*).

Yet we are all too aware that the family today is in crisis. We live in a society that devalues human life, rejects the plan of God for marriage, and redefines the family according to human ideas. Symptoms of the crisis include (but are not limited to) divorce, cohabitation, single parenthood, pornography, gender confusion, the isolation caused by individualism, a culture that views children and the elderly as burdens, and the stresses of modern life that prevent families from spending time together.^[49] Families today face unprecedented challenges, and for this reason our local Church must commit a major portion of her resources to supporting families and helping them live out their call to holiness.

Ministry to Families

Among the many ministries entrusted to our parishes, the first priority is to assist families to live as domestic churches. Many parents have not been evangelized or well catechized themselves. Just as airline safety videos tell us to put on our own oxygen mask before assisting others—since otherwise we may not be able to help them at all—so parents need to have a living relationship with Jesus and to learn the faith themselves in order to hand it on effectively to their children.^[50]

In recent generations, the pattern for many Catholic parents has been to delegate their children’s religious education entirely to the parish, assuming that by doing so they fulfill their obligation to pass on the faith. Parishes must make every effort to resist this pattern, since catechizing children has little effect if parents themselves are not living as disciples of Jesus. Parishes must look for ways to make catechesis and sacramental preparation family-based, helping parents grow in discipleship so that they can then form their children.

Parishes also need to do everything possible, within their limits, to ensure that struggling families are being cared for, including those affected by divorce, illness or bereavement; infertile couples; those with children with special needs; and those struggling with pornography or other forms of addiction. Ministry to families must be sensitive to the rich cultural diversity within our local Church, appreciating and celebrating the different ways that our Catholic faith is lived out.

Evangelization within Families

Parents are the primary evangelizers as well as the primary catechists and educators of their children. Their role is absolutely irreplaceable. The role of fathers in particular is essential, since one of the greatest factors influencing a child’s future practice of the faith is the religious involvement of his or her father. Amid all the pressure to prepare their children for success in life, parents need to realize there is no greater success and no greater gift they can give their children than a relationship with Jesus and his Church, which endures throughout eternity.

A family of joyful missionary disciples is one where sacrificial love, after Christ's example and in the power of his Spirit, is the principle that governs all of life. The first priority is given to participation in the Sunday liturgy and daily prayer; decisions about activities and finances are made according to the mind of Christ; the spouses talk freely to one another and to their children about the Lord; the faith is enculturated through various family and cultural traditions and celebrations; and, above all, the mutual gift of self is the norm for all relationships. In such families, the spouses are witnesses of Christ to one another, and often even the children, through the simplicity of their faith, evangelize their parents.

The Witness of Families

“The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world.”^[51] The witness of a joyful family life rooted in the Gospel can be a spiritual oasis for people in contemporary society. How many have never experienced a family life characterized by warmth, mutual affection, honor, forgiveness, and peace? In order to form healthy Christian families themselves, they need to see what it looks like; they need both teaching and models. I encourage families who are living the Gospel to exercise radical generosity in inviting others to share in your family life, even if you are well aware that it is not perfect. For instance, consider engaging in a ministry or ongoing service project as a family, so that others can witness how you relate to one another and how you raise your children. Consider inviting singles, including young people, to attend Mass with your family or to share meals at your home on a regular basis. Consider serving as mentors to newly married couples. When unchurched families—including relatives—come to your home, recognize that even a prayer before meals, or simple words of thanksgiving to God offered by each member of the family, can be a powerful witness to the presence of Christ among you.

Attraction

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. [Matthew 13:44](#)

Effective witness to Jesus has these attractive qualities: joy, hospitality and generous service to the poor and the marginalized.

The Joy of the Gospel

Unless we manifest to others the joy that is ours from having found the “pearl of great price” and from being sure of the Gospel’s invincible power, we will not attract others to listen to the good news. A parish of glum faces and grumpy attitudes will attract no one. Let our faces show our joy, which is not based on our changing circumstances but the unchanging presence of the risen Lord among us. Scripture commands us to rejoice, because we are capable of choosing joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!” ([Phil 4:4](#)). As Pope Francis stated:

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, ... 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 fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ.”^[52]

The One Sheep

“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?” (*Lk 15:4*). Jesus’ parables deeply challenge our human ways of thinking. How can it make sense to leave ninety-nine sheep vulnerable in the desert to go after just one lost one? Yet in his own ministry Jesus clearly made it a priority to reach the lost, those who were not in right relationship with God. He went out of his way to interact with people like Zacchaeus the tax collector and Mary Magdalene who had seven demons (*Lk 8:2; 19:1-9*). His whole mission was “to seek and save the lost” (*Lk 19:10*).

Christ’s primary mission must be ours as well. Yet it is easy to lose sight of that mission. Almost everything we do in parish life has been geared to ministering to the ninety-nine who are in the pews. So unleashing the Gospel in our local Church means learning how to make unchurched people a priority. To seek them, invite them, welcome them and accompany them on the way of discipleship is the business of every parishioner. The paradox is that when the attention of the whole flock turns outward to seek the lost, the ninety-nine grow exponentially in their own faith and commitment to Christ.

The Parish as a Place of Welcome

For evangelization to have its effect we must ensure that our communities extend a warm welcome to everyone who walks through the door. This entails changing the way we envision the parish. It is natural to think of the parish as the place for those who belong; we are less accustomed to seeing it as the place for those who do not yet belong but are taking their first steps on the journey toward God.

Every parish should deliberate on how to welcome those who have never come to church, or who have not been there in years, and who may cross the threshold with some trepidation. Are we sometimes tempted to react to such people like the older brother in Luke 15, who responded to the homecoming of his prodigal brother with anger and judgmentalism? Are we sometimes indifferent? Or are we rather like the father, who warmly embraced his son and celebrated his homecoming with great joy? If a homeless person shows up at the parish, let us rejoice! If a teenager covered in tattoos and piercings walks in, let us be glad! Let us make our parishes places where everyone who attends Mass can also make friends, find mentors, and feel known, loved and supported. This will require the committed involvement of many parishioners, especially those who have a charism for hospitality or for accompaniment.

Many of those we evangelize will not be immediately ready for adult catechesis or the RCIA program. To bring an unchurched person directly into such programs is like throwing a non-swimmer into the deep end. An important part of welcoming the newly evangelized is therefore to ensure that every parish, insofar as possible, has a “shallow end”—an entry-level means of getting one’s feet wet in the journey of faith. This may include programs of initial proclamation of the Gospel, such as Alpha; it may also include social events where people can get to know others in a relaxed, non-threatening environment before making a commitment of faith.

Evangelical Charity

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. [Matthew 5:16](#)

Our service to the poor and marginalized needs to be a clear witness to Jesus our Lord, not mistaken for humanist philanthropy.

Catholics around the world and in our local Church have developed a remarkable network of charitable programs for health care, disaster relief, hunger alleviation, poverty reduction, refugee aid, family services, counseling, and help for people in every form of need. We must continue and intensify these works of service that manifest God's love to those around us. In recent decades, however, there has been a tendency for Catholic charitable work to become separated from our primary calling to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is time to overcome that distinction. We need to ensure that in ministering to the material needs of others we are also responding to their spiritual thirst for God. Every Catholic charitable work must also be an authentic expression of Catholic faith. We must be unabashed to speak the name of Jesus and to invite every person to the fullness of life in him. The world needs the light that is in Christ alone.

Encounter, Grow, Witness

Those sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. [Mark 4:20](#)

“Encounter / Grow / Witness” is the threefold process for evangelization that has proven its worth in our local Church and will be our paradigm as we go forward in unleashing the Gospel. Every person in the Archdiocese is called to encounter Jesus anew, to grow daily as his disciple, and to give witness to the power of his mercy.

Encounter

An encounter with Jesus is a moment in our lives that has such impact it causes us to change how we live. Once we have encountered Christ, from that point forward we are either all in or all out. Jesus says, “Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” ([Mk 8:34](#)). We are faced with a decision to either walk away sad like the rich young man, or to surrender our whole life to him and live from that moment on as his disciple. Parishes need to constantly foster opportunities for people to encounter Jesus.

Grow

To follow Jesus is to be in a constant process of growth, like the seed that fell on rich soil. We seek to be more like Jesus, to treat others as he did, to pray as he prayed, to love as he loved, and to honor God in every area of our lives, including marriage, family life, finances, work, and leisure activities. Growing as his disciple demands a daily surrender to the one who loved us and gave his life for us: “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” ([Gal 2:20](#)). Parishes need to help parishioners to grow continually in discipleship and deepen their relationship with Christ.

Witness

Many Catholics tend to think our goal is essentially to be good and make it to heaven. In fact, our goal is to extend the kingdom of God on earth by making the world a place where Christ is known and loved, so that as many people as possible are brought with us to eternal life. To live fully as a disciple is to make disciples. All we need is this conviction: “Knowing Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive; that we have encountered him is the best thing that has happened in our lives, and making him known by our word and deeds is our joy.”¹⁵³¹ Parishes need to help every parishioner become a witness to God’s everlasting mercy and thereby unleash the Gospel to everyone they meet.

Calling Upon the Advocate

They went to the upper room.... All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. [*Acts 1:13-14*](#)

Prayer and intercession are indispensable components of the new evangelization, since God the Holy Spirit is the principal agent for unleashing the Gospel. Prayer is the way we access the unlimited divine power of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. The main reason Synod 16 was itself an experience of a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit was that it was preceded by a whole year of fervent prayer.

The Star of Evangelization

As at the first Pentecost, still today, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of the Apostles, leads us in prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit and inspires us with a sure confidence that the Lord hears and will not fail to answer. Mary was the very first person to proclaim the good news of Christ, when she welcomed his presence within her through the Holy Spirit and went in haste to share the good news with her cousin Elizabeth ([*Lk 1:35-40*](#)). Since then she has continued to help and guide the Church’s mission through her powerful intercession. Her appearance as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico in 1531 led to one of the most fruitful harvests of evangelization in history. Let us call upon her intercession that the Lord may bring about an unprecedented harvest in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

The Role of Intercessors

Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. [*Matthew 9:38*](#)

Intercession has always been the hidden engine of the Church’s mission. It is not by accident that the co-patrons of the missions are St. Francis Xavier, who traveled as far as Japan to preach the Gospel, and St. Thérèse the Little Flower, who spent her entire adult life in a cloistered convent, offering all her prayers and sufferings for missionaries around the world. Intercessory prayer cultivates the soil for the sowing of the Word. It can stir up spiritual hunger in a whole city or region, so that the hearts of even those who are far from God are prepared to hear the Gospel when it is preached to them. Those who are suffering, especially, should never feel they are useless to the Church’s mission. In fact, they have a unique capacity to empower evangelization by offering their sufferings in union with Christ, and praying for the grace of conversion for those who are being evangelized.

One way to avail ourselves of the power of intercession is for each parish to form an intercessory prayer team which is regularly informed of the parish’s evangelistic initiatives,

prays specifically for their success, and receives regular updates on how their prayers are being answered.

Victory over Spiritual Opposition

The Church's mission has never been carried out without opposition—sometimes cultural, social, or governmental, but always spiritual. “Our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (*Ephesians 6:12*). We need not be afraid, since we know who has already won the victory. But we do need to arm ourselves for spiritual combat, recognizing that “Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (*1 Peter 5:8*).

The faithful need help in understanding how to resist the evil one, exercising the authority they have in Christ. We must use all the weapons the Church has given us: prayer, especially the rosary, Scripture, the sacraments, and sacramentals such as holy water. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (*James 4:7-8*).

PROPOSITIONS AND ACTION STEPS

Be doers of the word and not hearers only *James 1:22*

The propositions and action steps which follow are the culmination of an intense effort to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit, through the people of God throughout the Archdiocese of Detroit. This effort began in November of 2015, by first listening to the many parishioners and pastors, who assembled in more than 240 Dialogue Gatherings to discern the Spirit's voice regarding their experiences around Encounter, Grow, and Witness. Through this effort, more than 11,000 comments were collected and synthesized in order to develop the propositions discussed at Synod 16, a three day event in which more than 400 Synod members gathered to discuss and discern the most critical and urgent ways in which to begin the journey of becoming a missionary Archdiocese. Out of 36 propositions, in a process that included voting by the Synod members, nine propositions rose to the top as being the most important to begin the journey. As you will see below, I accept and fully endorse these nine propositions that the Synod recognized as having the highest priority.

Subsequent to the Synod, I consulted with my Unleash the Gospel Leadership Team, a group of key advisors who have been prayerfully involved in planning for the Synod and assisting me in helping to transform our culture to embrace the New Evangelization. With their support, I commissioned a small working group to evaluate and once again synthesize, what was revealed by the Synod discussion, not just the voting. Upon their review, which included evaluation of over 400 comments from the Synod members and a review of the reports from 46 expert advisors, as well as a review of the actual video account of the Synod members reporting, they provided a detailed report regarding what was heard and what was revealed at the Synod, ever vigilant to hear the possible “prophet” among all the discussion.

Having received the report, I then consulted further to establish concrete action steps in support of the propositions. The action steps which follow were developed, as has been true this entire process, with prayerful discernment and dedication of the team members, assisted by many individuals along the way. For my part, I not only received proposed action steps from others, but have also been personally involved in developing these action steps, seeking

to be faithful to what the Holy Spirit has revealed throughout our Synod process. I am confident that these action steps, rooted in the Holy Spirit, and blessed by a “New Pentecost” will put us on a solid foundation to begin again, with a renewed energy, our work of missionary discipleship.

Action Step A

I will establish a New Evangelization Council by August 1, 2017. This council will:

1. Provide ongoing counsel to me as to additions and/or changes needed in the action steps in order to accomplish the Synod propositions.
2. Develop resources for measuring the success of these action steps as they relate to the propositions.
3. Provide ongoing counsel regarding overall evangelization efforts in the Archdiocese.

Action Step B

I charge the Judicial Vicar and Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Detroit to form a committee to review the Particular Law of the Archdiocese in light of the results of Synod 16. By January 7, 2020, the Judicial Vicar and Chancellor will present to the Archbishop of Detroit the work of the committee which will propose possible changes to Particular Law that are necessary in order to fulfill the work of Synod 16.

Families

Vision: Families who, having embraced their role as the domestic church and in connection with other families and single persons, actively seek the spiritual and social renewal of their neighborhoods, schools and places of work. Such families and individuals would display a strikingly counter-cultural way of living: grounded in prayer, Sacraments and attention to Scripture; unusually gracious hospitality; a capacity to include those on the margins of society; and joyful confidence in the providence of God even in difficult and stressful times.

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Envision and develop a practical plan for ongoing human and spiritual formation for all the stages of life (e.g., children, youth, adults, and seniors).

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

Formation for Mission

I charge AOD Central Services: Office of Family Life, Office of Evangelization, Office of Catechesis and Office for Christian Worship to lead the development of a plan in support of this proposition by June 2019. Some considerations for this plan need to be:

1. That in imitation of Christ, martyrdom is the pattern for fulfillment as a disciple of Jesus, and so preparation for this heroic witness is the measure for Christian formation.

2. Mindful of the Sacrament of Confirmation as the anointing with the Holy Spirit for mission, a thorough re-examination:
 - a. of the appropriate age for confirming of those baptized as infants,
 - b. of the possible forums for these celebrations, and
 - c. the forms of youth and young adult formation that ought to follow Confirmation.
3. That consideration be given to shaping Marriage preparation into a form of “Second Catechumenate.”
4. Support for families in difficult circumstances (divorce, widowed, pornography, infertility, etc.).
5. Assisting families to live out radical hospitality in their homes
6. Including cultural diversity throughout the plan.
7. Empowering parents as the primary witnesses of the faith.
8. Modeling key elements of discipleship and witnessing the same.

Family Mentoring and Accompaniment

I charge parishes to mentor and accompany families through:

1. Implementing the plan developed by AOD Central Services by January 2020.
2. Forming family discipleship groups, responsive to the needs of the community, that gather in homes to accompany one another with the joys and struggles of life.
3. Giving support to movements and Christian communities that promote family life and evangelization.
4. Using all existing parish programs and events (such as; preparation for Sacraments, social events, information nights, festivals, fish fry’s, sports events, etc.) as opportunities for families to encounter Jesus anew, grow daily as His disciples, and give witness to the power of His mercy.
5. Helping men and women understand their identity and reclaim their sacrificial role as Christian husbands/wives and fathers/mothers.

Christian Family Identity

I charge families to commit to re-claiming their identity in relationship to God.

1. Reclaim Sunday: attend Mass as a family and intentionally spend time with one another, including sharing a meal together.
2. Commit to forming your family in the love and power of sacred Scripture by placing it at the center of your family life. Study and reflect on Scripture, especially on the Sunday readings. Participate in Bible studies, use the Sunday readings, Scripture aids, and participate in family fellowship where Scripture is shared. Make full use of Sunday parish opportunities to unleash the Gospel in your family.
3. Create time for regular family meals without distraction to reclaim its sacred nature.
4. Commit to developing family prayer time. Make time to listen, share, and grow together as a family guided by the Lord in times of joy and trial. Trust and develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit. Seek out simple ways to pray that fit your family, giving primacy to the family rosary, Scripture reflection, especially the Sunday readings, and devotions. Seek out and initiate opportunities to pray with other families.
5. Reclaim the sacrament of reconciliation as a lived reality in your home: heal wounds and brokenness in your family through sacrifice, forgiveness, mercy and love.

6. Create a home where your family models Christ's love, become aware of your neighbor's needs and reach out to them with a welcoming spirit so as to share your faith.
7. Parents: be the primary witnesses of the faith to your family.

Parishes

Vision: Parishes are to be founded upon prayer and a culture of encounter with Jesus. This will lead to parishes that are ready to welcome others and mobilized to evangelize: invite, connect, mentor and send families and individuals into mission. Every activity and resource of the parish must be in alignment with the fundamental commitment to evangelization. Parish leadership should manifest a healthy teamwork that is oriented to equip parishioners with the necessary training, formation, planning and resources to initiate and realize meaningful endeavors to extend the Gospel to every corner of the parish territory.

Parish Culture

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Build a culture of life-changing personal encounter with Jesus that permeates every aspect of parish life and that leads to a loving encounter of our neighbor. (e.g., children, youth, adults, and seniors)

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I charge AOD Central Services: Office of Evangelization, Office of Catechesis and Office for Christian Worship to lead the development of resources and training by October of 2017 in order to accompany pastors and parish leadership as they seek to fulfill this proposition.
2. I charge pastors to recommit to a daily practice of personal prayer and intercession as their highest priority and to lead the parish to do the same. This should include beginning and ending all meetings with time for prayer that is an opportunity to encounter Jesus anew, grow daily as His disciples, and give witness to the power of His mercy.
3. I charge pastors to create a regular time for Eucharistic Exposition and Marian Devotion for the parish community and to promote participation.
4. I charge pastors to provide generous availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and inspire the faithful to celebrate and participate regularly.
5. I charge pastors and parish leadership to implement the following by June 2019:
 - a. Create a transformational Sunday experience (Hymns, Hospitality, Homily) that effectively models, inspires, and sends individuals and families forth into mission.
 - b. Lead the parish in a spirit of radical hospitality that permeates all parish activity and flows out to the community.
 - c. Understand the entire geographical territory of their parish to respond with cultural competency and outreach.
 - d. Gain a clear and dynamic understanding of a life-changing encounter with Jesus so they can create opportunities for others.
 - e. Provide "shallow entry points" for people who are seeking Jesus.

Parish Functions

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Equip, empower, support and send forth individuals and families in mission (e.g., evangelization, social and economic transformation, and spiritual and corporal works of mercy).

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I charge AOD Central Services: Office of Evangelization to lead the development of a model of total evangelization around Unleash the Gospel by June 2018.
2. I charge AOD Central Services: Office for Christian Worship to lead the development of a plan for equipping parishes with the necessary resources and formation to plan transformative Sunday liturgies, and liturgical events that will commission and send forth individuals and families for mission. This plan should be proposed by June 2018.
3. I charge parishes to begin incorporating this model of total evangelization into their parish by December 2019 and to revise their mission statements accordingly.
4. I charge parishes to have a prayer and intercession team, by December 2017, to pray for the mission of the parish and intentions from the leadership team and to provide ongoing prayer support of that team.
5. I call pastors and parish leaders to seek the counsel of families in order to most effectively accompany them as they discern, discover and live out the mission of the family.

Parish Leadership

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Establish a parish leadership team around the pastor as a normative practice, where team members develop shared responsibility and accountability both to the vision of the Archbishop and the mission of the parish. Extend the same team dynamics and practices to all parish and/or school staff.

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I charge AOD Central Services: Department of Parish Life and Services, along with the Office of Evangelization, to lead the creation of coaching teams with an initial pilot group to begin by December 2017 to assist in developing Archdiocesan standards and norms for organizational health patterned after elements of the Amazing Parish resources, such as:
 - a. Providing formation for all parish staff.
 - b. Building a healthy leadership team and establishing ways to share best practices.
 - c. Creating clarity for the entire parish by having answers to essential questions that guide and define the vision, mission, and assignment of responsibilities.
 - d. Over-communicating clarity throughout the parish through simple and precise messaging using multiple media at all levels of parish life.

- e. Reinforcing clarity in areas such as volunteers, and hiring, firing, rewarding, and compensating employees.
2. I charge AOD Central Services: Department of Parish Life and Services to lead the development of standards and norms for organizational health in parishes by June 2018, and to establish forums for helping parishes assess their strengths and challenges as they seek to meet these standards.
3. I charge all pastors to create a parish leadership team following Archdiocesan standards and norms for organizational health by December 2018.
4. I charge AOD Central Services: Departments of Parish Life and Human Resources to lead the development of a new model for parish structures (corresponding with the constitution of the Church) including consultative bodies and parish staffing that are in alignment with the vision of Unleash the Gospel by December 2019.
5. I charge the Episcopal Council, working with the Presbyteral Council, to create a system of support to clergy by August 2019 through:
 - a. Consultation with the Diaconate leadership, and making full use of the resources of Sacred Heart Major Seminary, develop a curriculum for ongoing formation of the clergy that puts its first priority on evangelizing and forming evangelizers.
 - b. Calling the presbyterate to ongoing formation and ensuring they have time for it.
 - c. While giving full consideration to the leadership responsibilities that necessarily belong to pastors, establishing structures which relieve them of managerial duties which can be delegated to others (in accord with the norm of Canon Law), so they have more time for their munus docendi (teaching office), especially the ministries of evangelization, preaching and catechesis.
 - d. Evaluating the priest assignment process and aligning it with the gifts and charisms of each priest.
 - e. Considering how best to facilitate priests sharing elements of communal life and extending fraternal support to one another.

Archdiocesan Central Services

Vision: Archdiocesan Central Services is to provide strategic and structural support to parishes and other Catholic entities, and to model the personal, spiritual and leadership characteristics of joyful missionary disciples.

Archdiocesan Central Services: First Priority

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Build a framework for mutual accountability between pastors, parishes, schools and the Central Services. To build a foundation for this, heal wounded relationships, build trust and practice transparency.

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. With assistance of my co-workers in Central Services, I will establish regular times for prayer and catechesis in order to advance the work of the new evangelization in the Archdiocese.

2. I charge the Moderator of the Curia and the Cabinet to reevaluate the Central Services organizational structure in light of mission, aligning roles, responsibilities, and just compensation to support the overall mission of Unleash the Gospel by August 2019.
3. I charge AOD Central Services to witness and model the developed standards and norms for organizational health.
4. I charge the Episcopal Council and Department of Parish Life and Services to lead the development of a transition management plan for parishes and schools to be clustered, merged or closed with these special considerations:
 - a. Forgiveness and reconciliation rooted in an intentional spirit of charity, vulnerability and humility with particular attention to those parishes and schools that previously went through the experience of being clustered, merged or closed.
 - b. Transition management training for clergy and lay ecclesial ministers.
 - c. Liturgical celebrations and other experiences that facilitate healing, deliverance, and reconciliation in a spirit of communion.
 - d. This plan should be in place by June 2018.
5. I charge the Episcopal Council, the Presbyteral Council and Moderator of the Curia to lead the development of a plan for accompanying and reconciling those individuals who have been wounded by the Church by June 2018.

Archdiocesan Central Services: Second Priority

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Invest in people, processes and tools that ensure effective, anticipatory and responsive communication to all those engaged or seeking engagement with the Church (internally, as well as with parishes, parishioners and the public).

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I charge the Moderator of the Curia and the Cabinet to create a team to evaluate communication and design creative, responsive methods and tools across the board: parishes, schools, central services, and those seeking engagement with the Church. This team should be created by December 2017 with a proposed strategy completed by December 2018.
2. I charge the Moderator of the Curia and the Cabinet to create a team to develop, evaluate and oversee a strategy that will:
 - a. Allow information and digital resources to flow securely and efficiently between the AOD, parishes and schools.
 - b. Connect and engage people involved in ministries.
 - c. Support a central repository of resources that facilitate an individual's journey to encounter, grow and witness to Christ.
 - d. This team should be created by December 2017 with a proposed strategy and plan completed by December 2018. Arch

Archdiocesan Central Services, Third Priority

Third Priority A

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Partner with Sacred Heart Major Seminary (SHMS) to develop practical and ongoing formation opportunities for clergy, lay ecclesial ministers and lay faithful around key areas of missionary activity (e.g., homiletics, family, culture, building teams, daily life evangelization, prayer, discernment and Catholic principles of social justice).

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I charge the New Evangelization Council to work with the faculty and administration of Sacred Heart Major Seminary beginning December 2018 to explore the possibility of establishing an institute dedicated to the Lay Witness in the World, with particular focus on fostering the dialogue between the Gospel and culture.
2. I charge the Moderator of the Curia and Rector of Sacred Heart Major Seminary to begin collaboration February 2018 on the following:
 - a. Develop practical and ongoing formation opportunities for lay ecclesial ministers and lay faithful around key areas of missionary activity.
 - b. Establish and strengthen associations of Christ's faithful to support the members in their common evangelizing mission and/or to advance important goals, especially knowledge and prayerful use of the Scriptures making the Holy Eucharist central to our identity as disciples, and helping to renew the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
3. I charge the Sacred Heart Major Seminary leadership and faculty, in collaboration with the Office for Black Catholic Ministry, to study how, in accordance with the Seminary's mission, to marshal and organize resources to advance the new evangelization in the African-American community. This process of study should begin by February 2018.

Third Priority B

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Build cultural competency among individuals, parishes and archdiocesan leadership to acknowledge and break down barriers that divide us – including race, ethnicity, sex and socioeconomic status.

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I charge AOD Central Services: Department of Evangelization, Catechesis and Schools to lead the development of a process and timeline for providing USCCB: Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers Training for all (i.e. Central Services, SHMS, Parishes, Schools, Cemeteries, etc.) by December 2017.
2. I charge Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan and AOD Central Services Office for Family Life to provide resources for developing a culture of empathy and understanding throughout the Archdiocese, according to the light of the Gospel, so that those who experience the challenges of gender identity and same sex attraction, will find support for growing as a human person in the virtue of Christ-like chastity. Resources and formation will be available by December 2018.

3. I will establish a working group to develop, on the basis of St. John Paul's teaching on inculturation of the Gospel, an initiative to express forms of Catholic life in the cultural idioms of the African-American community of Southeast Michigan. This group will begin work in February 2018.
4. I charge the Office for Hispanic Ministry to expand its efforts to share the riches of our Hispanic cultures with our non-Hispanic communities of the Archdiocese.
5. I charge the Moderator of the Curia to convene staff from the departments of Development and Stewardship, Finance and Administration, Evangelization, Catechesis and Schools and Parish Life and Services to lead the development of a plan that will seek to break barriers of socio-economic status and build mutual respect for the gifts God has given to all the faithful to be completed by December 2018.

Third Priority C

I affirm and support the following Synod proposition:

Actively support the re-envisioning of the mission, funding and governance of Catholic schools.

In order to accomplish or support this proposition:

1. I confirm, in light of what I heard the Holy Spirit say to our local Church through Synod 16, that Catholic Schools are an apostolate that is the responsibility of all parishes and all Christ's faithful. This conviction needs to be a foundational principle for the renewal of this ministry.
2. I confirm and charge, in light of what I heard the Holy Spirit say to our local Church through Synod 16, the Catholic Schools Council to move us forward on the path to ensure that any Catholic family in the Archdiocese of Detroit that seeks an excellent Catholic education for their children can have one.
3. I charge the Catholic Schools Council to ensure that schools have evangelization and discipleship as their highest priority as they re-envision the mission, funding and governance of Catholic schools.
4. I charge AOD Central Services: Office for Evangelization, Office for Catechesis, and Office for Health, Athletics, Physical Education and Safety along with the Catholic Youth Organization to develop a plan to cease sporting activities on Sunday and to ensure evangelization and discipleship is their highest priority. This plan should be developed by August 2018 for implementation in the 2019/20 school year.
5. I charge AOD Central Services: Department of Evangelization, Catechesis and Schools to implement the new Religion Curriculum by September 2017.
6. I charge all Catholic schools to follow the AOD Central Services-developed standards and norms of organizational health (to include following the "leadership team" model as described in Action Step 2.3-1) beginning the 2019/20 school year.

CONCLUSION

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.... And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. [Acts 2:42-47](#)

This letter ends where it began, in chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles. Here we see the Church living an authentically Christian communal life: following the teaching of the apostles, practicing fellowship and care for one another, partaking in the sacraments, and praying together. And we see how God blesses them by adding to their numbers. We see a mystery, a reality at once human and divine, the created manifestation of the work of the Creator Spirit. The Church is the sacrament of the risen Christ in our midst. She is alive because he is alive. She grows with the vigor and power of his divine life. And her living is not for her own sake but for the sake of her mission. Her Lord sends her to proclaim the good news that “the crucified one has been raised,” just as he was sent by the Father.

In this text from Acts, St. Luke paints a beautiful portrait of the Church in her first days in Jerusalem. Since then, like a flourishing vine, her branches have extended over the face of the whole earth. The Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit is a living branch of this living vine. What St. Luke said of the Church in Jerusalem can be said truly of us. It is as the Church of Christ in southeast Michigan, founded by Christ and alive in Christ, that we take up in earnest the new evangelization.

The unleashing of the Gospel is not something we do individually but a communal task, a work of the whole mystical body of Christ to which we belong. If we are living as a band of joyful missionary disciples, our communal life is itself a radiant witness to the power of the Gospel.

It falls to me as the principal shepherd of this local Church to lead and direct our community in answering the Lord’s call to be about making disciples of all nations. In response to what I have heard the Holy Spirit saying to us in Synod 16, I pledge to make “Unleashing the Gospel” according to the direction of Synod 16 the road map for the years remaining in my ministry as Archbishop of Detroit.

I am firmly convinced that the graces bestowed upon the Church in Detroit in Synod 16 are a great spiritual treasure, riches which the Holy Spirit has poured out upon us for the monumental task that lies ahead. With the help of God I will be a true and faithful steward of these gifts that are the common property of us all for the work that has been entrusted to us all. I am establishing the New Evangelization Council as a permanent body to assist me in assessing the response of the Church in the Archdiocese to Synod 16 and to advise on ways to make continued progress in unleashing the Gospel. In this way I will have the support I need in the discharge of my stewardship. And I look to give annually at Pentecost an accounting of my stewardship of the graces of Synod 16.

As we embark on the missionary transformation of our local Church, a particular companion and intercessor for us is Venerable Father Solanus Casey. I see the recent announcement that he will be beatified in the months ahead as an incomparable grace for us: a model for the work of evangelization and a providential sign from God that we are doing his will. In his years of humble service as doorkeeper to St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit, Father Solanus met everyone who came to him—Catholic or non-Catholic—with the warmth and compassion of Christ. He provided soup for the hungry, kind words for the troubled, and Christ’s healing grace for the sick—always with the good news that in Christ God loves and cares for his world. Father Solanus was a walking proclamation of God’s love. May we follow his example! Along with him, we also have as heavenly partners Our Lady, the Star of the New Evangelization, and our archdiocesan patroness St. Anne. You might also have your own

personal companion; mine for the new evangelization is St. Bernadette of Lourdes, who courageously and humbly carried out God’s mission for her even in the face of formidable opposition.

Where will the Archdiocese of Detroit be in twenty years? My hope is that it will be a community of joyful missionary disciples and of saints united in Jesus—that there will even be a whole host of causes for beatification!—and that southeast Michigan will be a place of the manifest presence of God. We are a local Church in movement, and I invite every member of the Church to join in as we follow where Christ leads. Not only the destination but the journey itself is reason for encouragement and joy in the transformative power of the Gospel. As Father Solanus always said, we thank God ahead of time for what he is doing for us.

From the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament, 3 June 2017, the Vigil of Pentecost

The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit

ENDNOTES

Section 1

1. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*, 75.
2. Cf. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 24.
3. See also [Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:46-39; Acts 1:8](#).
4. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, 14.
5. Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 6; 13.
6. John Paul II, address at the opening of the 19th Ordinary Plenary Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), Port-au-Prince, Haiti, March 9, 1983.
7. *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 246. cf. John Paul II, *That They May Be One (Ut Unum Sint)*, 98.
8. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.
9. Pope Benedict XVI, [Letter on the Society of St. Pius X, March 10, 2009](#)
10. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
11. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.
12. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 5, sermon 20.
13. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 33.
14. Cf. [Acts 4:31; 8:26-29; 39-40; 10:19; 13:1-13; 15:28; 16:6-10](#).
15. Cf. [Mt 16:21-22; 26:35, 69-75](#).
16. Cf. [Acts 2:14-41; 3:1-26; 4:8-13](#).
17. Cf. [Mt. 7:13-14; Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:16-18; 5:29](#).
18. See also [Lk 24:46-47; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20](#).
19. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 12.
20. *Ibid.*, 264.
21. Pope John Paul II, *On Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae)*, 25.
22. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 164-165.
23. Augustine, *Sermons*, 272 (PL 38, 1247).
24. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, 21.

25. Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 73; cf. 90-98, 122.
26. Cf. Pope Francis, *Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee Year (Misericordiae Vultus)*, 17.
27. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 84-87.
28. *Ibid.*, 84.
29. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 6.
30. Recent books that provide very helpful guidance in this regard are James Mallon, *Divine Renovation. Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2014); and Michael White and Tom Corcoran, *Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, and Making Church Matter* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2013).
31. Cf. Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes*, 11.
32. “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, 41.
33. See the, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 799-801, 951, 2003. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (2016).
34. Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 3.
35. Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 9.
36. St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* trans. G. W. Butterworth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964), 44.
37. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 120.
38. Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 2.
39. Pope John Paul II, *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, 9; Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 6.
40. *Ibid.*, 28.
41. Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 26; cf. Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4.
42. [Address at the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, May 30, 1998.](#)
43. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 106.
44. *Ibid.*, 127.
45. *Ibid.*, 49.
46. *Ibid.*, 169.
47. Cf. [Eph 5:25](#) Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 72.
48. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11.
49. *Ibid.*, 33-57.
50. Mallon, *Divine Renovation*, 212.
51. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 324.
52. *Ibid.*, 10.
53. [Final Report of the Fifth General Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean \(CELAM\)](#) (Aparecida, Brazil, 2007), 29.