

**We Proclaim
Jesus as Lord!**

--- A Pastoral Letter on Missionary Discipleship ---

MOST REV. ROBERT J. MCCLORY

Bishop, Diocese of Gary

February 2, 2022 - Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord

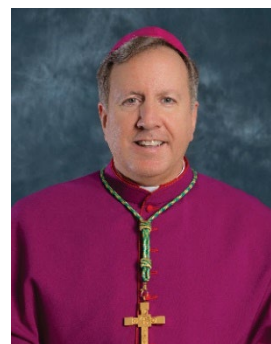
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
Disciples <i>AND</i> Missionaries.....	Page 3
Ten Principles of Missionary Discipleship	Page 7
1. We proclaim Jesus as Lord	Page 9
2. We are all called to be missionary disciples	Page 11
3. We invite others into a personal encounter with Jesus	Page 13
4. This is God’s work, not our own.....	Page 15
5. Prayer and hard work are required of us, nonetheless.....	Page 17
6. Our efforts as missionary disciples will require our own ongoing conversion	Page 19
7. Joy should be evident in our invitation to others to enter into a personal encounter with Jesus	Page 21
8. Healing and reconciliation are central to our efforts as missionary disciples.....	Page 23
9. An inviting and welcoming outreach is essential to our efforts as missionary disciples.....	Page 27
10. We should embrace a sense of urgency in this work.....	Page 29
A Concluding Reflection	Page 31
Endnotes	Page 35

“ *We proclaim Jesus as Lord
and ourselves as your servants
for Jesus’ sake.* ”

— 2 Corinthians 4:5

As I approach my second anniversary as your bishop, I am reminded of our gathering at the Cathedral of the Holy Angels on February 11, 2020, for my episcopal ordination. At that time, I shared my episcopal motto “Iesum Dominum Praedicamus,” taken from the first part of 2 Corinthians 4:5, “We proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” On that occasion, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Papal Nuncio to the United States, issued the following challenge:



“The Holy Father wants a missionary Church and His Holiness is counting on you [Bishop McClory] to lead the people of the Diocese of Gary to be both disciples and missionaries.”

These words continue to inspire and guide our local Catholic Church.

This pastoral letter is intended as an extended reflection on missionary discipleship: What does it mean to be a disciple and a missionary? How can we proclaim Jesus as Lord? What does it mean to be an outward focused Church serving a hurting world? These questions and themes arose as a prominent part of our synod discussions initiated in 2021 at the prompting of Pope Francis, who invited all the world’s dioceses to enter a synodal process on the topic of synodality, our way of being Church at this pivotal moment in time.

Our recent synod experience is also an effort to refresh the extraordinary gift of Synod 2017 under the leadership of my predecessor, Bishop Donald J. Hying, culminating in his pastoral letter re-enforcing the Great Commission to “go make disciples.” (Matthew 28:19-20) To accept the charge to “go make disciples” is another way of saying that we are called to be missionary disciples. The one who sends us out is Jesus himself.

It is important that we ground our efforts in an abiding trust in Jesus as we pivot from the diocesan portion of our synod process to the parish and institutional portion in which the work of our Synod will unfold over an extended time. To assist with this effort, in this letter I offer three

fundamental reflections on our faith. I first examine the relationship that exists between our calling as disciples and the missionary impulse that is so central to the Church's work in the world, using the third mystery of the "Mysteries of Light," or Luminous Mysteries, introduced to the world by Saint John Paul II. I further articulate the meaning of "missionary discipleship," drawing on the Gospel of Luke and the insights of Pope Francis. Finally, I offer an image I believe reflects or illustrates this pivotal moment in the life of our local Church — the image of a bonfire.

I hope these reflections will provide a common reference as together we boldly undertake the work that lies before us. May it be shared to serve as a formational foundation for all who will participate in consultative processes at the parish and institutional level as we seek to rediscover our identity as both disciples and missionaries.

DISCIPLES AND MISSIONARIES

In 2002, Saint John Paul II made a significant change to one of the most revered devotions in the Church, the Rosary. He added the **Luminous Mysteries** to a tradition previously comprised of three sets of mysteries: the Joyful Mysteries, which celebrate the infancy narratives and Jesus' childhood; the Sorrowful Mysteries, which venerate the passion and death of Jesus; and the Glorious Mysteries, which recall the resurrection of Jesus and the imparting of the Holy Spirit and which honor the Blessed Virgin Mary as well. The Mysteries of Light, known commonly as the Luminous Mysteries, focus in a particular way on Jesus' three-year public ministry and include his Baptism, the Wedding Feast of Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom, the Transfiguration and the Institution of the Eucharist.

I call your attention to the third of these Luminous Mysteries: **Proclamation of the Kingdom**. It speaks in a powerful way to our two-fold identity as disciples and as missionaries. In fact, these callings cannot be separated from each other. A missionary is not a particular kind of disciple. To be a disciple is to be a missionary, a truth revealed in the Proclamation of the Kingdom, the Good News of Jesus.

“ *Jesus is the Good News!* ”

It is important to understand that we cannot separate Jesus' Proclamation of the Good News from his person. **Jesus is the Good News!** Although the four Gospels differ somewhat in their portrayal of the Messiah, they attest to his core message with great clarity: the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel! Extraordinary acts of mercy were coupled with this proclamation of the Good News — acts of healing and the forgiveness of sins.

In Jesus, the power of God was projected into the world with a new intimacy. In proclaiming the Good News, Jesus affirmed that what generation upon generation had prayed for, waited for, hoped for and longed for was him. In Jesus, everything changed! Those who heard his voice were no longer limited to hoping for peace, comfort, consolation, healing and freedom. These human desires are now realized in his person. Jesus is Emmanuel, God is with us.

Jesus' mission did not end with the Proclamation of the Kingdom. He invited his followers into a deep and abiding relationship with him. He embraced them as aspiring disciples and he challenged them to be missionaries as well. Jesus proclaimed the Good News and then shared his saving mission with his disciples, encouraging them to do the same.

We, too, are invited to heed the voice of the Master. We, too, can be transformed by his presence in our lives and his example. **Having encountered Christ, we long to experience his love ever more deeply. We recognize Jesus as so much more than a friend, wisdom figure or folk hero. He is our Savior, our hope and our destiny;** and we are challenged each day to imitate him and so participate in his ongoing work in the world.

We are called to be fully active in our discipleship and this means that we must be missionaries, too. This is the great challenge of our time. Jesus does not call some of us to be disciples and others to be missionaries. To be a disciple of Jesus, one must embrace the missionary calling, too. Unfortunately, few of us feel prepared to embrace the missionary responsibility that is fundamental to discipleship. Yet as disciples, we realize that the Good News cannot be contained. The truth about Jesus and his promise of salvation should be shared with everyone! It must be shared and not just with those who look like us, act like us, or sound like us and not just with

“ *How am I being called to
share Jesus, to serve others?* ”

someone from our own socioeconomic class or faith community and not just with someone with whom we tend to agree — but with everyone.

Missionary activity comes in all shapes and sizes. Few among us will be asked to stand on a street corner testifying to God’s love, even though some in our diocese are committed to this kind of evangelization. For most of us, our unique response to the missionary impulse will emerge over time as we ponder a question that applies to all aspiring disciples: “How am I being called to share Jesus, to serve others?” This question applies to all of us, including the homebound whose missionary work may be focused solely – and beautifully – on prayer.

Matthew’s Gospel explains the two-fold nature of missionary discipleship: “Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, he was teaching in the synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and curing every disease and illness.” (Matthew 9:35) Jesus was preaching and healing, calling others to repentance and inviting them ever more deeply into the Kingdom of God. Matthew goes on: “At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them,” (Matthew 9:36) because they were troubled and alone.

The crowds needed a shepherd. They needed Jesus and Jesus did not disappoint. He did not leave them troubled or alone. He was then and remains the Good Shepherd. And because of this, we cannot leave those whom we encounter troubled or alone, not if we are true followers of Christ. We have the answer, the remedy, the ministry and the mission needed to proclaim the Kingdom in our time. This answer, this remedy, this ministry and this mission are meant to be shared now, both near and far. We certainly should have a personal relationship with Jesus, yet we must also be a missionary.

Pope Francis uses the image of a field hospital in making this point. A field hospital is pitched among the wounded. Sometimes, immediate, life-sustaining care must be provided in a makeshift facility. We can trust that we have the treatment that is so desperately needed by those among us who are troubled and by those among us who have been abandoned. We can bind these spiritual wounds, not because we are special or uniquely endowed, but because we have Jesus and because we are compelled as disciples of Jesus to share the Good News, to bring healing and reconciliation when and where we are.

Matthew's Gospel goes on to identify a chief obstacle to Jesus' ongoing work in the world: "(T)he harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few, so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Matthew 9:37) Again, this is a principal challenge of our time. We are called to be missionary disciples that are willing to join the Master's harvest.

If you only look on the surface, many people today seem to be living happy, fulfilling lives. Few appear to need anything more – just look at social media. We should not be deceived by appearances. We know that many of these virtual presentations are less than fully honest and sadly superficial. We know, too, that there is considerable suffering and sadness behind many of these facades. Many are troubled and many are alone in our own time and place.

Our world is in need of disciples who are willing to tend to the needs of all — both the baptized and unbaptized. Our world needs disciples who will share the Good News, proclaiming Jesus as Lord, Son of the Father, whose love and mercy are available to everyone. Let us boldly proclaim Jesus as Lord. Let us bravely bring healing when and wherever we can.

Sharing the Good News does not require perfection.

We may be “wounded healers,” but that is okay. Few among us have achieved perfection in any sense of the term. **Sharing the Good News does not require perfection.** Indeed, the Good News we proclaim is God's Good News, not our own. We are simply asked to make it manifest in the world. The healing we effect is God's gift. We are privileged to share it as best we can. And the reconciliation we hope to engender in and among those whom we encounter is God's peace and God's hope for all of us. We are the voice, the hands and the feet of the Body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27) As St. Paul put it, we are challenged to put on the “mind of Christ.” (Philippians 2:5) It is Jesus who continues to act in the world in and through us.

We are indeed called as disciples *and* missionaries. The first relationship both informs and requires the second. Further, we are called at this moment in time to serve in a world that is very much in need of disciples and very much in need of missionaries, too.

The call to fulfill the Great Commission was not reserved to “good times” or to favorable conditions. Much has happened over the intervening 24 months since I was ordained your bishop. Perhaps most obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us, bringing much suffering and intensifying isolation and social unrest.

COVID-19 and several other challenges have also revealed disconcerting trends of a longer-term nature. We know, for instance, that membership in our parishes is down and so, too, participation in Sunday worship and the sacraments. This is true, not just in the Diocese of Gary, but in the nation as a whole. Some have concluded that the Church is in a state of permanent decline and others wrangle over the precise cause or causes of these developments. Indeed, we could all too easily be disheartened or even divided by these “signs of the times.”

“ *As believers, we are called
to bring hope and healing.* ”

As believers, we are called to bring hope and healing. Jesus has not abandoned us in this task. We are not alone. Pope Francis has affirmed this article of faith. “I’m never hopeless,” he insists. “We are accompanied.”¹ Further, “I take hope from the last words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel: ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:20).”² I, too, take great hope that Jesus is with us as we respond to his command to be missionary disciples.

Yes, we proclaim Jesus as Lord!

TEN PRINCIPLES OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

T*o whom should we look for guidance as disciples walking together during this season of prayer, conversation and invitation? We look to Jesus* as revealed in the Gospels. We look, as well, to Pope Francis, who has built upon the work of his predecessors Saint Paul VI, Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI in producing a substantial body of work on the nature of missionary discipleship, most notably in *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel.

We are particularly blessed that in 2022 the Church will focus on the Gospel of Luke during the liturgical year that ends on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Luke's Gospel is celebrated as the Gospel of hospitality and acceptance. As noted by Brenden Byrne, "(t)he whole idea of 'acceptance/nonacceptance' is pivotal to Luke's understanding of the ministry of Jesus. The 'acceptable year of the Lord' is the season of God's 'hospitality' to the human race, which it is Jesus' mission to proclaim and enact."³

It is in Luke's Gospel, too, that the ministry of evangelization is explained most clearly and most notably in the person of the Blessed Mother. The assurance that we are not alone is disclosed in both Luke's Gospel and the continuance of his narrative in the Acts of the Apostles. Whereas Jesus is the driving force of the narrative in Luke's Gospel, the Holy Spirit assumes this pivotal role in Acts. Jesus' disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue his ministry — the proclamation of the Good News of the Father's love.

“ *Our call to missionary discipleship will require a renewed commitment to hospitality.* ”

These descriptions in Luke's Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles apply to the challenges we face today with respect to the Great Commission to “go 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) Our call to missionary discipleship will require a renewed commitment to hospitality. It will require that we boldly take up the ministry of Jesus in our time, never forgetting that we are not alone in this struggle.

We can discern ten distinct principles pertaining to missionary discipleship within the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles: (1) *We proclaim Jesus as Lord*, (2) *We are all called to be missionary disciples*, (3) *We invite others into a personal encounter with Jesus*, (4) *This is God's work, not our own*, (5) *Prayer and hard work are required of us*, (6) *Our efforts as missionary disciples will require our own ongoing conversion*, (7) *Joy should be evident in our invitation to others to enter into a personal encounter with Jesus*, (8) *Healing and reconciliation are central to our efforts*, (9) *An inviting and welcoming outreach is essential to our efforts* and (10) *We should embrace a sense of urgency in this work*.

Each of these principles will be addressed, with insights shared from Cycle C of the Sunday Lectionary and the wisdom of Pope Francis.



PRINCIPLE ONE

WE PROCLAIM JESUS AS LORD —2 *Corinthians* 4:5

Luke's Gospel reveals Jesus as more than a wise man, more than a teacher, more than a healer and more than a Jewish prophet. In fact, he is much more. The Apostolic Tradition, drawing on the Gospels, affirms Jesus as the Son of God who was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. He is revealed as the Son of God who suffered, died and was buried, only to rise again from the dead. On the Third Sunday of Advent (Cycle C), we hear that Jesus is greater than John and that he "will come to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Luke 3:10-18) After Christmas, as we recall Jesus' baptism, we hear the voice that came down from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) In the Gospel reading from the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C), Jesus declares: "Today this Scripture passage [i.e., a year acceptable to the Lord] is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21) Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture!

On Ash Wednesday, Jesus invites us to respond to his offer of salvation in these direct words from the Gospel of Mark: "Repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15) During the Third Sunday in Lent (Cycle C), in Luke's account of the Transfiguration, the voice of the Father is heard again: "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." (Luke 9:35) During the Triduum, we will enter into Jesus' passion and death and at the Easter Vigil Mass, Luke's Gospel will recall the empty tomb and the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that he would "rise on the third day." (Luke 24:7) This will be followed by Luke's account of the Ascension in the Acts of the Apostles, in which Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, (Acts 1:1-11), and also the inauguration of the mission of the Church by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-11)



*God loved me and gave himself up for me...
(this is) what calls us to be missionary disciples.*



—Pope Francis

The Church does not shy away from these truths. As noted in the Baptismal Rite, "(t)his is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord." We are not free to dilute these truths as we "go forth to make disciples." Pope Francis is clear in this regard: **"The firm center of Christianity is the essential proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It means that God loved me and gave himself up for me. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His love on the cross, are what calls us to be missionary disciples."**⁴ Indeed, we can never presume to "domesticate the power of the face of Christ."⁵ Pope Francis advises us, instead, to abide always in a "reverence for the truth. This is the humility of heart which recognizes that the word is always beyond us...[As Pope John Paul II put it], 'we are neither its masters or owners, but its guardians, heralds and servants.'"⁶



Pope Francis encourages all missionary disciples to concentrate on the ‘essentials of the faith, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary...’



At the same time, Pope Francis encourages all missionary disciples to concentrate on the **“essentials of the faith, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary... (W)hat shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.”⁷** The proclamation of Jesus’ suffering, death, burial and resurrection must stand foremost in the “hierarchy of truths”⁸ we proclaim.

Reflection:

- Do we shy away from the *scandal of the cross* in our proclamation of the word and in our teaching?
- Do we shy away from the truths of the faith when we share our own journey of discipleship with others?
- Does our preaching proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and does it invite a response on the part of the listener and compel those to whom it is proclaimed to share it with others?

PRINCIPLE TWO

WE ARE ALL CALLED TO BE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

We acknowledge Jesus as priest, prophet and king — three identities shared with each of us at our baptism. Having been anointed as such, we are compelled to continue the work of Jesus in our journey. We are to do as he did. During his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, he healed and he confronted evil. We see this three-fold dynamic at work most clearly in Luke’s Gospel, as Jesus sends his closest associates out ahead of him. “He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal [the sick].” (Luke 9:1–2) Jesus then extends this same three-fold mission to another 72 disciples in chapter 10. They, too, are directed to proclaim the Good News, to heal those in need of healing and to confront evil. As Gerhard Lohfink notes, “[Jesus’ disciples] are to do exactly what Jesus does. They share his fate, his duties, his joys and his sorrows.”⁹ And in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke’s account reveals that this is exactly what the disciples do. They carry on Jesus’ three-fold mission — they live out his three-fold identity as priest, prophet and king.

And this applies to us, too. This three-fold mission is a consequence of our baptism and our sharing in Jesus’ three-fold identity as priest, prophet and king. It is not optional — it is what it means to be a missionary disciple.

Pope Francis has affirmed this understanding of missionary discipleship: “Evangelization is the task of the Church. The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way toward God.”¹⁰ And this involves more than just a few among us. All Christians are called to participate in this essential work: **“In virtue of their baptism, all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples...”**¹¹

“*In virtue of their baptism, all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples...*”
— Pope Francis

This focus of the Church’s work extends well beyond the faithful who find their way to our pews each week. According to Pope Francis, the new evangelization must be “carried out in three principal settings. In the first place, we can mention the area of **ordinary pastoral ministry...** A second area is that of **the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism**, who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith... Lastly, we cannot forget that evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel **to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.**”¹²

The Church is not free to preach exclusively to the choir. All are called to holiness. Hunkering down as a remnant Church in the midst of a hostile world is not an option for missionary disciples.

Our efforts in this regard must exhibit a certain boldness born out of our trust in God. As Pope Francis notes, “(h)oliness is also *parrhesia* (candid speech): it is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in the world...How often we are tempted to keep close to the shore! Yet the Lord calls us to put out into the deep and let down our nets...”¹³

At the same time, Pope Francis is aware of the anxiety this understanding of missionary discipleship can engender in some. He affirms that “(f)ear of the mission can be a sign of the Holy Spirit. We feel, at once, both inadequate to the task and called to it.”¹⁴ He assures us that great learning is not required. People respond to authentic witness more than to learned discourse.

According to Pope Francis, “People are looking for someone to listen to them. Someone willing to grant them time, to listen to their dramas and difficulties. This is what I call the ‘apostolate of the ear,’ and it is important. Very important.”¹⁵

Reflection:

- Do we recognize missionary discipleship as an essential aspect of our Christian identity?
- Does our proclamation of the Word of God and our Christian witness reflect our commitment to this essential aspect of our baptismal identity?
- Do we understand our call as missionaries to include the baptized, the fallen away and unbelievers?

PRINCIPLE THREE

WE INVITE OTHERS TO A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

Although we are commissioned to proclaim Jesus as Lord, it is not enough to distill the person of Jesus into a static set of dogmatic statements. As Donald Senior has noted: “It is not really part of the Christian program that people should simply ‘know about’ Jesus. Genuine Christianity is based on knowing Jesus. The urgency of the Christian mission since its beginning has been that people should come to know Jesus personally and, because of that relationship, to transform their lives.”¹⁶ Pope Francis quotes Pope Benedict XVI in making this same point: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”¹⁷

The compelling nature of this invitation is revealed in Luke’s Gospel reading for the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C), in which Jesus confronts Peter with the question all Christians must face at one time or another: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responds: “The Christ of God.” (Luke 9:18-24) As we know, this leap of faith comes at a cost for Peter, as it does for all disciples. Later in Luke’s Gospel, when an aspiring disciple hesitates in responding, Jesus reminds him of the cost of discipleship. (Luke 9:51-62) Christian discipleship requires more than intellectual assent and is more than a casual commitment. It requires a personal relationship that is all-encompassing and gives direction and meaning to life.

Pope Francis affirms this understanding of relationship: “At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising with him.”¹⁸ He thus invites

“ *Pope Francis invites all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.* ”

“all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them...”¹⁹ Why? Because with Jesus, life becomes “richer” and with him it is “easier to find meaning in everything.”²⁰

This is why we evangelize, according to Pope Francis. “**A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks with him, breaths with him, works with him...** A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody.”²¹ Indeed, “(o)n 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 [and] strengthen you.’”²²

How this invitation is shared in our time will depend on the audience to which it is conveyed. Some nominal Catholics and even some who are disillusioned or angry with the Church may retain

some semblance of a relationship with Jesus or at least the memory of one. It is a greater challenge for those whose “social imagination” can no longer consider the possibility of a God who loves them and cares for them.

“ *It is helpful to think of encountering Jesus and conversion as a lifelong process.* ”

It is helpful to think of encountering Jesus and conversion as a lifelong process. First, we want to bring people to an encounter with Jesus. Then, we encourage them to respond to that love and to grow daily as his disciples. Finally, those who are transformed by his love are called to give witness to the power of his mercy to others. Evangelization and discipleship should be part of the ordinary life of every Christian as we share the one whom we have encountered with those who have forgotten about him or who may have never heard the message of the Gospel.

As we anticipate and encounter questions, we are not without hope and guidance. The Church affirms that certain questions are universal and are asked still, in our post-modern culture. “(I)n the face of modern developments there is a growing body of people who are asking the most fundamental of all questions or are glimpsing them with keener insight: *What is humanity? What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death, which have not been eliminated by all of this progress? What is the purpose of these achievements, purchased at so high a price? What can people contribute to society? What can they expect from it? What happens after this earthly life has ended?*”²³

The response to these most basic of questions can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “By love, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. He has thus provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life.”²⁴ In the words of St. Peter, “Master, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

Reflection:

- In our proclamation of the word and in our teaching, do we stress abstract truths over the need for a personal relationship with Jesus?
- Do we understand what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus?
- Do we effectively communicate this understanding of discipleship to others?
- Have we been adequately awakened to a hunger for a personal relationship with Jesus?
- Do our RCIA and Religious Education Programs use the stories of Jesus in the Sunday Lectionary in order to draw participants into a deeper relationship with Jesus?
- Do we offer a full continuum of adult education and formation opportunities in our parishes? In our ministries in the Diocese of Gary?
- Are we committed to reaching out to lapsed Catholics, the “unchurched,” and seekers in order to invite them, too, into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus?

PRINCIPLE FOUR

THIS IS GOD’S WORK, NOT OUR OWN

We should not assume for a moment that our efforts to evangelize the world or even our own family members and friends are dependent on us. The work of missionary discipleship is God’s work. Jesus reminded his closest associates of this near the end of his three-year ministry: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Jesus initiated his relationships with his closest collaborators. In evangelizing others, we simply convey or affirm Jesus’ invitation to those who seek him. We cooperate to the best of our abilities when and where we can. Our success in evangelizing others is not dependent on *our* efforts, but in faith we make the effort — even though we cannot really be certain what “success” might mean in any given encounter.

“*God walks with us even in our most challenging moments. He walks with us as we labor in his vineyard as missionary disciples.*”

The reading for the Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time (Cycle C) is apocalyptic in nature (Luke 21:5-19). Despite its dark tone, Jesus consoles his disciples with these words: “Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.” This teaching does not negate the need for our best efforts in proclaiming Jesus as Lord. It reminds us that God walks with us even in our most challenging moments. He walks with us as we labor in his vineyard as missionary disciples.

Pope Francis affirms this view: **“The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative. ‘He has loved us first.’ (1 Jn 4:19)”**²⁵ Moreover, our success in evangelizing others cannot be assessed in human terms: “Because we do not always see [the seeds we plant] growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks.”²⁶

Given the formidable challenges we face, the failure to recognize this truth can lead to discouragement, an ever-present possibility Pope Francis has confronted directly: “The complaint that ‘everything is broken’ is answered by the claim that ‘it can’t be fixed,’ or ‘what can I do?’ This feeds into disillusionment and despair...”²⁷

“No words of encouragement will be enough,” according to Pope Francis, “unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel.”²⁸

Reflection:

- Do we earnestly pray for the graces needed to fulfill God's hopes and dreams for our parish communities? For the diocese as a whole? For the universal Church?
- How do we understand what it means to be successful as a parish community? As missionary disciples?
- How do we measure our success in this regard?
- Does knowing that the work of making disciples belongs primarily to God hold us back or somehow "let us off the hook?"

PRINCIPLE FIVE

PRAYER AND HARD WORK WILL BE REQUIRED OF US

Luke's Gospel does not shy away from depicting the hard work of missionary discipleship. In the Gospel reading for the Third Sunday in Lent (Cycle C), Jesus shares the story of an unfruitful fig tree. The gardener saves the fig tree from the orchard owner's wrath by promising to "cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it." The gardener is then granted a year in which to revive the fig tree. (Luke 13:1-9) When it was written, this story was probably understood as a parable about Israel. We can understand the fig tree as wayward mankind, too and the gardener as the Church. Hard work will be required if we are to realize God's hopes and dreams for his people, just as hard work was required in the case of the fig tree.

In this same reading, Jesus uses two additional images to convey the nature of the work that may be required of us to fulfill God's purposes. The first is a builder who must "calculate the cost" of constructing a tower before proceeding, lest "onlookers should laugh at him." The second is a general who must determine if his ten thousand troops will be sufficient to the task before he goes into battle. (Luke 14:25-33) Making disciples may be God's work, but our part will require planning, resource management and effective execution.

“ *The way of
missionary discipleship
is the way of the cross.* ”

As disciples of Jesus, we should not expect thanks per se, just as we should not anticipate an easy path. **The way of missionary discipleship is the way of the cross.** The reading from Luke's Gospel for the Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C) makes this clear: "Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from the plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here immediately and take your place at table'? Would he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished'? Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'" (Luke 17:10) This may sound harsh to our ears, but it is reflective of Jesus' obedient stance before the Father. As disciples of Jesus, it should guide us in our stance before the Father as well.

The invitation to wait on tables is a motif central to our understanding of ministry. It is used to describe the selection of the seven Hellenists and their call to "wait on tables" in the Acts of the Apostles. (Acts 6:1-7) Unfortunately, we cannot assume that this ethic is the norm in today's Church.

Pope Francis is unstinting in his criticism of those among us who suffer from “paralysis and acedia” (i.e., spiritual sloth or apathy). In Pope Francis’ view:

“This pastoral acedia can be caused by a number of things. Some fall into it because they throw themselves into unrealistic projects and are not satisfied simply to do what they reasonably can. Others, because they lack the patience to allow processes to mature; they want everything to fall from heaven. Others, because they are attached to a few projects or vain dreams of success. Others, because they have lost real contact with people and so depersonalize their work that they are more concerned with the road map than with the journey itself. Others fall into acedia because they are unable to wait; they want to dominate the rhythm of life. Today’s obsession with immediate results makes it hard for pastoral workers to tolerate anything that smacks of disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross.”²⁹

According to Pope Francis, discontent in the Church can impede the hard work of missionary discipleship: “(A)mong Catholics of an isolated conscience, there is never a shortage of reasons for criticizing the Church, the bishops, or the Pope: either we are behind the times, or we have surrendered to modernity; we are not what we should be or supposedly once were. In this way, they justify withholding and separating themselves from the forward march of the People of God. Rather than throwing themselves into the great task of evangelizing our world in communion with the Body, they remain huddled in ‘their’ group of purists, guardians of the truth.”³⁰

Reflection:

- Do we know what to do in order to evangelize nominal Catholics? Those who are disaffected from the Church? The unchurched? Seekers?
- Have we marshaled the resources needed to encourage evangelization? At the parish level? At the diocesan level?
- Do we withhold our best efforts to evangelize others because of inertia, a fear of failure, or discouragement?
- Does anger harbored against the Church or against others in the Church inhibit our effectiveness as missionary disciples?
- Does our community need to be renewed in order to fulfill God’s calling to missionary discipleship?

PRINCIPLE SIX

OUR EFFORTS AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES WILL REQUIRE OUR OWN ONGOING CONVERSION

How could this not be so, given the road walked by Jesus? On the First Sunday of Lent (Cycle C), we recall Jesus' time in the desert. (Luke 4:1-13) This is a pivotal moment in Luke's Gospel in which Jesus confronts and surmounts the same three temptations to which Adam and Eve had succumbed in the Garden of Eden.³¹

In the first temptation, Jesus experiences intense hunger and so the devil encourages him to turn the stones lying about into bread. The bread featured in this story reminds us of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, which so tempted Adam and Eve. Employing Ignatius Loyola's understanding of root sin,³² the bread featured in Luke's Gospel — like the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden — symbolizes our human desire for “stuff” and for unhealthy, self-gratifying experiences of one kind or another. It symbolizes the unhealthy materialism and self-centeredness to which most of us can easily become addicted — a debilitating root sin, in fact, that can lead to so many other sins, all of which can wreak havoc in our lives. Jesus navigated these human attractions in a way that Adam and Eve failed to do.

In the second temptation, Jesus confronts the experience of abandonment. Sensing his isolation, the devil ridicules Jesus. He dismisses him as a fool just as the serpent ridiculed Eve as a fool in the Garden of Eden. “You are so important Jesus, you are so very special,” the devil seems to say. “Show us, Jesus. Throw yourself off of this cliff, so that we can see you being ‘rescued’ by the angels the Father will surely send on your behalf. Show us, Jesus. Show all of us.” The devil pricks Jesus' presumed vanity just as the serpent in the Garden of Eden pricked Eve's vanity. The devil appeals to our human need to feel loved and our human need to feel special or unique. Jesus rejects the devil's enticements and, in doing so, transcends any temptation to vanity.

The devil senses a certain vulnerability in Jesus and delivers a third temptation. The devil appeals to something that lies deep in so many of us — human pride. He shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promises all of them to Jesus if he will but “prostrate himself” in worship, not to the Father, but to the devil himself. Pride manifests itself in the narcissistic conceit that we know best. It can manifest itself, too, in the belief that we deserve the best, for one reason or another. In a similar way, the devil promised Adam and Eve that they would “be like gods” if they would but eat of the forbidden fruit. Like materialism and self-centeredness, as well as vanity, pride is a root sin that lies at the heart of considerable dysfunction in our world, a root sin to which the best and brightest and the most fortunate among us are particularly susceptible. Jesus vanquished pride, a powerful temptation, to which Adam and Eve had fallen prey.

The fact that Adam and Eve proved susceptible to these three temptations speaks to their primordial nature and hence, to our own vulnerability. Jesus willingly confronted these root sins,

acknowledging the humanity he shared with us. It speaks to our susceptibility and our need for ongoing conversion as we recommit ourselves to our fundamental identity as missionary disciples.

Pope Francis is direct in acknowledging certain sins that he perceives to be all too prevalent in the Church, all of which fit quite comfortably under the traditional umbrellas of materialism and sensuality, vanity and pride. He acknowledges, too, our need for ongoing conversion as we take on the task of missionary discipleship. More to the point, the Church's "missionary mandate...calls for ongoing formation and maturation."³³ Confronting our own failures and weaknesses can be disorienting. "See where you are centered," he tells us, "and decenter yourself. The task is to open doors and windows and move out beyond..." [This is why] I prefer the image of the pilgrim, who is one who decenters and so can transcend."³⁴

“ *Without prolonged moments...of prayerful encounter...
with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless;
we lose energy...and our fervor dies out.* ”
— *Pope Francis*

Pope Francis knows, too, that this kind of ongoing conversion will not be possible without time in the desert (i.e., time in prayer): **“Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties and our fervor dies out.”**³⁵ Indeed, the “lack of a deep spirituality” can produce “pessimism, fatalism and mistrust.”³⁶

Most importantly, this call to continuous conversion pertains, not just to individuals, but to the Church as a whole. Indeed, Pope Francis has encouraged “each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform,”³⁷ hence his call for a worldwide focus on synodality (i.e.: a “particular *style* that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as **the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel**”³⁸).

Reflection:

- Are we open and committed to continual conversion?
- Are we discouraged in our efforts to “Go make disciples”?
- Are we open to best practices and to fraternal correction with respect to our efforts to evangelize the broader community?
- Are our efforts to evangelize those who are insufficiently catechized, the disaffected and the unchurched, grounded in prayer?

PRINCIPLE SEVEN

JOY SHOULD BE EVIDENT IN OUR INVITATION TO OTHERS TO ENTER INTO A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

The Church has long known that joy draws people to Jesus. Writing in the late 2nd Century, Tertullian attributed the attractiveness of Christianity to the care Jesus' disciples showed for one another and for others: "(I)t is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another..."³⁹ Pope Francis agrees: "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by 'attraction.'"⁴⁰ More often than not, a carping or judgmental stance, vis-à-vis the disaffected and those who are searching for something more in their lives, will turn people away from the Church and, hence, the possibility of a deep and abiding personal relationship with Jesus.

A very different approach can be found in Luke's Gospel. In chapter 1, Mary responds to God's request of her with her simple "yes," and then proceeds "in haste" to the hill country to be with her kinswoman Elizabeth. Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting is filled with great joy, indeed! "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (Luke 1:46-56)

“*‘Today this scripture passage
is fulfilled in your hearing.’*”
— Luke 4:21

As noted in the Gospel reading from the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C), Jesus' public ministry begins on a similar note: "He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: '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 and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.' Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, 'Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21) Luke thus establishes Jesus' entire three-year ministry as one of great joy!



*(A)n evangelizer must never look like someone
who has just come back from a funeral!*



—Pope Francis

Pope Francis also knows that joy lies at the very heart of our faith. Indeed, his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is devoted exclusively to this defining aspect of missionary discipleship. He chides those in the Church who present a contrary visage to those who have been battered and bruised by life and those who are searching for something more: **“(A)n evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!”**⁴¹ Invoking a now celebrated turn of phrase, Pope Francis affirms that “defeatism” can all too easily turn us into “querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses.’”⁴² Indeed, too many Christians live “Lent without Easter.”⁴³

Reflection:

- Do we experience our identity as missionary disciples as a great joy in our lives?
- Does our proclamation of the word and our teaching fully reflect the joy of the Gospel?
- How do we share our joy with others?
- Do we actively invite others to share the joy that is enlivened in a personal relationship with Jesus?

PRINCIPLE EIGHT

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION ARE CENTRAL TO OUR EFFORTS AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

We know that Jesus healed and expelled demons in order to restore those who were ill and those who were possessed back to their families and their communities. Jesus' encounter with the widow of Nain in Luke's Gospel poignantly illustrates this defining aspect of his ministry. He recognized that an abiding relationship shared by an only son and his mother had been shattered. Jesus was "moved with pity" as a result and so "gave the young man back to his mother." (Luke 7:13-15)

The account of the Gerasene demoniac makes this same point: "The man from whom the demons had come out begged to remain with him, but he sent him away saying, 'Return home and recount what God has done for you.'" (Luke 8:26-39) In his command to "Go home!" Jesus instructs that we should share with others what God has done in healing and restoring us.



Jesus restored those whom he encountered back to a right relationship with themselves, to right relationships with others and, through the forgiveness of their sins, to a right relationship with God. In fact, we see many such healings in Luke's Gospel, including the cure of Simon's mother-in-law, (Luke 4:38-39) the cleansing of a leper, (Luke 5:12-16) the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10) and the healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage. (Luke 8:40-56)

Jesus, it seems, associated righteousness (i.e., the restoration of right relationships) with healing, a concrete manifestation, in fact, of God's mercy. Pope Francis defines mercy as the "beating heart of the Gospel"⁴⁴ and links it directly to the task of missionary discipleship:

"(T)his is a time for mercy. The Church is showing her maternal side, her motherly face, to a humanity that is wounded. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them on the streets."⁴⁵ He recognizes that "(s)in is more than a stain. Sin is a wound; it needs to be treated, healed."⁴⁶ Again, Pope Francis invites us to think of the Church "as a field hospital, where treatment is given above all to those who are most wounded,"⁴⁷ as a place where right relationships are restored.

Through baptism and the sacrament of reconciliation, the Church offers the pathway to forgiveness and spiritual healing. To those who have been victims of sins committed upon them, we should be a place of compassion and restoration.

Further, mercy is not something to be metered out judiciously. Jesus calls all of us to repentance and a new life as part of our response to the Good News. In addressing the depth of the mercy we are to show others, Pope Francis points to an exchange Jesus had with Peter, a man who experienced Jesus' forbearance over and over again: "(W)hen Peter asked how many times he should forgive someone, Jesus said not seven times but seventy times seven, (Matthew 18:22) or in other words, always."⁴⁸ In the end, "(t)he Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel."⁴⁹ As Pope Francis reminds us, "God forgives not with a decree but with a caress."⁵⁰

 *The Church must be a place
of mercy freely given,
where everyone can feel welcomed,
loved, forgiven and encouraged to
live the good life of the Gospel.* 
— Pope Francis

Still further, this understanding of the depth of the mercy required of us reveals an unexpected truth: the mercy we share with others is not ours. It is God's mercy. Indeed, the compassion we share with others is best understood as a participation in God's mercy. According to Pope Francis, "(m)ercy is divine and has to do more with the judgment of sin. Compassion has a more human face. It means to suffer with, to suffer together, to not remain indifferent to the pain and the suffering of others."⁵¹

This participation in God's mercy requires, first and foremost, an acceptance of our own need for mercy. According to Pope Francis, "the first and only step required to experience mercy is to acknowledge that we are in need of mercy."⁵² And it requires, as well, a sustained commitment to the healing of a world very much in need of healing. According to Pope Francis, missionary discipleship "calls on every baptized person to be a peacemaker and a credible witness to a reconciled life... This role, at present, calls for a profound social humility"⁵³ and a tolerance for unresolved turmoil: "The task of the reconciler (i.e., a missionary disciple who is committed to restoring right relationships) is to 'endure' the conflict, facing it head-on and by discerning see beyond the surface reasons for disagreements..."⁵⁴

This may be particularly applicable to the bitterness associated with scandal and any number of disputes, too. As Pope Francis notes, "(w)hen conflicts are not resolved but kept hidden or buried in the past, silence can lead to complicity in grave misdeeds and sins. Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict between different groups..."⁵⁵ "Jesus did not found the Church as a citadel of

purity nor as a constant parade of heroes and saints... (T)he Church can be an instrument of God's mercy because it needs that mercy."⁵⁶

Finally, Pope Francis links this need for healing, peace and reconciliation to the Sabbath: "Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world."⁵⁷

Reflection:

- Have we acknowledged our own need for healing?
- Is our engagement with the insufficiently catechized, the unchurched and seekers always and everywhere characterized by compassion?
- Are we committed to the healing of those whom we encounter? To the healing of the world?
- Do we, in fact, contribute to the healing of the world and do we invite others to this labor in the vineyard?
- Do we share the meaning of the Sabbath as a gift from God oriented to the restoration of right relationships?
- Do we invite others to experience the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass as a gift from God which renews us as his people and strengthens us by his Word and the Holy Eucharist?



PRINCIPLE NINE

AN INVITING AND WELCOMING OUTREACH IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR EFFORTS AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

Jesus abhorred judgmental attitudes and high-handed behaviors. This is abundantly clear in the Gospel read on the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C): “Stop judging,” he tells his disciples, “and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.” (Luke 6:27-38) Jesus was more concerned about those who had fallen short of the community’s expectations than those who lived lives of apparent virtue, hence the twin parables of the lost sheep and the misplaced coin (Luke 15:1-10) and the story of the prodigal son, which is proclaimed on the Fourth Sunday of Lent (Cycle C). (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32)

A positive disposition and a joyful demeanor are not enough, it seems. Each of these parables leads to action. Our behaviors toward the poorly catechized, the disaffected, the unchurched and seekers need to model Christ if we are to be true to our calling as missionary disciples. In explaining the importance of an inviting and welcoming stance with others, Pope Francis goes even further. He flips the script. Yes, we should engage others as Christ would, but even more is required of us. Indeed, Pope Francis invokes the wisdom of St. Benedict, who “ordered that all guests who knocked at the monastery door be welcomed ‘like Christ,’ with a gesture of veneration, the poor and pilgrims were to be met with ‘the greatest care and solicitude.’”⁵⁸ Further, “this demands certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and a welcome which is non-judgmental,”⁵⁹ and certain behaviors as well.

“ *The Church will have to initiate everyone...
into this ‘art of accompaniment’.* ”
— Pope Francis

According to Pope Francis, this will require many of us to adopt new skillsets as well as new attitudes. “God is never indifferent. The essence of God is mercy, which is not just seeing and being moved but responding with action.”⁶⁰ According to Pope Francis, “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 (c.f. Ex. 3:5).”⁶¹ After all, “each person’s situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without.”⁶² This is particularly so with respect to the most vulnerable among us: “(W)e are constantly tempted to ignore others, especially the weak. Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still ‘illiterate’ when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed society.”⁶³

A certain boldness will be required, too. Missionary disciples who read the signs of the times and respond faithfully cannot be confined to their parish's worship space. We will need to step out of our comfort zones and accept a certain level of risk. Pope Francis is clear in this regard: **"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."** I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsession and procedures."⁶⁴ "By mixing with tax collectors and 'women of ill repute,' Jesus wrestled religion from its imprisonment in the confines of the elites, of specialized knowledge and of privileged families."⁶⁵ He further explains, "The Church does not exist to condemn people but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God's mercy. I often say that in order for this to happen, it is necessary to go out: to go out from the Church and the parishes, to go outside and look for people where they live, where they suffer and where they hope."⁶⁶

"We walk together with and towards Jesus. As we encounter him more deeply, our hearts begin to change and our lives become renewed."

Our accompaniment is not aimless. **We walk together with and towards Jesus. As we encounter him more deeply, our hearts begin to change and our lives become renewed.** Jesus calls all people to a better way to live, in the forgiveness and the freedom of the love of God.

This will require great patience, too and an abiding trust in God. Again, we cannot measure "success" with respect to our efforts as the world understands the term. The same applies to our apparent "failures."

"At times," Pope Francis reminds us, "we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it."⁶⁷

Reflection:

- Are we judgmental with respect to the insufficiently catechized, the disaffected and the unchurched?
- How would they characterize our interactions with them?
- What would it mean to recognize the lives of others as bearing the image and likeness of Christ?
- Are we fully prepared to accompany others?
- Are we patient with others whom we encounter as missionary disciples?

PRINCIPLE TEN

WE SHOULD EMBRACE A SENSE OF URGENCY IN OUR WORK IN THE VINEYARD

There is an undeniable urgency in Luke's Gospel and it runs in two directions. In the Gospel reading for the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C), Jesus shares his most compelling desire, **"I have come to set the world on fire and how I wish it were already blazing."** (Luke 12:49-53) Jesus is bursting at the seams to announce the Good News of the Father's love to any and all who hear his voice. It seems there is so much to do and so little time! Again, "(t)he harvest is abundant but the laborers are few... (A)sk the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Luke 10:2)



*Jesus shares his most compelling desire,
"I have come to set the world on fire and
how I wish it were already blazing."*



— Luke 12:49-53

There is a foreboding side to this urgency as well. We know that we will be held accountable for our efforts, especially as they pertain to those among us who are spiritually vulnerable. **Souls are at stake!** The story of the now-deceased Lazarus proclaimed on the Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Cycle C) (Luke 16:19:31) and the "woes" recalled on the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Luke 6:17, 20-26) make this clear. Jesus reserves his sharpest language for the religious leaders of his day, including both clerics and lay leaders:

"Oh you Pharisees! Although you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, inside you are filled with plunder and evil. You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also make the inside? But as to what is within, give alms and behold, everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb, but you pay no attention to judgment and to love for God. These you should have done, without overlooking the others. Woe to you Pharisees! You love the seat of honor in synagogues and greetings in marketplaces." (Luke 11:39-44)

Jesus' cautionary words should resonate with all of us today, as well!

A certain urgency is reflected in much of Pope Francis' writing, too. He often uses the word "crisis," which he defines as a kind of "self-forgetting."⁶⁸ The family is in crisis⁶⁹; our postmodern culture is in crisis; our politics are in crisis; the world economy is in crisis⁷⁰; the environment is in crisis and so on. Pope Francis reserves his harshest rhetoric, however, for the Church itself. His criticisms of the Church and leaders in the Church are not so much alarmist in nature, however. He is, after all, a man of great hope.

In the end, his criticisms are more impatient and regretful than apocalyptic. And this impatience and regret is born, it seems, out of his sense that the Church may not be living up to its missionary calling at this pivotal moment in time. Pope Francis knows that we, too, will be held accountable for our labor in the Father's vineyard.

Reflection:

- Are our hearts on fire to proclaim the Father's love to all?
- Do we fully appreciate the nature of the challenges that lie before us?
- Do we recognize certain opportunities that may be available to us?
- Do we fully understand what is at stake, not from our perspective, but from God's perspective? Do we understand that souls are at stake?

“ *Let us set Northwest Indiana ablaze in God’s love as we boldly proclaim Jesus as Lord!* ”

A CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In my homily during the Mass that opened our current Synod on October 17, 2021, I shared a personal reflection. I reprise it here because it was organized around an evocative image that complements, I think, the more formal analysis shared here. I recalled a visit to one of our local parishes, where I was invited to participate in a bonfire. As the parishioners assembled, I was advised that I would soon be asked to light the fire!

Now fire can be intimidating. A fire can get out of control. A fire can be dangerous. Once a fire is raging, it can be hard to contain. And yet we know that fire can be beneficial, too. In our local industries, fire is used to purify metal and to shape it.

And we know, too, that fire is featured prominently in Scripture. The appearance of fire played a prominent role at the Pentecost, of course. Tongues of fire descended upon those who had gathered in the upper room. Again, Jesus affirmed that he had come to “set the world on fire,” a startling claim to which he added: “How I wish it were already blazing!” Why? Because the fire of the Holy Spirit – that burning intensity that the Lord wants us to have in our hearts, that coming together so that the fire of God’s love can be made visible to all and a source of heat and light and strength and power – is such a powerful biblical image.

The Father sends the Holy Spirit so that we will not be alone, so that we will know the truth of God’s love and so be enabled to live out this great truth in our time. The same Holy Spirit has guided the Church over the centuries. The same Holy Spirit can be found in Scripture and in tradition and in the Magisterium, too. **The Holy Spirit is the guardian of the deposit of faith, but more than a guardian, too. The Holy Spirit impels us forward.**

When I was ordained as your bishop, I reflected on the many fires that had already been lit in the Diocese of Gary as a result of the synod that had taken place in 2017. Bishop Hying and those who assisted him listened attentively to voices from across the diocese. He “walked” with everyone who participated in this memorable event to better understand the needs of God’s people and to identify ways in which we, as Church, can attend to those needs.

That torch has been passed on to me. In my view, we should rekindle this fire and send it off in new directions as we confront the many challenges that have emerged in this unique moment in our history, including our experience of COVID-19. Indeed, we should embrace anew the title of the pastoral letter shared at the close of the diocese’s 2017 Synod, “Go Make Disciples,” as a reminder

of the missionary mandate given to all of us by Jesus. This is our job! We are to go make disciples! We are challenged in this time and place to draw others into a loving relationship with Jesus!

I know this can seem more than a bit daunting. “Me? A missionary disciple? Me? Promoting Jesus to my loved ones and to others who don't know him? How can I do that?” Yes, we can easily assemble a laundry list of reasons as to why we should shy away from the path of missionary discipleship. “I'm going to stay in my comfort zone. I'm not going to light any new fires. I'm going to stick with what I've got.”

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis argues that every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Jesus. If you have encountered the love of God in Jesus, you are a missionary. We are all encouraged to be missionaries.

Nonetheless, too few among us have embraced this calling. Some may say, “I think of myself as a follower of Jesus and that work for me, at least to some extent, but I'm not qualified or even willing to be sent out to do anything.” The truth is that in our baptism, God has prepared us to always and everywhere be missionary disciples. As followers of Jesus we must trust in the Holy Spirit and always be on mission!

“ *We have found the Messiah!* ”

Pope Francis provides us with examples. “Look at the first disciples,” the Holy Father tells us. **Look at those first disciples who – immediately after encountering the loving gaze of Jesus – went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!”** They had encountered Jesus and then told others whom they met along the way about him. The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans came to believe in him because of this woman's testimony. The same was true for St. Paul. After his encounter with Jesus, he immediately proclaimed Jesus as Lord.

Pope Francis asks: “What are we waiting for?” To be a missionary disciple is a joyful life. It is a beautiful calling. To be open to the Holy Spirit's work in our time is nothing short of a great adventure!

The time came for me to light the bonfire. “Here you go, Bishop.” And I said, “Oh, no. That's okay. You can do it.” And then I thought about it for a moment. What a powerful symbol — a bonfire — and reminder that “I have come to set the world ablaze!” I decided to light the fire and at a spot where it had all been prearranged, I lit it!

Now, truth be told, the bonfire did not get off to great start. My efforts did not set the wood — or the world — ablaze. I soon noticed, however, that there was another spot ready to be lit and, sure enough, someone took my lighter and lit it. And this little flame took off! And then it was as if you had two little fires going in the big pile of wood. And I found myself cheering for my little flame. I wanted it to find its way to the bigger fire so that we could say, “Yes, this is a great bonfire!” And it did all come together. In time, the two fires united and we did, indeed, have a great bonfire.

I do not know yet about the many little fires the Lord is going to set ablaze for us in the Diocese of Gary, but I trust that he will do so if we remain open to him. I can assure you that it will happen. And, yes, we might say, “I’ve only got a little bit of kindling. I don’t have a whole lot here with which to work.”

Be patient, however. Wait and see what the Lord will do. It is all about remaining open to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can use us and we can, in time, do more than we could ever have asked for or imagined.

“ *We can and should be an epicenter of evangelization.* ”

Together, let us attend to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that this vision – this good work begun in us – will be realized here in the Diocese of Gary. The 2020 census revealed that there are 807,703 souls living in our four counties. Not all are Catholic, of course, but all need to encounter the love of Jesus. **We can and should be an epicenter of evangelization. Why not us?**

Northwest Indiana needs to know and experience the love of Jesus now more than ever, to know there is a better way to live, a life full of hope and joy and the love of Jesus. The Lord has given us all we need to be his vessels. Strengthened by the Eucharist, renewed by all the sacraments and the Word of God, we can bring revival and renewal to individuals, families, parishes and our communities. Encouraged by the example of our Blessed Mother, the first and greatest of all disciples and a true exemplar for all missionaries, let us embrace the challenge to be both disciples and missionaries.

Let us set Northwest Indiana ablaze in God’s love as we boldly proclaim Jesus as Lord!

Jesus, I trust in you.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.



Robert J. McClory

**The Most Reverend Robert J. McClory
Bishop
Diocese of Gary**

February 2, 2022

The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord

Gracious God,
Grant us the grace to be your joyful disciples and the courage
to be your bold missionaries, proclaiming by word and deed
that ***Jesus Christ is Lord!***

Amen.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 15.
- ² Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 20.
- ³ Brenden Byrne. *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2015, 61.
- ⁴ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 103-104.
- ⁵ Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 151.
- ⁶ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 146.
- ⁷ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 35.
- ⁸ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 36.
- ⁹ Gerhard Lohfink. *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012, 84.
- ¹⁰ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 111.
- ¹¹ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 120.
- ¹² Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 14.
- ¹³ Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 129-130.
- ¹⁴ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 2016, 21.
- ¹⁵ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 17.
- ¹⁶ Donald Senior. *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1992, 7.
- ¹⁷ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 7.
- ¹⁸ Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 20.
- ¹⁹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 1.
- ²⁰ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 266.
- ²¹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 266.
- ²² Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 164.
- ²³ Second Vatican Council. "*Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.*" In *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, 163-282. Northport, NY: Costello, 2007, par. 18.
- ²⁴ Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 1997, par. 1718
- ²⁵ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 12.
- ²⁶ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 279.
- ²⁷ Pope Francis. *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2020, par. 75.
- ²⁸ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 12.
- ²⁹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par.82.

- ³⁰ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 70-71.
- ³¹ I am grateful to Deacon Dan Lowery for contributing this exegesis pertaining to Jesus' experience of the three temptations in the desert, a reflection that I have modified and adapted here, but has been published elsewhere in a modified form.
- ³² See Loyola, Ignatius. *The Spiritual Exercises*. Translated by Elder Mullan. Lexington, KY: First Rate, 2016.
- ³³ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 160.
- ³⁴ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 135.
- ³⁵ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 262.
- ³⁶ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 275.
- ³⁷ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 30.
- ³⁸ Synod of Bishops. *Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Church*, September 2021, 1.2.
- ³⁹ Tertullian. "Apology," chapter XXXIX, ANF03. In *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff. Translated by S. Thelwall. London, England: Catholic Way, 2014.
- ⁴⁰ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 16.
- ⁴¹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 10.
- ⁴² Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 85.
- ⁴³ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 6.
- ⁴⁴ Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 97.
- ⁴⁵ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 6.
- ⁴⁶ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 26.
- ⁴⁷ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 8.
- ⁴⁸ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 50.
- ⁴⁹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 114.
- ⁵⁰ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, xii.
- ⁵¹ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 91.
- ⁵² Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, X.
- ⁵³ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 239-140. See Pope Francis. *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2020, par. 284. See also Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 47.
- ⁵⁴ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 91-92.
- ⁵⁵ Pope Francis. *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2020, par. 244.
- ⁵⁶ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 72.
- ⁵⁷ Pope Francis. *On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2015, par. 80.
- ⁵⁸ Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 102.
- ⁵⁹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 165.

- ⁶⁰ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 19.
- ⁶¹ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 85.
- ⁶² Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 172.
- ⁶³ Pope Francis. *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2018, par. 64.
- ⁶⁴ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 49.
- ⁶⁵ Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 123.
- ⁶⁶ Pope Francis. *The Name of God is Mercy*. New York, NY, Random House, 52.
- ⁶⁷ Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 46.
- ⁶⁸ Pope Francis. *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2020, par. 51.
- ⁶⁹ See Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2013, par. 66.
- ⁷⁰ See Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 117.

Notes

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Notes

[illegible]



Synod 2022

our journey continues ...
nuestro viaje continua...



Diocese of Gary
dcgary.org