

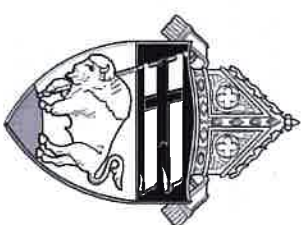


## A Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Buffalo

Bishop Edward R. Scharfenberger,

Apostolic Administrator

First Sunday of Advent, 2020



My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

God calls you each by name! “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jer. 1:5). God’s call to Jeremiah is personal, sanctifying and missionary. Knowing, choosing and sending – this is God’s loving action in your life. You are made by love and for love.

To say his call was “prophetic” does not mean Jeremiah could predict the future. The call of a prophet is to be a messenger, an ambassador for God’s loving plan in the world. The mission of every baptized Christian is prophetic: to accept being called by name, sanctified, and sent into the world to announce the “good news,” or gospel, of God’s mercy-giving love.

To be “missionary” is to be touched by God’s holiness and sent forth, to break away from fear of change, to grow beyond our comfort zones (“we’ve always done it that way”) and to abandon ourselves, daring to move into a future of what God dreams for us. This is life in the Holy Spirit, the love between the Father and the Son, who joins us together as members of the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the master of relationships, revealing through our connectedness our true personal identity, our unique role in this communion of life and love which we call the Church.

Church is not so much a place we go to as a name for who we are, living our daily lives together as family. A family is wherever and whenever you knock on the door; they will take you in. Families grow and welcome new members. My favorite definition of church or parish is a “family of families” – and a family for those without family.

As your spiritual father during this time of transition, I invite you – all of us – to consider, reflect on and renew our family relationships. None of us is an island. If God is calling us each by name, then each of our

lives has a meaning and a purpose for God.  
God lives in us and among us.

None of us got here alone. Whoever our birth or adoptive parents may be, whoever fed and nurtured us, rocked and cradled us, dressed, taught and carried us around in our formative years, we were always part of something larger than ourselves. Those of us with warm memories of our family of origin, parish or catholic education often want to share that experience with others. Those whose memories may be tinged or scarred by painful experiences, or sinful patterns of abuse, still hope for healing and reconciliation. Toward this end, every parish and school must become an oasis of peace. As we share our stories and trust prayerfully in God’s presence among us, we discover something of what those two travelers on the road to Emmaus did, while discussing, even questioning their experience of Jesus. Suddenly he shows up, unrecognized at first. He stays – and enlightens their hearts and minds – “*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?*” (Lk 24:32)

The Church is born in the shadow of the Cross. What appears at first appears to be the end is only the beginning. We come to such points in our lives, when old ways seem to collapse. We may feel at a dead end, that our best hopes and expectations have been defeated. There and then the Lord encounters us, only to open up another door – the door to his heart and to a new life of hope in him. If we look back, like Lot’s wife, we will wither and die. If we enter the heart of Jesus with trust, we will have life to the full. “*Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it*” (Lk 17:32-33).

We stand now at such a crossroads. Many of us in the Diocese of Buffalo have cherished memories of how things once were. With all the headwinds in recent years, however, we may wonder if our best days are past. For others, there is disappointment and regret