

Along this journey together as families of faith, seeking the good of all members, while ever attentive to those most in need of our attention and support, we will challenge one another to envision new ways of using and sharing our resources, reaching beyond parish boundaries, sharing experiences and learning from best practices. A recent Instruction from the Congregation for the Clergy (The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community #16) suggests some models that might be appropriated in different regions of our diocese. Our Renewal Task Force will suggest others that might be examined, tried and implemented.

What we are envisioning here is not a program or a plan for closing or opening, expanding or contracting current parish structures. Families do not grow, blend and harmonize like corporate mergers and acquisitions. In the course of time, circumstance and needs may suggest the wisdom of sharing or repurposing a building, a particular space, or personal talents and abilities in innovative and creative ways, realigning schedules for Masses, sacramental formation, schooling alternatives, social ministries, and administrative models. This is more about growing together organically, from the grassroots, rather than following some imposed blueprint for reconstruction or consolidation. It is a growing process rather than a prefabricated program. The ultimate goal is for all parish families to be and remain vibrant communities of faith, focused on their evangelizing mission. At the heart of the renewal, however, must be a commitment to conversion, which leads to holiness, not just self-preservation. *"[A]s he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written 'Be holy because I (am) holy'"* (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Holiness is the object of our call to the knowledge and love of God. It requires in us a desire and an openness to listen and discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit, speaking to us as we walk together. It also demands hearts ready and willing to forgive every day. We have sinned and we need to admit our failures and shortcomings. We will continue to make mistakes and must be willing to impart and receive fraternal correction, in accordance with the Scriptures. We cannot remain static. Ecclesia semper reformanda - the Church must always be reformed. Everyone must have a mind and a heart open to be changed.

Finally, and most fundamentally, we have to pray. No community, no family, will stay together without these three: listening, forgiving, praying. For our family of faith, nothing is more essential than prayer in all its forms. This includes, first and foremost, participation in the Holy Eucharist, weekly, if not daily. It embraces all of the sacraments as well, particularly the sacrament of Penance, on a regular basis. The Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina, personal prayer, Eucharistic adoration, and the recitation of Rosary are all tried and true ways of praying that pastors must encourage even as they accompany their people in the learning and the practice.

We might close by remembering the famous words of Venerable Father Patrick Peyton, also known as the "Rosary Priest," who said, "the family that prays together stays together." Three prayers for our 'Mission of Renewal' accompany this letter for use at Mass, family and school gatherings, or in personal meditation. All three may be said together as one prayer, separately, or in any order. The important thing for all of us to do is to keep asking the Lord to help us to listen, to forgive and to pray with and for one another. In doing so, we will discover together his ongoing plan for our spiritual, fully human growth, and the wellness of our families, especially our family of faith, the Church, in all its forms throughout our diocese and in all of its regions.

Jesus calls us each by name, accompanying us as we walk together, saving us through one another, in each of whose hearts his Holy Spirit lives. We are all connected in one body, his body, his Church. That is why we take care of one another. And in doing so, we build up the Body of Christ. *"the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way"* (Eph. 1:23).

May our Lord bless each and every one of you and place in your hearts that same Holy Spirit who "scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10), so that every person you encounter may find in your heart the love and peace and mercy in the Sacred Heart of Jesus himself.

Lovingly in the heart of Jesus,

Bishop Ed

*+ Edward B. Sheehan, Bishop*