



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls
Office of the Bishop

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***Set Ablaze:
Unleash the Fire of the Holy Spirit***

September 24, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our current reality

“Praise the Lord, for he is good.” (Psalm 136)

Today we find ourselves in a culture deeply immersed in, and divided by, ungodly humanistic ways of thinking and acting through relativism, secularism, individualism, partisanship and political unrest, war, and acts of violence carried out on the most vulnerable in our midst. These ungodly ways of thinking and acting ultimately cause harm to ourselves, the common good, and harmony. In such trying times, it is important that as Catholics we remember God is good and he desires good things for us individually and as a society. Truly, his goodness prevails despite all the cultural problems we experience *if* we allow God to be alive in us and our culture.

The Christendom culture that once existed in America and many parts of the world no longer exists. In a 1974 television interview, Archbishop Fulton Sheen predicted the end to the Christendom culture in which our economic, political and social life were inspired by Judeo-Christian values and instructed by Christian morals. Many of our problems today confirm Archbishop Sheen’s prediction: our culture is no longer built on the Judeo-Christian ethos that it once was.

Sadly, Christ’s Church, intended, inspired and guarded by Jesus himself, yet entrusted to humans, is not immune to cultural influences. For example, registered households of Catholics in our diocese have decreased 6 percent since 2010 while the general population in eastern South Dakota grew 12 percent. In that same period, total Sunday Mass attendance has decreased 26.1 percent. As Catholics, we need a reawakening—a renewal and intensification of living our faith in the Church and the world.

Our response

“Rise, and do not be afraid.” (Matthew 17:7)

It is time to rise from our slumber, from any complacency, fear, distractions, ungodly cultural values or indifference so the grace of God in us can be unleashed in the Church and world. We do this by living dynamic *Lifelong Catholic Missionary Discipleship through God’s Love*. This requires rejecting ungodly humanistic ways of thinking and acting, and asking God to renew us in a world so longing for peace and happiness that will only be found in and through him. It will require spending time and energy developing a deep personal relationship with God and reaching out to others in our parishes and Catholic institutions. This will require a co-responsibility of parishioners in the life and mission of the Church and world in new and increased ways.



Building a future full of hope

"[Y]ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes." (Acts 1:8)

When gathered with the Apostles at the Last Supper, Christ assured us that the Holy Spirit would be with us always. We know we are not orphaned, as Jesus instructed, and the Holy Spirit will come to us, as Jesus promises (John 14:16-18).

At the encouragement of many, I directed the enlistment of a firm specializing in guiding dioceses undergoing a planning process. The decline of parish vibrancy in many parishes (sensed in many ways and seen in the Current Reality data report) and the decrease in numbers of priests available to lead parishes was at the forefront of why I enlisted the firm's help. However, it has become clear that a planning process can also facilitate renewal in our parishes, leading to structures that better support our clergy and staff to promote their personal health, happiness and holiness.

Therefore, as Bishop, I write to ask for your participation in this planning process. Please, therefore, take time to review the current reality information provided on our diocesan website. There you will find demographic, sacramental, financial, and other data that help paint a picture of who we are as Church today. Our current reality is meant to explain "why" we need to make intentional changes, to plan a new structure.

In October, I will be asking for your insights on a proposed new structural model for parishes so that further refinements and improvements to the design can be made before it is finalized. The model, a reflection of the "what" has been designed, is based on data, specific parameters, and the input of our clergy and lay members of our Diocesan Pastoral Council. It will benefit from your input, and the model will not be finalized until after your feedback has been provided.

After the completion of a structural plan for the pastorates of our diocese later this year, a pastoral planning process will begin in the summer of 2023. Pastoral planning will involve all parishes as they exist today and, relying on local parishioner input, will create a plan for when, where and how often Masses and other ministries will occur within the new pastorates. More information will be provided on how pastoral planning will be carried out beginning in July 2023 when the structural plan is finalized and announced later this year.

Conclusion

With the help of the Holy Spirit and your active cooperation, God can renew the Church, make it one that has been **set ablaze** by God's love, and goes out into the world to **unleash the fire of the Holy Spirit** by sharing the goodness of God with others. Reflecting on the great wisdom offered to us by St. Thomas Aquinas, it is my hope that we as a diocese might journey through this planning process in a way that teaches us how our passion (desires) should be governed by reason (what is prudent), enlightened by faith (what God has revealed through Scripture and Tradition), and motivated by love (with charity).

As we plan for our future, I ask for your prayers. So that we might be unified in our prayer, I have written and included a prayer with this letter. Pastors have been asked to pray it frequently in our parishes at appropriate times as local customs allow.





I look forward to receiving your insights through our diocesan website so our structural and pastoral planning process may enjoy the benefit of broad consultation and your insights. Thank you most especially for joining me in praying for our diocese and this planning process. May God bless us abundantly as we journey together on a path of renewal in the diocese.

In the love of the Lord,

+ Donald E DeGrood

Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls

