



A STEWARD'S JOURNEY

OUR CALL TO GREATER COMMUNION

A Pastoral Letter on the New Diocesan Pastoral Plan

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Bishop of Jefferson City





To the laity, members of institutes of consecrated life,
and the clergy of the Diocese of Jefferson City:

Greetings in the name of the Risen Lord.

INTRODUCTION

1. We began this year with a desire for a brighter future. The clergy sexual abuse tragedy, the decline in participation at Mass and in our Church programs, especially by our young adults, the decrease in the number of vocations to the ministerial priesthood, pressures in our rural areas caused by shifting demographics, and the continuing worldwide pandemic tempt us to discouragement and despair. We know something has to change for our local Church to thrive and fulfill its mission.

But I have some good news to share with you: The Lord has a future full of hope for us (Jeremiah 29:11).

THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL LETTER AND PLAN WERE PROMULGATED ON FEBRUARY 6, 2021, AT ST. THOMAS MORE NEWMAN CENTER IN COLUMBIA, MISSOURI. *On the third anniversary of his ordination and installation, Bishop McKnight signed the letter and plan during Mass with the young adults telling them the Church needs their energy and "fresh eyes to help our Church transform into what the Lord is calling us to be," emphasizing the importance of our youth in the fulfillment of our mission as a Church.*

EMMAUS JOURNEY (Luke 24)

2. Luke's Gospel story about the two disciples headed in the wrong direction — away from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus after the crucifixion — shows us how the Good News of Jesus' resurrection has the power to change where we are headed.

We know the name of only one disciple, Cleopas. The other disciple could be a man or woman, young or old. As such, the other nameless disciple could be a placeholder for any one of us.

The two disciples were debating, grappling with how to wrap their minds around the death of the Lord and what this would mean for them. They were downcast and unable to recognize the Lord when He suddenly joined them on their journey. They relay their belief in Jesus as a prophet of God, mighty in word and in deed, but also their disappointment that, it seemed to them, He didn't turn out to be the savior they were hoping He would be.

3. But Jesus changed their minds. He began by teaching them from the Old Testament Scriptures, showing how it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer in order to enter into his glory. Then Jesus inspired their hearts.

As they approached the village, they beseeched the Lord to stay with them, for it was already evening. Jesus accepted their invitation.

While they were at table, He repeated his actions from the Last Supper: He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, but He vanished from their sight.

They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" And they turned themselves around and went back to Jerusalem, testifying to all they experienced, how the Lord was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

4. This fascinating story of the disciples recognizing Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist, and thereby coming to believe in His resurrection from the dead, inspires us to consider the many ways we may be disheartened, troubled, and confused without the light of the Gospel, the hope of the resurrection, and the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It is a good reminder of how much we need an intimate relationship with the Lord, and that our best place to encounter Him is in the breaking of the bread in the community of disciples known as the Church.

5. Do you, with me, desire your heart to burn within you? Are you open, like the two disciples in the Emmaus story, to listen to Jesus and to let Him change your mind about things that tempt you to be downcast, confused and troubled?

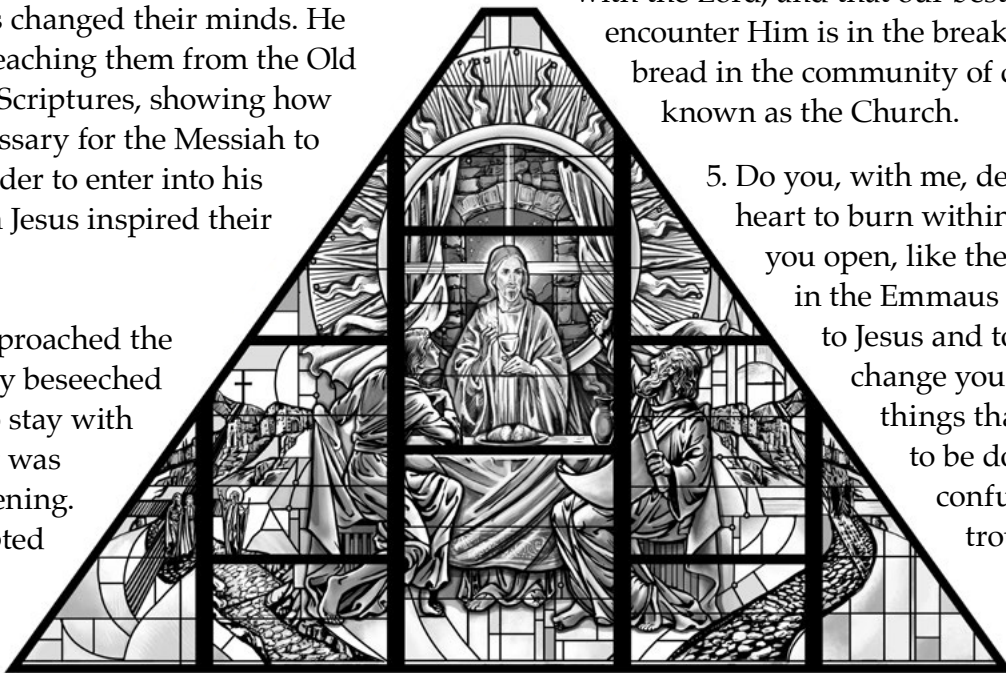


FIGURE 1.1

THIS PROPOSED WINDOW FOR THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOSEPH ILLUSTRATES THE STORY OF EMMAUS. *Jesus is framed by window curtains blowing open, symbolic of the spiritual gift of understanding and by a monstrance symbolic of worship: Did not our hearts burn within us? The two disciples suggest our response to the presence of Christ. The older Cleopas on the right holds the Scriptures and gestures towards Christ in that "opening" moment of the intellect. The younger disciple on the left leans in with a burning heart to adore and receive the bread and the cup.*

THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN

6. On my third anniversary as your bishop, I so desire that the Lord may enliven our diocese! I desire that the Lord may help all our parishes to be beacons of hope for their parishioners and the wider community, to be communities of faith where we encounter the Lord together in these challenging times. May we come back together, refrain from “going it alone” and heading in the wrong direction. Then, with a stronger communion within each parish and among the parishes, we may fulfill our mission as a local Church!

7. I continue to be grateful for how I was welcomed three years ago, when I was ordained and installed as the Bishop of Jefferson City. As I began to meet many of you, I realized it was going to be necessary for me to listen in an intentional, systematic way to you. I wanted to hear not only the pain, but also the dreams, of the people of our diocese.

Almost immediately, we began listening sessions around the diocese, in English and Spanish, and one solely with young adults. In my attempt to listen deeply to your concerns and hopes for our Church, it became clear that a pastoral plan could be a process to lead us into a better future.

8. At the same time, I was preparing for my first *ad limina* visit to the Holy Father, along with my brother bishops from our region. This afforded us an opportunity for a second set of listening sessions, which focused on the challenges we are facing and how we hope to provide a home of faith for the generations to follow us.

9. Many of us experience the faith first in our homes. All of us bring our faith with us to worship God and support the community in our parish.

The Holy Spirit truly spoke to me when I read Pope Francis’ encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) on the importance of the

parish in our faith lives. In no. 28, Pope Francis describes what a parish is:

“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.’ This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”

10. Those sentences echoed what I was hearing from you, and an idea was formed to “review and renew our parishes ... to bring them nearer to people.”

From this encyclical, and from the many voices I had heard throughout the listening process, three fundamental themes for the renewal of our diocese became clear to me: The Spirituality of Stewardship, Co-responsibility, and Parishes as Centers of Charity and Sanctuaries of Mercy.

I did not determine these three themes solely on my own. Along with the clergy and our Diocesan Pastoral Council, I tested these themes.

11. The Diocesan Pastoral Council worked with me to establish a process so we could invite every Catholic's participation in the development of a new pastoral plan. While keeping ourselves solidly rooted in the teaching of the Catholic Church, especially the conciliar documents of the Second Vatican Council, we also wanted "grassroots" input. Without those deep roots, we knew the plan would not flourish.

12. A year ago, the process was introduced to lay parish leadership in a diocesan-wide meeting at the Cathedral of St. Joseph – one of the last times we gathered in person before the restrictions of the pandemic! In that meeting, we explained the goal of the pastoral planning process, which we titled "Better Together." By breaking open the Church's teachings, especially those of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Francis, we encouraged each parish in the diocese to embrace a stewardship spirituality, empower an understanding of the co-responsibility of laity and clergy, and foster personal experiences of charity and mercy in our parishes.

We laid out the timeline for parishes to develop a pastoral plan for themselves, using the same "grassroots/grass tops" methodology. We asked parishes to invite people to participate in a Lenten reflection series on the three themes and to provide their reflections to their pastor and parish councils.

It was also necessary to recognize two groups who are often marginalized in our communities: young people and Spanish-speaking parishioners. We provided opportunities for both groups to consider the three themes and provide their reflections.

13. Together, then, the pastor and council members of almost all our parishes – 70 – developed a parish pastoral plan. The plans were sent to the Chancery, not for approval, but for me and other diocesan leaders and collaborators to understand the scope of



FIGURE 1.2

POPE FRANCIS HOLDS A COPY OF HIS APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *"The Joy of the Gospel"* (*"Evangelii Gaudium"*). *The diocesan pastoral plan is built upon this apostolic exhortation, especially its definition of a parish and its mission.*

what parishes were doing to strengthen their spirituality of stewardship, their ability to exercise the Church's teaching on co-responsibility, and their capacity as centers of charity and sanctuaries of mercy.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Presbyteral Council reviewed the parish plans, and then a first draft of the diocesan pastoral plan was proposed. This draft went through several revisions, as we sought reactions from parish lay leadership and clergy.

14. Our diocesan pastoral plan leverages our diocesan resources to assist parishes in the achievement of their parish pastoral plans. It is simple, fitting on one 8.5" x 11" page, yet it provides a three-year plan with activities to implement the three priorities in a strategic manner. This intends that diocesan resources are providing optimal support to parishes in the implementation of their own plans.

Serving as a catalyst for the parishes, the diocesan pastoral plan focuses on three objectives:

15. The Spirituality of Stewardship. The U.S. bishops wrote in their Pastoral Letter on Stewardship (1992) that Jesus' disciples and Christian stewards recognize God as the origin of life, giver of freedom, and source of all things, and that we are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and for one another. The spirituality of stewardship does not begin with our financial donations, but with an encounter of faith. The spirituality of stewardship will flourish in our diocese by increasing the participation of all parishioners, especially the young and fallen away Catholics, in their parish.

16. Strengthening co-responsibility. The fostering of a stewardship way of life will bear the fruit of an even greater diversity of charisms. That fruit will only mature in a parish culture of co-responsibility for a harmonious and integrated missionary effort.

"The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity," Pope Francis explains in *The Joy of the Gospel*. From that union come a diversity of expressions and gifts, "a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony" (no. 117). This multifaceted and diverse union provides what the conciliar document *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* calls

a "familiar dialogue": "A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the

laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world" (no. 37).

17. Strengthening our use of co-responsibility will de-emphasize the focus on maintenance of current structures and re-emphasize missionary discipleship. It will also create a culture in which vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life can

thrive and be supported, serving the future of our Church.

Co-responsibility signifies the mutual respect for the different roles and responsibilities of the clergy and laity in the life and mission of the Church. This implies a culture of respect among the laity for the right and obligation of everyone to be engaged in the mission of the parish. We need everyone at the table, and there is no room for turf issues!

18. Fostering the personal experience of mercy and charity in our parishes. As a deepening gratitude to God in a spirituality of stewardship increases our volunteerism, and as a culture of co-responsibility takes hold in the parish, more



"DO ALL THAT YOU DO WITH LOVE." Thérèse of Lisieux is a much-loved saint, known as the Little Flower and one of only four women honored with the title Doctor of the Church. Yet, she wrote of how she struggled to love her sisters in community. She exemplifies how to practice the spiritual works of mercy in the ordinary acts of daily life.

people will experience their local parish as a center of charity and a sanctuary of mercy.

When a parish fulfills the spiritual and corporal works of charity, its members are proclaiming the Good News of salvation. Tangible experiences of charity and mercy change people's minds about the parish and the Catholic Church as a whole. Mercy changes the hearts of those who receive mercy and those who offer mercy.

19. The Council Fathers' document *On the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* beautifully expresses this objective: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts" (no. 1). We encounter Christ when we engage in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

20. We use the terms "charity" and "mercy" to signify all the ways in which Christ's presence in the community of believers is experienced. For the purposes of the pastoral plan, the parish as a center of "charity" refers to the ways the Church ministers to those who have material needs: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, providing transportation for the homebound, etc.

"Mercy" is about reconciliation and forgiveness, but it is also experienced when a parish tangibly extends the Church's consolation and support in people's everyday joys and sorrows. The parish as a sanctuary of "mercy" fosters the practice of reconciliation within families and within the community of the parish; providing solace, consolation and support for people.

21. The parish as a recognized center of charity and sanctuary of mercy goes to the heart, to the culture of a parish. We can recognize our parish's culture especially in how baptisms, funerals, and weddings are celebrated, and how

the stranger and the foreigner are welcomed.

Are these merely moments of commercial transactions between individuals and the parish offices? Are those who call our parish office or look for us on the Internet left waiting in the cold?

Or are these opportunities of evangelization when we encounter individuals who have fallen away from the practice of the faith or have never darkened the doorway of our church? What experience would Jesus want them to have of our parish as they mourn the death of a loved one, celebrate the wedding of a friend or family member, or welcome the gift of new life in a family at a baptism? Are we accompanying them as a community of faith in these special moments?

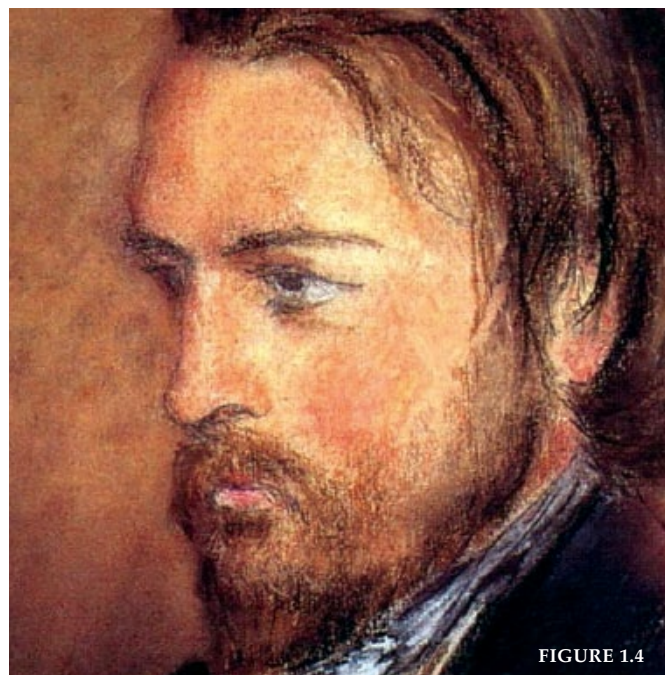


FIGURE 1.4

NOT TOO YOUNG! Early 19th century Paris was a rude awakening for Antoine Frédéric Ozanam. Challenged by his fellow students at Sorbonne, he and other young Catholics realized the Catholic Church needed to do more to address the great needs of the city's residents. On his 20th birthday, he invited five other students to a meeting where they founded the first Conference of Charity to assist the poor. Soon, they renamed their organization to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in honor of their patron saint.

22. It was clear, too, in reviewing the parishes' plans, that the diocesan pastoral plan must have a focus on improving communications in the parishes, especially in the use of digital information and communication systems.

For most parishioners under a certain age, who are "digital natives," these systems are vital and necessary for all aspects of their lives. If we, as a Church, see them as nonessential, we are, as one young adult explained, telling young people they, too, are not an essential part of the Church. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, we must be digital missionaries, learning the culture of digital natives and bringing the Gospel to their world.

23. As a means of holding ourselves accountable, one of the first-year activities of the diocesan pastoral plan is the creation of an assessment tool parishes can use in evaluating their progress in the implementation of their pastoral plans. We want to ensure our common dream will be accomplished: To have vibrant parishes with a deeper commitment to accomplishing the mission given to us by Jesus Christ; that is, to share and live our Catholic faith in witness to the Kingdom of God.

But for our parishes to thrive, our communion and commitment to one another within the parish and among the parishes in the diocese must be stronger.

THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH (Acts 2:42)

24. In the Acts of the Apostles, the sequel to the Gospel written by St. Luke, there is a description of the ideal Church community, strong in its communion and piety: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The communion of the Church, as described by St. Luke, is rooted in what we believe as Catholics (the teaching of the Apostles); in how we live the Christian virtues and practice charity (the communal life); and in how we pray as Catholics, especially the Mass and the sacraments (the breaking of the bread and the prayers).

Our communion is strengthened whenever we adhere to the faith, when we practice our faith, and when we celebrate the sacraments in fidelity to Christ. This is why we are "Better Together." But you and I know our communion needs to be strengthened to address the unprecedented challenges facing our Church today.

25. Many comments from the various listening sessions, and during the discernment processes for the parish and diocesan pastoral plans,



THE LAITY'S PRIESTLY WORK. Archbishop Oscar Romero was martyred while celebrating Mass in El Salvador in 1980. He had been a strong voice for justice and encouraging lay Catholics to take their baptismal call seriously. In 1977, he said in a homily, "How beautiful will be the day when all the baptized understand that their work, their job, is a priestly work, that just as I celebrate Mass at this altar, so each carpenter celebrates Mass at his workbench, and each metalworker, each professional, each doctor with the scalpel, the market woman at her stand, is performing a priestly office!"



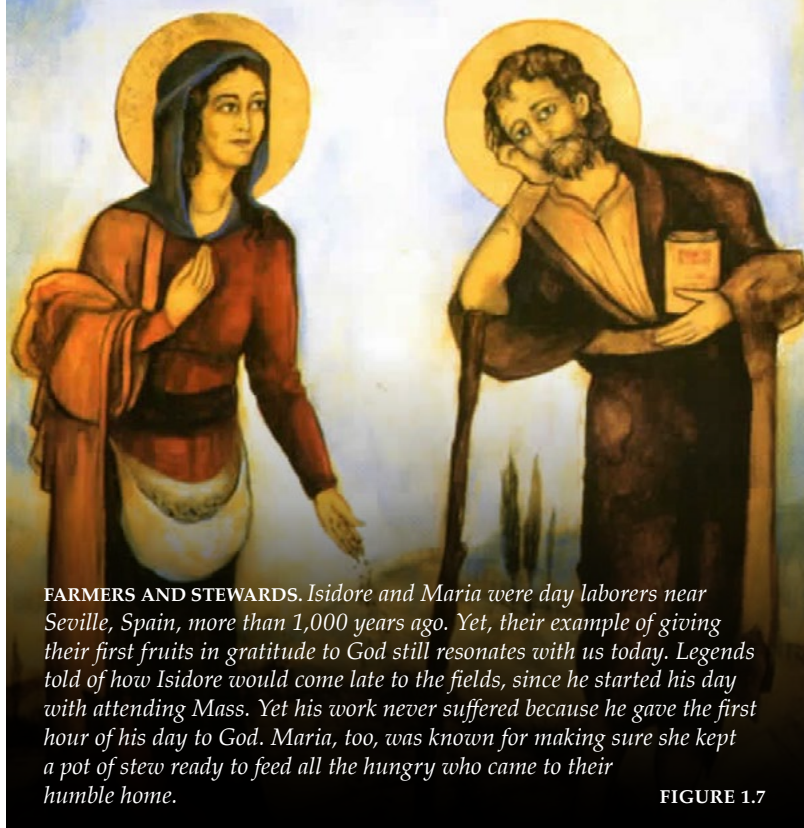
surfaced a great concern for our youth and declining participation in our Church. We know the importance of fostering new vocations to the ministerial priesthood. Catechesis was also raised as a matter needing attention, especially in terms in passing on the faith to the next generation.

But what good are our programs of catechesis and faith formation if no one shows up? And how can we promote vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life without healthy parishes?

26. During our gathering of lay leadership in February 2020, we learned how important the transcendentals of truth, beauty and goodness are in attracting the millennial generation to participation in the Church. In particular, we must consider the ways in which the beauty of our faith is expressed. How we celebrate the Sunday Eucharist, with its noble and beautiful grandeur, is important not only for ourselves but for those who have yet to join us at the altar of the Lord. And who can deny the importance of showing the beauty of our faith in our works of charity and mercy for a generation so hungry for it?

27. If we accomplish the three priorities of the diocesan pastoral plan (spirituality of stewardship; co-responsibility; and parishes as recognized centers of charity and sanctuaries of mercy), our parishes will be successful in their evangelization efforts to invite, welcome, and engage more people in the life and mission of the Church.

For this to happen, change will be necessary for most, if not all, our parishes. We must use our first fruits in the celebration of the Mass and other liturgies, rather than what is left over in the parish budget. And we must redouble our efforts to practice the charity that is sacramentally manifested in the Eucharist: Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life!



FARMERS AND STEWARDS. Isidore and Maria were day laborers near Seville, Spain, more than 1,000 years ago. Yet, their example of giving their first fruits in gratitude to God still resonates with us today. Legends told of how Isidore would come late to the fields, since he started his day with attending Mass. Yet his work never suffered because he gave the first hour of his day to God. Maria, too, was known for making sure she kept a pot of stew ready to feed all the hungry who came to their humble home.

FIGURE 1.7

28. May our diocesan Patroness, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray with us for the fulfillment of our diocesan pastoral plan. With her, may we be the Church at prayer:

*Stay with us, Lord Jesus, on our journey of faith,
and be our companion on our way
to set our hearts on fire with new hope.
Help us to recognize your presence among us
in the Scriptures we read,
and in the breaking of bread.
For you live and reign with the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Given in Columbia, Missouri, at St. Thomas More Newman Center Parish, on the 6th day of February in the Year of St. Joseph, 2021, the third anniversary of my ordination and installation as Bishop of Jefferson City.

Shawn McKnight

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight
Bishop of Jefferson City

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A STEWARD'S JOURNEY OUR CALL TO GREATER COMMUNION



Three Year Diocesan Pastoral Plan

	Strengthening participation (Stewardship)	Strengthening co-responsibility	Strengthening charity and mercy
YEAR ONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch stewardship renewal process with seven pilot parishes • Use the pillars of stewardship — hospitality, prayer, formation and service — to inform support from diocesan offices to parishes • Provide to parishes small group program that focuses on spirituality of stewardship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide formation for parish pastoral and finance councils • Provide formation and education for pastors and heads of schools regarding spirituality of stewardship • Encourage the laity to assume their role in strengthening our family of parishes through appropriate and active participation in decision-making regarding structural reconfiguration of parishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist parishes in surveying the unmet needs of the people in the parish's territory • Develop an assessment tool for parishes to review how they foster the personal experience of mercy. This tool would include sacramental encounters (e.g. funerals, weddings, baptisms), physical settings at the parish, pastoral approaches and office processes.
	Improve communications for personal engagement in parishes by using unified digital information and communication systems		
YEAR TWO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch second pilot cohort of parishes for stewardship renewal program • Establish a diocesan Stewardship Council • Develop a plan to move from Catholic Stewardship Appeal to Catholic Stewardship Renewal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with the formation of parish stewardship councils • Provide formation and education for pastors and heads of schools regarding spirituality of stewardship • Provide formation of lay ministry leaders in the parishes to empower works of charity and mercy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a network of Catholic Charities Ambassadors, allowing parishes resources to provide for unmet needs within their parish territory • Support parishes in their efforts to foster personal experiences of mercy, based on their assessments
YEAR THREE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement diocesan-wide Catholic Stewardship Renewal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing consultation of laity regarding opportunities for better collaboration of clergy, lay ecclesial ministers and other resources to strengthen parish life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network with neighboring parishes and/or not-for-profits within the wider area to ensure all unmet needs are met



ON THE COVER

WORKS OF MERCY IN STAINED GLASS shine in St. George Catholic Church in Hermann, Missouri where a series of 13 stained glass windows depict the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The cover of this letter showcases “Holy Mass” (full window shown here) and one of the spiritual works of mercy: praying for the living and the dead. One theme of the diocesan pastoral plan is to support clergy and laity in building up their parishes as centers of charity and sanctuaries of mercy.

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