



Core Statement of the Pastoral Plan

1.5 I therefore take this opportunity to invite everyone in the Diocese lay faithful and religious, deacons and priests– to join with me in forging our parishes into communities of saints, into strong, lively and welcoming schools of discipleship. May they be communities where the Lord is known and loved; where the liturgy is experienced as an encounter with the wonder of heaven; where daily prayer is a natural part of life; communities of healing, where all are welcomed, their dignity as children of God always recognised; where young people grow in deep love for the Gospel, for the sacramental life of the Church and for prayer; where all know the riches of the Faith and seek to share it with others.

Conforming Ourselves to Christ

1.6b We are called to be more closely conformed to Christ, that as His disciples we may bring the Good News to our brothers and sisters. This is a call that is made upon all the baptised, each according to their state in life, that we may use the gifts we have been given at the service of Christ and of our brothers and sisters, both near and far.

1.7 We must keep our minds and hearts fixed on Christ, The Word Who is Life, the One Who is our Subject, the One Who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist and Who sends us out, in the power of the Holy Spirit to be His instruments, to be the earthenware vessels that hold the treasure that is the message of Life.

The Importance of the Eucharist

2.1 As we respond to the call to Mission, the celebration of the Eucharist must always be at the heart of our lives, the encounter with Christ that enables us to do all He asks of us. It is through celebrating the Eucharist, above all else, that we grow in conformity to Him. This demands of every person in the Diocese, clergy and faithful alike, an adherence to the celebration of Mass, especially on Sundays and Holy Days. This time of renewal across the Diocese is a call to us all to re-commit ourselves to the celebration of the Eucharist.”

Prayer, Formation and Mission

1.6a It will be helpful, also, to re-iterate the foundational elements of the Plan: The principles of Prayer, Formation and Mission must be the measure against which we place every endeavour. Prayer is the vital prerequisite for every conversation, every thought and every action. Formation in every aspect of Faith is necessary if we are to be effective in Mission. Mission calls us outward, beyond the safety of that with which we are comfortable.

The Importance of Prayer

3.1.i Prayer – ‘the raising of one’s mind and heart to God’ – is the necessary foundation for every step that we take. Prayer is the life-breath of the Christian. Nothing is possible without it and the continuing life of the Diocese, as in the past, will depend upon the life of prayer of us all.

3.1.vii We must continue, therefore, to become more and more a people of prayer. Every person living in the Diocese will be given the opportunity to learn about prayer and to experience the different ways of praying.

The Importance of Formation

3.2.i Formation, beginning with and grounded in prayer, leads us to be ever closer to Christ – conformed to Him. Formation requires a deeper understanding of Scriptures, especially the Gospels.

The celebration of the Liturgy is, itself, a means of formation, centred on the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays.

Formation is life-long, for the journey to closer conformity to Christ is the very purpose of our lives.

3.2.iii Every person in the Diocese has the right and responsibility to grow in the knowledge and understanding of the faith.

It's all about Mission

3.3.i The Church has a 'Missionary Mandate', to be 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 849)

This task of preaching the Gospel to all stems from the command of the Lord to the Apostles, recorded at the end of Matthew's Gospel: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." *(Matthew 28:19)*

3.3.ii The call to be missionary disciples is a consequence of our Baptism. It is a responsibility that is placed on every Christian.

3.3.iii Effective mission is not possible unless grounded in prayer and underpinned by formation.

Conclusions

6.1 The world in which we live thirsts for God and every person, as God's creations, finds meaning and fulfilment only in Him. As Saint Augustine reminds us: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." *(St. Augustine, Confessions, 1.1)*

This restlessness, this thirst, is often not recognised and results in much searching that reaches no fulfilment. It is into this space that the Church must step, answering 'the need to respond adequately to many people's thirst for God.' *(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n.89)*

6.2 It is, therefore, in this space that we stand as Christ's faithful in the Diocese. The opportunities that this space affords prompt us to answer the Lord's call to prayer, to grow in our conformity to Him through our formation, that we may do His work.

6.3 This Pastoral Plan presents, therefore, our earnest attempt to respond to this challenge in our present times and circumstances. While we must be in no doubt that the challenges are significant, we know, too, that our following of Christ, our proclamation of the Word Who is Life, brings with it the joy of the Kingdom of God.