

Go Forth with Hearts on Fire

A Pastoral Letter on the New Evangelization

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The Best Message

Never More Convinced

After 48 years as a priest, I have never been more convinced that each of us needs and desires a relationship with Jesus Christ in His Church. Each day brings this reality home to me in new and striking ways. Earlier this year I looked into the eyes of seven men as I ordained them to the priesthood and sent them out to serve the people of God. Hardly a week goes by in the fall and in the spring when I am not standing before eighth graders, sealing them with the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation and commissioning them to profess faith in Christ publicly.¹ At parishes throughout our diocese, I regularly meet men, women and children who are sharing their relationship with Jesus Christ with a palpable joy and urgency. One by one, day by day, these evangelists are bringing family and friends to a place where they can say, “Yes, I want what you have. I need more.”

To be candid, together with these new priests, eighth graders, and parish evangelists, we face a fundamentally altered landscape compared with the one I was sent to serve upon my ordination in 1965. When I was ordained just 10 days after the close of the Second Vatican Council, fewer than 1 in 10 marriages ended in divorce. Abortion was illegal. Fewer than 300,000 Americans were incarcerated. Today, 1 in 4 pregnancies end in abortion. Four in 10 marriages end in divorce, and in the public culture, marriage and the family are in the process of being redefined. One in 31 adult Americans is in prison or on probation. Amid such brokenness, Pope Francis’ analogy of the Church as a “field hospital”² has never seemed more fitting. Now is the time to find “a language of mercy,” which he describes as “expressed in gestures and attitudes even before words.”³ A nearly frantic search for peace, meaning and hope is evident all around us. Yes, we experience a true hunger and thirst within us for something more—indeed, for *Someone* more.

My Prayer: That You Will Introduce Just One Person

My foremost prayer is for the dawning of a new evangelization here in the Diocese of Arlington. I pray that we might meet this hunger and thirst with an outpouring of love, mercy, and an evangelization “new in its ardor, new in its methods, and new in its means of expression.”⁴ Simply put, it is a prayer that we might fall more deeply in love with Jesus Christ and share that love with another.

Consider the implications of **every Catholic introducing just one person to Christ**. If every one of the roughly 500,000 Catholics who belong to the 68 parishes and 6 missions of our diocese brought the Good News to just one other person in the coming year, my life and your pastor’s life would be turned upside down. I would find myself the most blessed Catholic bishop in the United States—no, in the world. It would not take long for us to see stronger marriages and healthier families. Parents could envision the lives of their children coming of age in an historic surge of the Catholic community, where there are vibrant expressions of the faith and genuine growth in our service to the poor and defenseless. Close relationships with our Lord would define us. More women and men would join the nearly 50 from our diocese now in formation for the consecrated religious life. More men would join our 38 seminarians currently

in formation for the priesthood. In a diocese that has already been home to extraordinary expressions of faith, new horizons of the Good News would open for all of us.

A Tool Box for the Evangelist Today

Even in such a challenging time, I believe that this vision can be realized for us as Catholics in the Diocese of Arlington. In fact, we live in a *privileged* time. Unlike prior generations, we cannot be lukewarm, uninformed, or casual about the gift of Faith. Today is a time of decision and commitment, and we are at the forefront. If we examine history, this degree of urgency was shared by all of the great evangelists in their own times.

In this pastoral letter at the close of the Year of Faith and at the outset of a new liturgical year, I hope to provide a tool box for you to become a great evangelist in this age. This letter has six parts. First (“Me, an Evangelist?”), I will invite you to consider the most common personal blocks we experience to evangelization. Second (“Before You Go”), I will reflect with you on how we encounter the love of Christ that sets us ablaze with zeal. Third (“Now, Go”), I will invite you to consider three of the evangelist’s essential attributes. Fourth (“Keep Going”), I will challenge you to take up three practices which sustain us in our daily walk with Christ. Fifth (“Has the Going Ever Been Tougher?”), since the evangelist needs to know what he or she may encounter, I will outline the five biggest obstacles the priests of our diocese have identified to spreading the Good News, together with proposed solutions. Sixth and finally, I will invite you to consider how Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, can increase our faith and focus our mission as evangelists.

I pray that this letter helps you to take specific and concrete steps in drawing closer to Jesus Christ, and proclaiming Him to others. By confronting the obstacles in your path, taking up the tools you need as an evangelist, and staying renewed as a disciple along the way, you will be living out your baptismal call to carry out the mission the Lord has for you—indeed, for all of us.

Me, an Evangelist?

I will admit, growing up, I never thought much about the notion of evangelizing. Everyone and everything in my world was Catholic. Yes, some may say that I had the quintessential Italian-American Catholic upbringing. I am the only child of an immigrant father and first-generation Italian-American mother. Our lives were simple but filled with the riches of their traditions. Through hard work and faithful prayer, my parents instilled in me a strong foundation. I served as an altar boy and was educated by the Sisters of Mercy and by the Christian Brothers. I was greatly influenced by my cousin Mike, a Catholic priest, so much so that at the age of eight, I announced my life’s plan to my parents, “When I grow up, I want to be like Father Mike.”

Yet it did not take long as a priest for me to realize that the gifts I had been given in childhood were now to be used to spread the Good News of Christ’s love. With the gift of faith, I received a mission to evangelize that continues to expand and increase every day of my priesthood. This gift, moreover, belongs equally to every Catholic.

What is Evangelization?

When I experience something new and exciting, the first thing I want to do is to tell someone about it. Telling others adds to my enjoyment. How much more should our response to our encounters with Christ result in a burning desire to share His story and His impact in our lives with others?

“Evangelization” simply means sharing the Good News (*euangélion* in Greek) about a Person, Jesus Christ. It is you and me taking a step toward Jesus...and then toward others to introduce Him. In all times, all around the world, the Church has existed to evangelize,⁵ to proclaim Jesus Christ.

We can think of evangelization as a two-part endeavor, initiative, and process. First, we ourselves must be re-evangelized, converted ever more to the Lord, set ablaze with His love. Second, we must reach out in love to others to show them Christ as the fountain Who satisfies the thirst of their hearts. If we neglect one of these two aspects of evangelization, we will find our efforts ineffective, one-dimensional, and out-of-balance.

Though this call to share the Good News may seem natural, let us briefly examine five common excuses or objections—in our own hearts and minds, and in the hearts and minds of others—for evangelizing.

1. I Don’t Think of Myself as an Evangelist

Often we may not think of ourselves as evangelists. It is natural in our culture, when faith is so often misunderstood or mischaracterized, to be hesitant to talk to other people about faith. We want to avoid embarrassment. We do not want to offend people. We worry that we may be perceived as judgmental. We do not want people to think that we feel we are better than they are. We may think that we do not know enough about our faith to share it. We are concerned that we may be judged ourselves. We fear that “imposing” our beliefs will limit others’ freedom.

You may not know it, but as a baptized Catholic you already are an evangelist. You are a herald or messenger of this Good News. You have received a commission to “Go out.” To each one of you, I echo the words spoken recently by Pope Francis: “Jesus is calling you to be a disciple with a mission!”⁶ The Lord has put within you the spiritual wisdom, strength, and the grace needed to conduct the specific mission which He has in mind for you. The challenge is to live according to that grace, wisdom, and strength so that your entire life bears witness to the Person Whom you know and love.

2. I Don’t Want to Impose My Catholic Faith

We do not *impose* our beliefs on others. In fact, we *propose* the Good News. It is about how Jesus has transformed our life. Only with the Holy Spirit, working freely *through* each of us as a follower of Jesus Christ, can we bring others to the Lord. Christ’s love does not limit freedom but instead gives true freedom. People are not “projects,” and they can no more be manipulated than you or I would submit to a stranger’s plan for our life. No amount of marketing

or public relations would ever genuinely move another to encounter Christ. Only our own deepening relationship with Him can spark a change in others.

The best way to evangelize is to attract people to the God they so desperately need by the way we live our lives. By growing closer to Christ, you and I create the opportunity for one person from our circle of family, friends, or community to see something different in our life, and ask us, “Why do you live that way? What urges you on?”⁷ When this happens, then we can invite them to join us at a Church-sponsored event, a Theology on Tap, a parish festival, a talk on the faith, or even the Holy Mass. But in the end, it will probably be repeated conversations and personal sharing that will bring family and friends to a place where they can say, “Yes, I want that too. I need more.”

Bringing the Good News to another is about offering the freedom and joy of Christ through His Church. It is one heart speaking to another with an invitation to life and joy. It is you and I bringing Jesus Christ, a living Person, into someone else’s life. When we evangelize, we meet people where they are in their lives, amid all of their joys and trials, and ask them to bring every part of their life to the Lord. In so doing, we help others to understand that the desires of their hearts—however they may be directed at present—are a summons from the infinite God of love and mercy, Who wants them to have the fullness of life. Evangelization allows people to become aware of the presence of God *already within them*, made as they are in His image and likeness. Evangelization invites others to identify that sense of yearning within themselves, and to allow for it to grow.

3. I’m Afraid to Evangelize

If you feel a bit shy about opening yourself to the Lord’s call, you are not alone in your fears. Pope Benedict XVI once said, “Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom?”⁸

He then responded brilliantly to all these fears: “No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great... Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and He gives you everything. When we give ourselves to Him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ—and you will find true life.” We offer this gift of true life to our families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers when we evangelize.

4. I Don’t Have Time to Evangelize

If you are thinking, “Not another new commitment,” rest assured, that is *not* what I am thinking! I am proposing a change of life. Like the rich young man whom Christ called to give up everything, it means *all*.⁹ Evangelization is not a new “spoke in the wheel”; it is the *entire* wheel. It is a leitmotif, so to speak, that will permeate everything we say and do, for the rest of our lives, and beyond! It is not something new to fit into your schedule but, rather, a new lens to

hold up to your *entire* schedule. While it could mean a mission trip, it most likely will mean re-envisioning your zip code as mission territory and working by my side here in the Diocese of Arlington.

5. I Don't See the Urgency to Evangelize

Beneath the surface of our culture, there is a suffering that only Christ the Lord can heal. The symptoms are evident in our broken families, materialism, widespread practical atheism, and, as I wrote in my pastoral letter, *Bought with a Price*, rampant pornography. Nevertheless, our neighbors, broadly speaking, are interested in spirituality and issues of faith. We know that the Truth that they are really hungering for is Christ, even though they might not know it. They want something more in their lives. This emptiness in our friends and co-workers is not just an academic matter. Increasingly today, we meet people who have turned away from Christianity and others who have never even encountered its teachings in any meaningful way. Some may have turned away after having been hurt by other Christians. Many lack a clear understanding of basic right and wrong. Yet, even as fewer people call themselves Christians, there is still a real, unmet hunger for meaning and purpose in their lives.

Our troubled world needs Christ and His teaching, along with the peace and forgiveness He brings into our lives. “But,” as Saint Paul wrote, “how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?”¹⁰ This is where your mission and mine begins.

Before You Go

1. Encountering Christ's Saving Love

“I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!”¹¹ The fire our Lord came to set is nothing less than His own love, indeed the fire from His Sacred Heart. We cannot share this love if we have not experienced its healing warmth and strength.

Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, was sent by His Father to ignite the world with the flames of divine love. “The Son of God ‘went forth’ from His divine condition and came to meet us.”¹² The Lord Jesus came—and remains among us—to proclaim how loved we are. He loves us so much that He willingly and “with joy...endured the cross,”¹³ giving His life so that we might be redeemed from the effects of evil, our own willful sinfulness and eternal death. He died so that we might live on earth with enduring love, and then, after our death, forever with our God. This is the simple proclamation of the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, what is known as the *kerygma*. Blessed Pope John Paul II described the *kerygma* as “the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith.”¹⁴

Before you and I can take up our mission as a disciple and evangelist, *we must know that we are the Lord's beloved*. Jesus loves us with an intimate, unconditional, and unfailing love—no matter what. Even when you or I sin, the Lord reaches out to us with His forgiveness and mercy. By His Death and Resurrection, He redeemed us from eternal death and brought us into

life. Through Him, God the Father in effect says to us, “I have given you the best gift I could give: my Only-begotten Son Who is your Redeemer, your Savior, your Way, your Truth, and your very Life. The love which He reveals to you, especially on the Cross, is wide enough to embrace saints, aspiring saints and outright sinners.” This encounter cannot but set our hearts ablaze!

Takeaway: God loves everyone. You are loved by God.

Practice: Think of three ways God has blessed you recently. Thank Him for these blessings.

2. Living as Children of God

“In accepting the gift of faith believers become a new creation; they receive a new being; as God’s children, they are now ‘sons in the Son.’”¹⁵ So then, we participate in Christ’s own Sonship. As God’s children, we become sharers in the divine nature and therefore capable of bearing witness to Our Father, by extending His kingdom of mercy and love to all we encounter. This dignity as children should never be underestimated. It is truly a privilege!

Our relationship with our own fathers may influence how we relate to God as His son or daughter. Whether or not the memory of our own father is positive, we can learn from Jesus who our Heavenly Father is and how to relate to Him. Our culture is aware that a father or father figure can make a crucial difference in life. Think of the countless literary and media themes that focus on the quest to find that missing father figure. How long will we search for the imitation? Let us finally look to the reality that God the Father *is the Father for us all*. For all of us who have become His adopted children, the Father fulfills all our needs completely and with immeasurable love.

Christ does nothing on His own. He does only what the Father does and asks of Him.¹⁶ This adherence to the Father’s will is the key to living as a son or daughter in the Son. Accepting this gift is the core of Christian holiness and discipleship, of a personal relationship with Christ in His Church and of our lives as evangelists. This entails embracing the Lordship of Christ in every area of our lives, including obeying Him in ways that may seem painfully contrary to our personal desires. But, only then are we liberated to experience God’s full blessing upon His children.

Takeaway: God created us! He did not have to, but in His desire to love human beings made in His image, male and female, He created us.

Practice: Meditate on these words from our Lord: “Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you. Fear not, I am with you.”¹⁷

3. Getting Personal: Our Relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church

A recent Pew Research Study revealed a statistic that should jolt every Catholic into action: Nearly a third of self-identified Catholics believe in an *impersonal* God—in other words, an “*impersonal* force.”¹⁸ That means that many among us do not have a personal, intimate relationship with the source of our very being. If Baptism brings us into an intimate communion

with the three Persons of God, the Blessed Trinity, how can it be that so many of the Father's own children do not know Him personally?

To answer this question, we need to re-examine our lived experience with God. "Living our faith," "living the spiritual life," "being truly religious"—whatever the phrase we use—is a matter of a relationship with a Person, namely, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Our Lord and Redeemer, within the community of His disciples, the Church. Practicing the faith demands an ever-deepening personal relationship with the Lord Jesus within the Church, a continuing surrender to "Christ the King who conquers us and to whom we offer our whole person"¹⁹ by giving Him our body, mind, emotions, and will.

Do you know anyone who falls in love with abstractions, like rules, concepts or commandments? I cannot think of anyone. We fall in love with a person. Friends have a personal relationship; husbands and wives have a relationship even more intimate. Experience in our friendships and marriages teaches us the necessity of nurturing these personal relationships. We do what it takes to preserve and to deepen such relationships, avoiding whatever would weaken or destroy them.

My relationship with Jesus Christ is founded upon knowing Him as a Person, and it is lived within our Church. It is not a relationship between Jesus and me in isolation, nor is it between a community and me without Jesus. It is a relationship with a Person that comes to me through the Church, founded by Jesus Christ Himself. It is within the Church that this relationship has been offered to and received by people throughout history. As Saint Paul wrote, "You are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it."²⁰ Pope Francis recently observed, "No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships."²¹

And yet many today say, "I believe in Christ, but I don't need the 'human community' of the Church." This is contrary to the mind of Christ, Who came to save us as members of His Mystical Body, the Church. As Saint Augustine put it, "Christ and the Church are two in one flesh."²² Since we often need help from friends or family in working through our relationships with others—for example, calling a friend on the phone to discuss what to do about a relationship—we can expect to build our relationship with Christ only with the help of His other friends, indeed, His other brothers and sisters, our fellow disciples, in the context of the Church family.

I share with you a very personal experience of Christ which occurred just several years ago, decades into my life as a priest and bishop. Without a doubt, I have understood, accepted and experienced in many ways the love of Jesus for me precisely as a disciple, priest, and bishop. However, there was always a kind of glass wall in terms of experiencing His love. It was as if I could see Him through the wall, and He could presumably see me, but I did not experience His love to the depth that I so desired. That was not His fault, but mine: somehow, I was not receptive enough.

Then, during a silent eight-day retreat with a group of fellow bishops, the retreat director suggested that I bring these passages from Isaiah before the Lord in *lectio divina* and prayer: “Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you. Fear not, I am with you... Do not fear, I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.”²³ It was during prayer with these texts that the Lord allowed this glass wall to suddenly and unexpectedly shatter! I cannot express in words how profoundly I was touched. I knew without a doubt that He loves me. I was grateful beyond words! I recalled the antiphon from the Mass for the Most Sacred Heart: “My son, give me your heart; note carefully the way I point to you.” As a result of His great mercy towards me, I live in a new way, not perfectly and not without all the struggles of daily life, but with an inner conviction that I cannot deny or ever forget. This experience can also be yours!

Takeaway: Christianity is about being friends with Christ, within the Community of His Disciples, where we learn how to be a better and closer friend to Christ.

Practice: As part of your deepening friendship with Christ, find one concrete way to love Him and through Him, to love your fellow disciples.

Now, Go

Every Mass ends with the words of dismissal. They might be taken merely as a signal to get our coats on and prepare to leave, but the dismissal is more than that. The words are a commissioning. We are to *go in peace* not leaving “Church” behind, but taking “Church”—that is, Jesus—with us into mission territory. We are to bring the Gospel to others by thought, word, and action. It is a tall order, so here are three guideposts to help us in this work.

1. Joy

From time immemorial, has it not been one goal of people everywhere to pursue happiness? “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life,” wrote Aristotle, “the whole aim and end of human existence.”²⁴ And yet today, the pursuit of happiness for some may mean the acquisition of more material possessions, power or status, or the satiation of physical or emotional desires. This “happiness” is fleeting and, we all know, unsatisfying. What we truly want is the joy of healthy relationships. This is what evangelization is all about!

So, let us talk about real joy for a moment. Joy does not mean getting what we want, or never experiencing difficulties, pain, and suffering. Perfect joy is union with God, and we know that we will have to go through the trials of life to know the fullness of joy with Him in Heaven. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that the pursuit of joy will include the cross: “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”²⁵ How well we know this phenomenon! A sense of inner peace and joy entails healthy and ordered relationships, including one with our Lord. As with all things, relationships can be hard work, which includes the highs and lows of life, the celebrations and the crosses that come our way.

Yes, announcing the Good News is a duty,²⁶ and with this duty and responsibility come the need to shed selfishness and fear, and to accept and embrace the challenges that make up this mission. But I promise you, bringing the Good News to another is a joy that far surpasses fleeting worldly pleasures. Once we have tasted the goodness of the Lord, we discover that the practice of our faith is not boring, burdensome, or negative, but rather, life-giving, transformative, and overflowing. Naturally, we desire to share this with others. We want others to taste the joy and strength that come from union with Jesus within His Church.

We will attract others to Christ's Church only if we show them that the Good News is truly *good*. So we must show the world how good a friendship with Christ is, how joyful and fulfilling and positive it is to be members of the Church, of Christ's own Body. "We all need to ask ourselves," Pope Francis reminds us, "if those who encounter us perceive the warmth of faith in our lives, if they see in our faces the joy of having encountered Christ!"²⁷

Takeaway: Our joy attracts people to Christ.

Practice: Pray for and seek to develop a right relationship with Christ that alone brings joy and right relationships with others. Allow your joy to be increased through the Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church.

2. Mission Territory

Before ascending to the Father, Jesus commanded the disciples, "go and make disciples of all nations."²⁸ In this "Great Commission" our Lord Jesus *co-missions* us to bring His love to everyone. We often think of missions in terms of the *foreign* missions, such as the two mission parishes our diocese sponsors and supports at Banica and Pedro Santana in the Dominican Republic. But as bishop, where is my primary mission? It is right here in the Diocese of Arlington. And I cannot accomplish my mission as a bishop alone. I need you by my side. Working together, we can bring the joy of the Lord into our homes, neighborhoods and places of work, into Alexandria, Arlington, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, Kilmarnock, Leesburg, Luray, Manassas, Winchester, and each of the other localities that comprise our mission territory.

Our homes—or "domestic churches"—are the first places of missionary activity. Blessed Mother Teresa would often tell visitors asking to join her mission in the slums of Calcutta to return home and find their own "Calcutta" there. From our homes, we then go out to tell the Good News, serving as salt and light and leaven in the surrounding neighborhood, parish, town, city, county, and even beyond.

Have you ever seen peace and joy in someone and asked that person what was making his or her life different? Has anyone ever asked you "What makes you, your family and home special?" Could people look into your home and know that your family is different? To use a popular analogy, is there enough "evidence" to "convict" you of being a Christian?

I pray that you and I provoke such questions more and more as we enter into each day with the perspective of a missionary. We are called, one could say, to make others' hearts burn for Christ. May our lives fascinate, attract, and inflame hearts as we enter "the missionary territories" we call home!

Takeaway: Our mission territory is all around us, in our homes, our neighborhoods and wherever we go.

Practice: Do something that will make someone ask: “How can you do that with such joy?” or “How do you have enough time to do that?” or “Can I join you in that service?”

3. Witnessing Through Service

“See how they love one another!”²⁹ is what the ancient pagans said of the early Christians, whose charity moved the hearts of those around them. It sparked an interest in finding what exactly enabled them to love one another. So it is that charity – our faith in action – evangelizes others today.

As children of God and followers of Christ, we seek opportunities for acts of charity, for living out our faith in concrete ways. Expressing the love of the Gospel through our actions is vital to being faithful disciples of Jesus and His authentic witnesses. “Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”³⁰ We can do this on our own or through the many Christian organizations doing valuable and visible works of service for the Glory of God and the welfare of our brothers and sisters the world over.

If we look, we will find concrete ways to love those who are needy and without hope. At His Last Supper, Christ showed us a new way to love our neighbor: He washed the disciples’ feet, an act beneath even a servant—a slave’s task. Our Lord and Master stooped to be a slave! That kind of sacrificial love we bring to those most downtrodden and in so doing, our self-giving both imitates and reveals the love of Christ’s Heart. Have we tried to love this way? Only when our hearts are in union with Jesus’ Sacred Heart will this love flow freely.

Takeaway: Acts of loving service are crucial to witnessing to Christ.

Practice: Volunteer or take part in charitable service, and find ways to discuss charity with others.

Keep Going

Tending the Flame with Three Evangelization Essentials

“Disciple” comes from the Latin verb that means “to learn.” The Lord Jesus is continually teaching us as He draws us closer to Him. After our initial encounter with Christ, a lifelong journey with Him awaits. In ever more beautiful and compelling ways, we learn to become intentional disciples, that is, disciples who consciously intend to learn from the Teacher and to follow the Beloved.

In *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell writes, “Intentional discipleship is not accidental or merely cultural. It is not just a matter of ‘following the rules’ . . . But discipleship begins when ‘persons at last have the occasion to hear the *kerygma*, renew their own baptism,

consciously choose Christ as their own personal Lord and Savior, and commit themselves actively in the life of their Church.”³¹

Without this intentionality, our faith weakens, our desire to learn from Him diminishes, and our initial love for Christ wanes and fades. Without truth, our faith is, in the words of Pope Francis, “reduced to a lofty sentiment which brings consolation and cheer, yet remains prey to the vagaries of our spirit and the changing seasons, incapable of sustaining a steady journey through life... If love is not tied to truth, it falls prey to fickle emotions and cannot stand the test of time.”³² In our careers and professional undertakings, we recognize the need to continually grow and develop. All the more so, as evangelists on a mission, we need the ongoing renewal that the following three practices offer to us in our life of faith.

1. The Eucharist: Core of a Living Relationship

Fanning the flames of our relationship with Jesus Christ into a burning fire is the core of living the faith. Nothing stokes that fire more than contact with Him in the Eucharist. He kindles our longing hearts as we receive Him in Holy Communion, as we encounter His Presence in the tabernacle. In the Eucharist, we discover the strength to love one another as Jesus commands us. With hearts set on fire by Him, we practice the faith in spirit and in truth, with peace, conviction and zeal. We begin to integrate living the faith into daily life and, of course, share in His mission of the New Evangelization.

Every Mass is the actual making present of Christ’s dying and rising, the clearest expression of Divine Love. At every celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, you and I embrace and are embraced by Love Incarnate, love that is reflected in the Holy Scriptures proclaimed to us in the first part of the Mass and, then, more deeply revealed to us in the second part of the Mass. In the Eucharist, we are personally united with Christ Jesus and, through Him, with one another as members of His Body. The very word “Communion” comes from the Latin for “union with.” Part of intentional discipleship is to open our deepest selves eagerly to His feeding us with His very own Person in Holy Communion, to allow His burning love to consume us as we consume His Body and Blood, and to then pass on that flame—that burning desire to love and be loved—to others.

Takeaway: The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life,”³³ helping us to love and be loved by Christ.

Practice: Receive Communion on Sundays, and if possible, more often, during the week.

2. Confession: Gateway to Evangelization

“The New Evangelization, therefore, also begins in the confessional!” Pope Benedict XVI said.³⁴

By receiving the Sacrament of Penance, we experience forgiveness for every last one of our sins, no matter how serious, and are sent forth on our mission, rejoicing. We meet the fire and light of Christ each time we go to Him in Confession. If you do not currently receive the Sacrament of Penance regularly, I strongly recommend going more often, at least monthly. If

you already receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently and find yourself confessing the same sins over and over, begin to think more deeply about the sins that may be lurking behind those sins, giving them power over you. Consider how you receive the Lord's forgiveness, and take adequate time to examine your conscience.

Through the priest, Christ embraces us in our sorrow, forgives us every sin, and touches us with the healing power of Divine Mercy, stoking the embers that only smolder in our hearts when through our sins, we have failed to tend the fire. When we leave confession, we go purified by His fire, our sins obliterated. That can give us new energy to live out His will, do what is good and true and just, and tell others about the joy we have come to know.

Takeaway: Confession is where the weight of our sins is lifted, allowing us to evangelize with new energy.

Practice: Ask God's forgiveness each night for the day's sins, and receive the Sacrament of Penance regularly.

3. Daily Prayer: The Evangelist's Life-Breath

Do you have a talent for staying in touch with old friends? Some of us do, but some of us find ourselves always apologizing for the delay in making that call or writing that note or email. What about keeping up with Jesus, Who tells us, "I have called you friends"?³⁵ Are we doing well or not so well in our friendship with him?

Our daily prayer is a conversation—a "phone call home"—which we need to strengthen and renew our lives. One hour at Sunday Mass is not going to be enough. One hour surely would not be enough for our spouse or best friend. So, even though it seems difficult or frustrating or even impossible to work one more thing into our busy days, if Jesus is our best friend, and indeed our spouse as Bridegroom of the Church, can we *really* think that just one hour on Sunday is enough to give Him?

Prayer is far more than a thing or an activity to be worked into the calendar, as if it were soccer practice or a PTA meeting. It must take primacy over everything else. Though often expressed in written or spoken words and in sung hymns, prayer is essentially a conversation. It is a conversation that challenges us in different ways than anything else we can do, because the voice of Christ will not be audible, unless we prepare and make time to "hear" it within our hearts and minds.

So how do we do faithfully engage in this prayerful "call home" each day? In prayer, we adore and praise the Lord, we give thanks and seek His divine assistance, and we offer sorrow for our sins. In prayer, we seek the wisdom, fortitude, insight, and courage to be God's heralds and instruments, true disciples of Jesus Christ. Entire libraries on how to pray reveal the fact that there are many different ways for different people and at different times. Still, there are some important basics.

First, we need both silence and space. Jesus went up the mountain, to out-of-the-way spots to pray alone with His Father. We must do the same, spending *at least* ten minutes a day

alone with the Lord. Second, while we speak to God in prayer, we also need to listen, to let Him speak to us in that “still small voice,”³⁶ to train the ear of our hearts on Him, for it is in our hearts that He speaks to us. Third, as Saint Bonaventure suggests, we need to “feed the fire . . . with the wood of the cross and the remembrance of the Passion of Christ.”³⁷ Returning daily to Jesus’ Passion and His Paschal Mystery—through which He won for us salvation—continually places us before Him, and before His passionate, burning love for us. The Cross is His proof of that love. Like the five wise virgins,³⁸ we need to keep our lamps trimmed and filled with oil by turning to Jesus Christ’s love in daily prayer so to keep that fire stoked and roaring. The hotter a fire burns, the more those near it feel its heat and see its light. Those around us in our daily lives just might find the same love kindled in them.

The Church has given us practices and tools to help us maintain and deepen our daily prayer. I would like to touch upon just five of these which truly help me in my efforts to be drawn closer to Jesus. I challenge you to take them up as well.

The Rosary

The Rosary has been highly transformative for many people in their lives as disciples. We can re-discover, or perhaps discover for the first time, the power of the Rosary when we pray it regularly. It can bring us to a closer relationship with Jesus through His mother. As Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote, “With the Rosary, the Christian people *sits at the school of Mary* and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.”³⁹ When we *pray* the Rosary (not just say it) and meditate upon its mysteries, it becomes for us “a veritable school of Christian life.”⁴⁰

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina, Latin for “divine reading,” is another time-honored tool we have to build up our prayer lives. Through the basic four steps of reading a passage of Scripture, meditation, prayer, and contemplation,⁴¹ we gaze upon the face of Jesus Who is the Incarnate Word of God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the author of the Scriptures, we reflect on His words of love. This reflection allows the Living Word to form our hearts, transform our minds, and conform our wills to the light of Truth. This ancient practice provides us with direction and resolutions for action. On my retreats, it is this practice of prayer that often brings me to a deeper level of understanding Our Lord. I invite you to spend time reflecting on scripture, and may I offer a place to begin? The account of Saint John the Beloved, placing his head over the heart of Our Lord at the Last Supper,⁴² is a striking passage to reflect upon in our lives as His disciples. Through *lectio divina*, we listen to the sound of His voice, and, as it were, hear the beating of His heart.⁴³

Fasting and Mortification

Jesus’ first call to conversion is conversion of the heart.⁴⁴ To help disciples to maintain spiritual growth and ongoing conversion, fasting and mortification (or self-denial) have served throughout the history of the Church as spiritual aids that draw us closer to our Lord and His

will. Through the physical hunger of fasting and the dying to self of mortification, we awaken and strengthen our spiritual hunger for God and for His life. While we are obligated to abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent, I remind you that all Fridays of the year remain days of penance. We are encouraged to continue to abstain from meat. If we do not do that, we should perform some other equivalent act of penance. We recall Jesus' words: "This kind you can drive out only by prayer and fasting."⁴⁵ Through our fasting and prayers, we ask the Lord to strengthen our hearts and wills, as we seek to be more effective heralds of Jesus Christ.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Our Holy Father Pope Francis spends the hour from 7 to 8 p.m. every evening before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He said that "If we are to know the Lord, we must go to him. Listen to him in silence before the tabernacle and approach him in the Sacraments."⁴⁶ If we truly believe that Christ is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, then there is no better way, apart from Mass, that we can foster daily prayer than by spending time in His presence in adoration, even if for a brief time.

Devotion to and Enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

On Christ the King Sunday in 2011, I consecrated the Diocese of Arlington to the Heart of Christ. The Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus refers to His Heart as a "glowing furnace of charity." The nearer we come to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the more we will be warmed by its fire, and the more His Heart will "transform us interiorly,"⁴⁷ making our hearts like His. His Heart seeks and saves the lost.⁴⁸ The Sacred Heart will thus help us to heal and warm others. As Pope Francis said, "The thing that the Church most needs today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful."⁴⁹ The entire Church will benefit from regular devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Takeaway: Daily prayer is essential to maintaining my closer relationship with the Lord. The Church gives us the resources for developing a vibrant prayer life.

Practice: Gradually increase the time you spend in prayer each day. Look for opportunities to pray alone and with others. Try one or more of the prayer aids listed as a way to deepen your devotion.

Has the Going Ever Been Tougher?

Even as we equip ourselves for evangelizing, we must also realistically acknowledge the obstacles that we will encounter. The teaching of Jesus Christ has always been what Saint Paul called a *skandalon*, a "stumbling block." Jesus demands something of us, for as He taught, "The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life."⁵⁰ As G.K. Chesterton quipped, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."⁵¹

Unfortunately, so many teachings have been "found difficult and left untried." Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* (1968) offered a prophetic foretelling of the situation we as evangelists face

today: an increase in marital infidelity and divorce, a rise in the degradation and objectification of women, a cheapening of life, a rise in violence, and an explosion of pornography. All of these are the results of the sexual revolution and contraception's violation of authentic human sexuality. *Humanae Vitae's* defense of the unitive and procreative dimensions of human sexuality was a clarion call. In the context of these societal ills, we find ourselves searching for something else—something more genuinely fulfilling.

Allow me, then, to point out the five most significant obstacles that my brother priests in the Diocese of Arlington have encountered. While each obstacle is complex and suggests various responses, I will propose at least one solution by way of a first step.

1. Putting “Busyness” Before Prayer

A wise priest once observed, “If you’re too busy to pray...you’re too busy.” And yet, a lot of us feel too busy today to pray. The reality of busy schedules is admittedly complex and defies easy solution. So too is the proliferation of technology in our daily lives. But these distractions nevertheless reveal a common and disturbing trend toward declared independence from God in our lives.

Practically speaking, we view prayer and other ways to increase our friendship with God as a lower priority. Stressed and overworked, we are more likely to prefer TV or browsing the Internet over prayer as a way to relax and re-charge in the little downtime we have. But these habits just numb us to our exhaustion and facilitate avoidance of our problems. Only He Who is the Author of Life can re-create and refresh us for the tasks at hand. Discerning how to convey the beauty and restfulness of time spent just with God is a big challenge for evangelization today.

Proposed Solution | Start by Re-evangelizing the Family

The family is the heart of the Church and the heart of evangelization. By calling for an Extraordinary General Synod of Bishops in 2014 on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” Pope Francis has underscored the urgency of starting with the family. After all, parents live out the true priority of faith as their children’s “first evangelists,” “first catechists,” and “first educators of the faith...by their witness and by their word.”⁵²

It may seem overly simplistic, but I find that any family’s health can be measured in how they relate to one another at dinner, at their family table. Only the altar, where Jesus Christ becomes Body and Blood for us, surpasses the importance of the family table in the domestic churches of our homes today. For here the parents’ role as their child’s “first evangelists” is made real in the caliber of their love, consistency, teaching, and witness. Here, our children experience their parents’ loving gaze and undivided attention—away from smart phones and other screens. This is a gift that far surpasses any toy imaginable, and teaches us to prioritize prayer over the other things that make us “busy.”

I was blessed to receive my first experience of faith from my parents. By consistent example, they proclaimed the Good News to me, handed on a love for God and neighbor, taught me to pray, to meet Christ in the Eucharist, to find His mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, and

to reach out in charity to those in need. They gave me the treasure of a Christ-centered life in the heart of the Church. The act of faith and the content of faith were seamlessly offered to me. Faith was the air I breathed, and the loving witnesses also of my aunts and uncles, teachers, and neighbors. “We do not find our faith in the abstract, no!” said Pope Francis.⁵³ I can only echo his words. For this reason, I challenge all Catholic parents to examine prayerfully their own family life and ask, “Is the fire of a living relationship with Jesus and His Church filling my home with light and warmth?”

For Families:

Takeaway: We can and should use our family time to promote faith, virtues, and character.

Practice: Strive to use regular family meal times to discuss the day’s events with all of your children. Schedule a regular time for family prayer where children can pray for their own intentions. Your own witness in prayer will help them learn to pray as they mature.

For Single Adults or Empty Nesters:

Takeaway: Strong friendships can build up our faith and strengthen us in love and good works including the love and good work of encouraging the parents around us.

Practice: Invite others to join you for a wholesome event—music, sports, or an event at church.

2. The Culture’s “Anti-Evangelization” Campaign

Our Catholic culture offers many things that are “good, true and beautiful”. These treasures—great literature, art, architecture, music, among many others—help us to see the glory of God’s creation and can move our hearts to love God and to understand our role in His creation.

At the same time, because of the reality of sin in the world, our secular culture is corrupt and corrupting. As Blessed John Paul II wrote, “If in fact, on the one hand, the Gospel and evangelization are present in this world, on the other, there is also present *a powerful anti-evangelization* that is well organized and has the means to vigorously oppose the Gospel and evangelization.”⁵⁴ This “anti-evangelization” campaign today is in full swing. One marketing campaign after another tempts us to pursue material things and physical appearances that distract us from our relationship with God.

Our children get mixed messages about right and wrong in many places, including “win at all cost” sports, violent video games, and media portrayals of “normal” child and teen behavior. Technology has become an avenue to serious sinfulness through rampant pornography, sexting, bullying, and narcissistic exhibitionism. Technology, improperly used, also allows us to easily engage other activities that, at the very least, can be a waste of time. Perhaps the most insidious message of the culture’s “anti-evangelization” campaign is that the “institutional Church” is to be ridiculed and rebelled against, like an unjust and old-fashioned parent.

Proposed Solution | We Must Hold Up a Mirror to our Own Lives

“I am a sinner,” said Pope Francis. “This is the most accurate definition.... I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.”⁵⁵ The more honest I am, the more aware I am of my need for

God's mercy and of His immense love from which His mercy pours out in overabundance. I am convinced that the best description of me is found in this quotation from a book which I read in seminary: "I am a weak and sinful man, but God put His hands on me, that is all."⁵⁶ Yes, the essential attribute of a disciple is his or her ability to admit to sin, the need for healing, and the need for what Pope Francis likens to a "field hospital": our Church.⁵⁷

While the growth of psychiatry demonstrates that people are prepared to seek out assistance for the circumstantial or psychological challenges which they face, sin is not a word that people are prepared to hear or understand today. Nonetheless, admitting that we have done wrong or hurt others is a crucial step towards continued renewal. Nothing is more persuasive here than the example we can set by being honest with ourselves about the ways we have failed. By calling ourselves sinners rather than calling others sinners, we can open up the space for healing by God's mercy. We can "divest ourselves of useless and hurtful things" and of "false worldly security."⁵⁸ We can also discern the ways in which the wider culture is forming us for or against true discipleship.

Any disciple can say the following: "I know that I sin. Often, at the moment, I admit that I don't seem to care that I am sinning. But, deep down, I admit that I am doing wrong, not acting as a son or daughter of the God who loves me beyond my wildest imagining. So, I am in need. I need what only Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior can give. So honestly, Lord, I confess my sinfulness and reach out for the mercy for which my heart aches. With your transforming grace, I will keep trying to avoid what is wrong and do what is right and good and beautiful."

Takeaway: Can you honestly say, "I am a sinner"?

Practice: Ask for forgiveness when you hurt anyone. "Do not let the sun set on your anger."⁵⁹

3. Ignorance, Misunderstanding and Indifference

"There are not a hundred people in America who hate the Catholic Church," said Archbishop Fulton Sheen, "There are millions of people who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church—which is, of course, quite a different thing."⁶⁰ The widespread ignorance and illiteracy of the truths of the Catholic faith on both the cognitive and affective levels is real. Not only our neighbors, but some church-going Catholics also have misconceptions about what the Church teaches.

Outside the Church, we can no longer assume that people understand even basic things like the meaning of Christmas and Easter. For many, the first step towards the Church is discovering the truth of Who Jesus Christ is and what the Church really teaches. Our witness of life will provide the bridge.

Proposed Solution | Lifelong Learning

Overcoming ignorance, misunderstanding, and indifference requires that we be patient, that we be loving friends who are able to answer questions about our faith when we are asked. To truly evangelize, we must acknowledge that ignorance is not willful but reflects our culture.

As Pope Francis reminded us, “Many people have drifted away from the Church. It would be a mistake to place the blame on one side or the other; indeed, there is no need even to speak of blame.”⁶¹ We also need to be ready to share our own faith story in a way that will explain our hope and joy in Jesus Christ.

Undoubtedly, when we truly love someone, we want to know more about that person—more about his or her life and background, likes and dislikes, thoughts and feelings, needs and challenges; in short, we want to learn all we can. Falling in love and “love at first sight” may be the beginning, but coming to know the real person is what fans that initial spark of love into a roaring, enduring fire.

The same is true of our relationship with the Lord Jesus—the more we know about Him, the greater our love becomes. In addition to the three practices outlined in “Keep Going” above, we can also come to know the Lord through His own words in Scripture, and through the experiences of His friends down through the centuries – in particular, those who are recognized as saints. Moreover, the Church’s doctrines invite us into deeper relationship with Christ. “Doctrinal clarity and conviction foster the process of lifelong conversion,” wrote George Weigel in *Evangelical Catholicism*. “Doctrinal clarity and conviction deepen one’s friendship with Christ.”⁶²

Saint Jerome, the fifth-century scholar best remembered for his translation of the Bible into Latin, which was then the vernacular language, insisted that “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”⁶³ In addition to the prayer and meditation of *lectio divina*, we can also grow in our knowledge of the Lord by our daily and deepening familiarity with the Word of God. Some commuters have found that an inexpensive recording of the New Testament can turn their travel time into time well spent. Others set aside time daily for reading the Bible, either individually or as a family. Bible study materials and other resources are available for Catholics at every level, even for the most uncertain beginner. And, of course, our attentiveness to the readings at every Mass and to the priest’s homily will take us each year through one of the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Just as a friend of a friend can sometimes provide unexpected insights about someone we thought we knew well, the “friends of the Lord”—other Christians down through history and today—can give us wisdom born of their own love of Jesus Christ. Are you taking time on a regular basis to deepen this friendship and to become a more “engaged, articulate and well-formed”⁶⁴ witness to the truth of Christ in his Church? Our own personal testimony of faith must be strengthened and “transformed by the renewing of our minds”⁶⁵ through daily discipleship. Author Matthew Kelly’s study of *Dynamic Catholics* reveals that those who consistently share their faith have a common habit: these Catholics spend an average of fourteen minutes a day going deeper in the truth and content of their faith by reading a book, an article, or using a podcast or other resource.⁶⁶

Takeaway: Those looking at the Church from the outside often do so with ignorance, misunderstanding, and indifference. The discipline of study gives us the tools we need to engage others intelligently and with sensitivity. As we grow in love for the Lord, we will want to grow in knowledge as well.

Practice: Set aside time for reading or listening to the Scriptures, spiritual works, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to increase your knowledge about Jesus Christ.

4. Transience and Anonymity

“People get lost in our big parishes,” I heard from one pastor, “and they need to be plugged into a small community where they can deepen their faith.” With large parishes, a high influx of new residents, and frequent turnover in the twenty-one counties and seven cities that make up our diocese, we find that building a strong family of faith is a continual struggle. One parish alone in our diocese is home to nearly 17,000 persons, over three times the population of my entire hometown. With an average parish size of 6,500 persons, we face, along with the blessings of growth, the daunting challenge of scale. How can any parishioner, let alone any pastor, learn so many names? Moreover, with so many individuals and families moving in and out of the area due to military assignments or other government-related work, we face the challenge of transience.

Proposed Solution | Evangelize Through Hospitality

In the years following his immigration from Sicily in 1920 as an 18-year old, both at work and in public places, my own father would often hear, “*You don’t belong here.*” Even at some Catholic parishes he was told, “*Your kind worship downstairs,*” with a finger directing him to a separate Mass for Italian immigrants in the church basement.

My father’s stark experience would not, I hope and pray, happen today, but many in our society and many even in our parishes still experience isolation and alienation. They long for a welcoming community. Hopefully, we can all look back on moments in our lives when someone went out of their way to welcome us in a special way. Mindful of this gratitude, I ask all of the faithful of our diocese to step outside your comfort zones. Do not be afraid! Do not wait for others to accompany you. Instead, take the first step and find ways to get involved. I pray that every one of our 68 parishes and six missions will be home to such a natural outreach.

The early Church also placed great emphasis on hospitality in the home. Families of faith became “islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.”⁶⁷ Indeed, it is not too much to say that evangelization itself *is* hospitality—that is, inviting and welcoming people into the house of God. Hospitality is the opposite of hostility. In a culture increasingly characterized by hostility among people of different political persuasions and different faiths, hospitality is a way of inviting a more loving interaction with others.

What, therefore, can we do to build a culture of hospitality in our “domestic churches” (homes), workplaces, neighborhoods, and parishes? How can we leave the door open for those who are seeking? Hospitality creates an atmosphere of loving trust that enables others to see the light of Christ in us. We should live in such a way that we provide others a beckoning light, an open door, an invitation into a family of faith.

Takeaway: Hospitality is an essential element of evangelization.

Practice: Invite others into your home to share a meal.

5. Parish Life: Maintenance or Mission?

“It is hard,” shared one pastor, “to invite someone into the Church, a parish, if there is disarray, lack of order, or lack of plans for the future.” In a similar vein, Pope Francis recently asked, “Is our pastoral plan dissipated and fragmented, such that in the end everyone goes his own way?”⁶⁸ If we favor a “maintenance model” in our parishes by which we do not “go and make disciples,” we resemble the fearful servant in the parable of the talents, who said: “Master, I knew you were a demanding person ... so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground.”⁶⁹ In this passage, the “master” minces no words when he addresses him as “you wicked, lazy servant.” Jesus warns us that He, the Master, will not be happy with that kind of servant.

Proposed Solution | Intentional Discipleship at All Levels of Parish Life

To counter the “maintenance model” we must “make the essential visible, namely Jesus Christ,”⁷⁰ Says Pope Francis. “What helps is to focus on the fundamental reality, which is the encounter with Christ, with His mercy and with His love, and to love our brothers and sisters as He has loved us.”⁷¹

As we focus on this fundamental reality, we cannot do so alone. “It is in the parish that one becomes engaged with the Church community, learns how to become a disciple of Christ, is nurtured by Scripture, is nourished by the sacraments, and ultimately becomes an evangelizer.”⁷² “Go-it-alone” discipleship is not an option if we are to follow the example of Christ, Who sent His disciples two-by-two and called us to be part of His Body, the Church.

The evangelist should be ever mindful of two questions: “Who is leading me deeper into the faith now? Whom am I in turn leading into a deeper discipleship with Christ?” In your parish, a weekly or monthly small faith community or prayer group provides an answer to both of these questions. In such settings, “iron sharpens iron”⁷³ even as we also engage in mutual encouragement and prayer. The proliferation of men’s and women’s groups, moms’ and dads’ groups, young adult groups, and many others in our parishes is witness to this need. Unless we are making disciples, we are not really evangelizing. As we make disciples, let us reflect upon Jesus’ method. He invested the vast majority of His time in teaching and forming the Twelve, who, in turn, could form the Seventy-Two disciples, and ever wider concentric circles. Lest we dissipate and fragment our efforts today, we need to adapt Christ’s own approach to forming and making disciples. And we do!

Takeaway: We need each other to become stronger disciples of Christ.

Practice: Look for a men’s or women’s group, Bible study, or a prayer group to join so that you can be supported as a disciple and, at the same time, support other disciples.

With Mary, Star of the New Evangelization

As we embark with new enthusiasm and with new tools to evangelize, we look to Mary, the Mother of God and our mother, to intercede for us. We ask for strength and perseverance and the power of her example of how to evangelize as her Son Jesus wishes.

Full of grace, Mary is the first and best disciple of the Lord and therefore the best of teachers. To become authentic evangelists, we follow Mary's perfect example. She was receptive to the Holy Spirit and shows us that faith is the surrender of ourselves to the Lord. Mary's life shows us the path of the evangelist. She is the "star" of the New Evangelization—that that fixed reference point, like the North Star, by which we can navigate the waters of our mission territory and guide others to the safe harbor of God's love. In a particular way, Our Lady of Guadalupe is precisely this star of evangelization for the over 200,000 Hispanic Catholic brothers and sisters in our diocese.

My parents gave me a priceless gift in their devotion to our Blessed Mother. Through regular recourse to her through the Rosary and honoring her on Marian feasts, I was given the image of Mary's example, which guides me in my personal journey with Christ. Her intimate love for her Son Jesus is a great example that deepens my special love for Him. I sometimes wonder if I could have endured the trials that ultimately must come to everyone had it not been for this relationship with the Mother of our Lord, given to me at such an early age. Parents today who give this gift to their children are equipping them for life!

Often, with all good intentions, we propose to God *our* plan. But holiness, true union with Jesus, comes about only in being one with *God's* plan. Nowhere is this more evident than in Mary's words and example: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word!"⁷⁴ At that moment and thereafter, she placed her life at the service of God's plan: "Your will be done in me." As she has done, we as evangelists will do, placing our lives at the service of God's plan, not our own. Mary has only one desire for us: that we know and love her Divine Son. Heeding her words and following her example, we are prepared to make the Kingdom of her Son our daily focus and our mission as evangelists.

"Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, increase our faith."⁷⁵ In your motherly care for us, intercede for us as we set out on this two-part mission to grow closer to your Son by being re-evangelized ourselves and to bring Him to others through evangelizing."

Takeaway: Mary shows us how to be good friends with Christ.

Practice: Pray using the Rosary. Consider Mary's obedience to God. Seek her intercession for your friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors.

Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, are you ready to accept your commission to evangelize in the 21st century? Are you ready to accept this gift and communicate it with joy and urgency to others? When you meet someone who does not know Christ, do you sense that they are yearning for the Truth? We live in times that require a doubling and re-doubling of our efforts to rebuild Mother Church.

Saint Francis of Assisi heard such questions through God's call to rebuild His Church. In response, he set out on a radical mission with bricks and mortar and a fervent enthusiasm to fix up some run-down church buildings. The Lord clarified His message to Francis, and Francis immediately began reinforcing and re-building the Mystical Body of the Christ present in our world with the same energy, joy, and urgency. Pope Francis has taken his name from this great saint and has begun to emulate the call of Francis, inviting us all to "Go out!"

"We believe in the Risen One who conquered evil and death! Let us have the courage to 'come out of ourselves,' to take this joy and this light to all the places of our lives! The resurrection of Christ is our greatest certainty; he is our most precious treasure! How can we not share this treasure, this certainty with others? It is not only for us; it is to be passed on, to be shared with others. Our testimony is precisely this."⁷⁶

As we listen to Pope Francis' words and recall the witness of Saint Francis, let us experience his call to rebuild – *now*, not tomorrow or next week. Today!

We must begin *today* to search for the lost – among our families, our friends, and, in fact, in our own hearts. "Heart speaks to heart," said Blessed John Henry Newman. My prayer is that all of us will allow the Heart of Christ to speak to our heart, so that we can share our heart with another. Many distractions and temptations can turn our attention away from this urgent task. Let us resist the inertia of inaction. Let us resolve to begin anew this great work of the New Evangelization. Let us experience the fire of bringing Jesus Christ and His saving Gospel to our contemporaries, who so desperately need to hear the truth and to experience the compassionate love flowing from the Heart of Christ. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, with the Lord Jesus as our daily Companion, we too exclaim: "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?"⁷⁷

Are you and I ready to go out?

We go forth, with hearts on fire! "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord"⁷⁸ today, tomorrow, and every day until we see Him face to face in our eternal home!

Study Questions for Individuals and Parish Groups

Me? An Evangelist?

The New Evangelization means, on the one hand, that we must first be re-evangelized ourselves. What specific areas in my faith or my life are most in need of re-evangelization?

On the other hand, we are called to evangelize others. Do I already evangelize? If so, how can I do it better? If not, what stands in my way, and how can I remove these obstacles? Am I willing to do so?

Parish: Is our parish doing anything new that might help people have a personal encounter with Jesus? Have I considered inviting anyone to these initiatives?

Before You Go

1. Encountering Christ's Saving Love

Do I really believe that Christ burns with passion for me personally and for others? Do I really believe that God wants an intimate relationship with *me*? Do I really believe that Christ died on the Cross for *me*?

The Church exists to evangelize. Who in the Church first evangelized me? Where or what might I be now had I not received it or not been open to it? Do I realize how important that was for me? If so, can I also see how vitally important it is for me to turn to others and bring the message of Christ to them?

Parish:

Do I see an urgency within our parish family to implement the New Evangelization?

Does our pastoral leadership team feel an urgency to implement the New Evangelization? If so, how can we help other parishes experience this urgency? If not, how can we begin to feel this new sense of "mission" in our parish?

2. Living as Children of God

What does it mean to have a father? How is God a Father in my life?

Do I truly see God the Father as infinitely dependable? If not, what might be holding me back from surrendering to Him as His child?

Parish:

Do all of the members of the parish feel the love of God? Do they believe that God loves them, personally?

Do parishioners and visitors feel *genuinely loved* by people when they come to Mass? Do they feel *genuinely loved* when they attend things like classes for sacramental preparation? How can we do this better?

3. Getting Personal: Our Relationship with Jesus Christ in His Church

Have I made an effort to move beyond the rules, precepts, and commandments and fallen in love with Christ? If not, what is keeping me from doing so? Or have I perhaps fallen in love with the rules and placed them above Christ?

What concrete steps can I take to nurture my relationship with Christ and His Church? What things am I doing, or not doing, that stand in the way of that relationship?
Do I pray for the Church and her mission?

Parish:

Do I pray for our clergy, for our parish, and the events that are held to evangelize?

Does our parish community prayer enter into the discernment process about future missions, as yet unknown, that might become part of our parish work?

Now, Go

Do I see evangelization as a duty or drudgery, or have I experienced it as a joy?

Do I really believe the Good News is *good*? Can I explain to others just why it is so good?

Parish:

How often does our parish plan opportunities for community fellowship after Mass on a regular basis? What percentage of the community attends these gatherings? How could I help to promote these gatherings?

1. Joy

Does the Good News fill me with joy? Or has it perhaps become stale and trite to me? What might it take for me to see it once more as ever fresh and to allow it to bring me the greatest possible joy? Do I see sharing the Good News as the great privilege that it is?

Do I really *thirst* that every person would come to know, love, and serve Christ? How does—or how should—this thirst affect how I live my life? Do I act on this thirst and seek to quench it?

Parish:

Do visitors to our parish experience an atmosphere of joy in those already present when they arrive for Mass on a given Sunday? Is someone present to cheerfully greet each person arriving to Mass?

Would visitors to our parish witness “joy in the Lord” as they watch the people come and go from parish activities, including Mass?

2. Mission Territory

Do I think of myself as a missionary? Do I realize that I am a missionary precisely because I am a member of the Church?

What places or areas of my life are my particular “mission territories”?

Parish:

Does our parish feel a sense of “mission” when participating in activities? Do we want others to “have what we have” in our relationship with Jesus?

Where do others see us striving to have a sense of “mission” in our parish? Are there areas where a greater sense of mission should be present?

3. Witnessing through Service

I know that reaching out to others is reaching out to Christ. Whom am I supposed to reach out to right now?

Do I trust Jesus’ words when He says, “Whatsoever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me”? Do I try to see Him in the people around me?

Parish:

Does service in our parish offer an opportunity for participants to grow in their relationship with Jesus? Or is service in our parish simply an end in itself?

Does service in our parish offer chances to evangelize while the work gets done? What would be some examples of this sort of evangelical service?

Keep Going

“Disciple” comes from the Latin word for “to learn.” Do I, as a disciple and as a child of God, still allow myself to be taught, or do I believe I do not need to learn anymore?

Do I keep my faith to myself, or do I share it with my children, my spouse, my coworkers, my friends?

Parish: Does our pastoral team consciously use special events (weddings, sacraments, funerals) as opportunities to teach all those present, including guests? Will guests be inclined to tell others about their good experience at our parish while they were visiting?

How does our parish support families in the struggle against the negative influences of the wider culture?

1. The Eucharist: Core of a Living Relationship

How much do I appreciate the Mass? Do I see the Eucharist as “the source and summit of our Christian life” (*Catechism*, 1324)? Do I make taking part in the Mass the center of my life, the most important thing I could do here on earth, and let others see its importance to me?

Do I attend Mass only half-heartedly or distractedly, or do I make every effort to give it my full attention and enthusiasm? What might be some ways in which I could be more intentional and attentive at Mass?

Parish: How do parishioners in our parish value the Eucharist?

Are parishioners prompt in arriving at Mass?

2. Confession: Gateway to Evangelization

Do I need to make Confession a more regular part of my life? If I go regularly, how might I improve the quality of my confessions?

How do I view sin? Do I understand how all sin—even the smallest sin—injures my relationship with God and with the members of Christ’s Body, the Church?

Parish:

Is there a growing acknowledgment in our parish of a need to improve our relationship with Jesus through the forgiveness of sins?

How has our parish increased the availability of confession?

3. Daily Prayer: The Evangelist’s Life-Breath

If I am not praying enough each day, what are some concrete ways I can make more time for daily prayer and so come a little closer to the fire of God’s love? Am I “too busy” to pray? If so, am I willing to sacrifice other things in my schedule in order to allow prayer to have primacy in my life? How might I improve the prayer I already do?

If I have a family, do I promote family prayer? Do I also spend prayer time with just my spouse? What are some ways to include children in prayer? Do I encourage my children to pray one-on-one with the Lord to the extent that their age and maturity enable them? Do I model a life of prayer for my children?

Parish: What is the greatest obstacle to daily prayer in my life? Would this be a typical response from other members of our parish?

Can our parish promote workshops or talks on building a prayer life?

The Rosary:

Do I turn to Mary frequently through praying the Rosary?

Do I *pray* the Rosary, rather than just say it? If I am just saying it, how can I come to really pray it?

Parish: How often does our parish have groups praying the Rosary together?

Does our parish ever encourage the Rosary as part of prayer at special events?

Lectio Divina:

Do I regularly read God's Word and meditate on it? Can I commit to reading the Bible daily? Weekly?

Does the Bible have a privileged place in my home, in my family, or does it merely rest on a bookshelf?

Parish: Are there opportunities for parishioners to participate in *lectio divina* regularly together?

How can we encourage a greater percentage of our parishioners to regularly read and pray with the Scriptures?

Fasting and Mortification:

Do I observe the fact that Friday is a penitential day yearround by either abstaining from meat or doing some other penance in place of abstinence?

What are some ways that I might incorporate other practices of penance or mortification into my life?

Parish: Are there opportunities for our parish to fast together for a specific intention (pro-life prayers, for increased vocations, or other intentions)?

Adoration:

How often do I pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament?

Have I ever considered making a daily or weekly holy hour so as to spend time with Jesus? If I cannot do an entire hour, could I at least spend some shorter amount of time in adoration?

Parish: How often is Adoration available in our parish?

How do we do promote these times? How many participate in Adoration?

The Sacred Heart:

Have I encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart within my family and enthroned His Sacred Heart in our home?

Parish: Do members of our parish receive a strong encouragement to enthrone the Sacred Heart in their home?

Has the Going Ever Been Tougher?

1. Putting “Busyness” Before Prayer

What in my daily life is keeping me from spending more time with God and, if I have a family, with my children? Do I allow my use of technology to keep me from being fully present to God and others? How can I find time to nurture my relationship with God?

If I am tempted to “put this off until tomorrow,” am I perhaps implicitly declaring “independence” from God?

Parish: Does our parish utilize technology to support families? When increasing our use of technology, are we taking care to help all of our parishioners to stay “in the know”—especially seniors?

Are members of our parish aware of the dangers of technology? Are we helping our members become more aware of those dangers?

Solution | Start with the Family

Do my spouse and I take seriously our role as our children’s first evangelists? Do I we give a good example of the Christian life to our children?

What are some practical ways the members of my family could help each other be re-evangelized?

For those without families: What can I do to help families be re-evangelized?

Parish: How does our parish support families in the struggle against the negative influences of the wider culture?

How does educating our youth (Catholic school, religious education, etc.) support the networking of families in our parish? How does Catholic education build community among all of our families?

2. The Culture’s “Anti-Evangelization” Efforts

What's good about our culture? What are my greatest concerns about our culture? In what ways does our culture "evangelize" us away from Christ?

How might we work with what is good in the culture in our work of evangelization?

Solution | Begin by Holding Up the Mirror to our Own Lives

Pope Francis recently said "I am a sinner." Is there a pattern of sin in my life that prevents me from having a personal relationship with Jesus?

Have I allowed my knowledge of my own sinfulness to look on others with mercy, or am I judgmental? Do I ask for forgiveness when I have sinned?

Parish: Are there areas of sin in the lives of members of our parish that are common enough to warrant a teaching series on the topic?

3. Ignorance, Misunderstanding and Indifference

What questions or issues do I or my co-workers, friends, or family struggle with or not know enough about? How can I learn more or help others to do so?

Solution | Lifelong Learning

Have I spent the time to learn about what the Church teaches and about why she teaches what she does, for my own edification but also that I might evangelize knowledgeably? Have I read the Catechism, encyclicals and other Church documents, such as the documents of Vatican II? What are some tools I could use to increase my knowledge of Church teaching? How can I use the technology I have to help me in this?

Am I willing to trust that the Church has been entrusted with the truth by Christ and allow her teaching to inform my belief? Am I willing to be instructed on the what, the why, the how?

Parish: Do adults in our parish know about opportunities to study the Catholic faith? Are there online courses that serve the needs of adult education? Do we make use of Catholic Distance University and its resources (www.cdu.edu)?

How many groups support Bible studies in our parish? Are there ways to increase the availability of Bible study or *lectio divina* to more parishioners?

4. Transience and Anonymity

What are ways we can make every person welcome in our parish by forming community and friendships?

Solution | Evangelize through Hospitality

Do I feel lost in my parish, or do I feel that I am a real part of it? If I feel I am not a part of my parish, is this my own doing through a preference for sitting on the sidelines? If this is my own fault, how might I get involved?

What might I do to help make the parish more welcoming to others? Do I truly welcome newcomers and allow them to take part and contribute?

Parish:

Are there routine (weekly, monthly, etc.) opportunities to build fellowship in our parish?

Do we plan any major events (e.g., parish festival) which are conducive for fellowship among our parishioners, while also offering an opportunity to invite a friend?

Is there a concerted effort to involve our entire parish in our thinking about hospitality? Does this effort include our children, our youth and college-age children, our young adults and singles, our seniors, our married and harried—in addition to those who normally “get the ear” of our parish planning groups?

5. Maintenance or Mission?

Parish:

Is our parish on a treadmill of activity where “maintenance” is overshadowing “mission”? Are there current activities that can yield their place in our parish priorities so new activities focusing on evangelization might bear more fruit?

As Pope Francis has asked, “What is the pastoral plan of...our parishes like? Does it make the essential visible, namely Jesus Christ?”

Solution | Intentional Discipleship at All Levels of Parish Life

Am I intentional in my discipleship, or have I been running on autopilot? If I haven’t been intentional, how can I become so?

With Mary, Star of the New Evangelization

What does it mean to say that “Mary is the first and best disciple”? How did she surrender to the Lord in faith and then evangelize others? How can we follow in her footsteps?

Do we hold Mary in our hearts and give her an honored place in our families?

Parish:

Would our members say that our parish affords parishioners ample opportunity to have Marian devotions?

Do members of our parish understand Mary's role in our own relationship with Jesus in our Catholic faith? Can our parishioners explain the role of Mary in our faith life to those outside the faith?

Go and Announce

Do I really sense the urgency of the New Evangelization?

Parish:

Are members of our parish equipped to share a personal short story of their own faith life? Are they becoming more open to sharing this story with others? Am I?

Does our parish offer times for reflection or full-fledged retreats for the general population on a regular basis?

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- ¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1305: “This ‘character’ [of Confirmation] perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and ‘the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially.’”
- ² Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ³ Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁴ Blessed Pope John Paul II, Address of the Nineteenth General Assembly of CELAM, Mar. 9, 1983.
- ⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14: “She [the Church] exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.”
- ⁶ Pope Francis, Homily for the 28th World Youth Day, July 29, 2013.
- ⁷ Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, April 24, 2005.
- ⁹ Mark 10:21
- ¹⁰ Romans 10:14
- ¹¹ Luke 12:49
- ¹² Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ¹³ Hebrews 12:2
- ¹⁴ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 25.
- ¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 19.
- ¹⁶ John 5:19
- ¹⁷ Isaiah 43:4-5
- ¹⁸ Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 43.
- ¹⁹ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ²⁰ I Corinthians 12:27
- ²¹ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ²² *Commentary on the Psalms*, 142,3.
- ²³ Isaiah 43:2, 4-5
- ²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachaen Ethics*
- ²⁵ Hebrews 12:2
- ²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2472: “The duty of Christians to take part in the life of the Church impels them to act as *witnesses of the Gospel* and of the obligations that flow from it.”
- ²⁷ Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ²⁸ Matthew 28:19
- ²⁹ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, ch. 39, 7.
- ³⁰ James 2:17
- ³¹ Weddell, 66, citing Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, “Christ Yesterday and Today,” *Zenit*, December 2, 2005.
- ³² *Lumen Fidei* 24, 27
- ³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324.
- ³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Annual Forum of the Apostolic Penitentiary, March 9, 2011.
- ³⁵ John 15:15
- ³⁶ I Kings 19:12
- ³⁷ Saint Bonaventure, *De perfectione vitae ad sorores*
- ³⁸ Matthew 25:1-13
- ³⁹ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 1.
- ⁴⁰ Cf., Saint Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*.
- ⁴¹ For a step-by-step overview of *Lectio Divina*, see Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, 87.
- ⁴² John 13:23-25

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- ⁴³ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 18: “The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle must be a kind of *magnetic pole* attracting an ever greater number of souls enamored of him, ready to wait patiently to hear his voice and, as it were, to sense the beating of his heart.”
- ⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1430.
- ⁴⁵ Mark 9:29
- ⁴⁶ Cf., Pope Francis, Twitter, Oct. 21, 2013.
- ⁴⁷ Bishop Paul S. Loverde, Pastoral Letter on the Heart of Christ, “*Fountain of Life, Fire of Love*,” (2011), 6.
- ⁴⁸ Luke 9:10
- ⁴⁹ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ⁵⁰ Matthew 7:14
- ⁵¹ Cf., G.K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*, ch. 5.
- ⁵² Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁵³ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ⁵⁴ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 112.
- ⁵⁵ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ⁵⁶ Cf., Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948).
- ⁵⁷ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *Thinking Faith*, 9/19/13.
- ⁵⁸ Pope Francis, Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁵⁹ Ephesians 4:26
- ⁶⁰ Archbishop Fulton Sheen, *Radio Replies* Vol. 1, (1938), 9.
- ⁶¹ Pope Francis, Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁶² George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism* (Basic Books, 2013), 36.
- ⁶³ Saint Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri xviii* prol.:PL 24,17B.
- ⁶⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Ad Limina Address to Bishops of the United States, Jan. 19, 2012.
- ⁶⁵ Romans 12:2
- ⁶⁶ Matthew Kelly, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic* (Beacon Publishing, 2012).
- ⁶⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1655.
- ⁶⁸ Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁶⁹ Matthew 25:24-25
- ⁷⁰ Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Oct. 13, 2013.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Statement from the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*, 2013.
- ⁷³ Proverbs 27:17
- ⁷⁴ Luke 1:38
- ⁷⁵ Theme for the Diocese of Arlington’s 2013 Pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
- ⁷⁶ Pope Francis, General Audience, April 3, 2013.
- ⁷⁷ Luke 24:32
- ⁷⁸ Roman Missal, Order of the Mass, no. 144.