

Go Make Disciples

A Vision for the Archdiocese of
Oklahoma City



A Pastoral Letter
Archbishop Paul S. Coakley

Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary
October 7, 2013

Faith

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Praised Be Jesus Christ!

Within a few months of my installation as Archbishop of Oklahoma City, Pope Benedict XVI published his Apostolic Letter “Porta Fidei,” which proclaimed a Year of Faith beginning the following year on October 11, 2012, and concluding with the Solemnity of Christ the King on November 24, 2013. We are nearing the end of the Year of Faith as I write.

The Year of Faith commemorates two of the most significant events of the twentieth century in the life of the Catholic Church. It marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It also coincided with the convening of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops whose theme in 2012 was “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”

As Pope Benedict wrote at that time, the Year of Faith is “a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the One Savior of the World” (PF 6). This Year of Faith has been an opportunity for Catholics to renew and rediscover their relationship with Jesus Christ and with His Church. It has been an occasion of grace.

As one way of preparing for and celebrating the Year of Faith in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, I chartered a team of clergy, religious and lay leaders to assist me in prayerfully discerning a mutually shared vision for the Archdiocese.

Many of you participated in one of the eight listening sessions held in various locations around the Archdiocese from Guymon to Lawton, to Norman and Enid and other places as well. Perhaps you submitted your thoughts in written or electronic form. I am grateful to all who participated in those valuable and energizing sessions. Over the course of thirteen months, we prayed, listened, gathered information and reflected on all we had heard and learned.

A Call to Holiness and Mission

I am writing this pastoral letter to proclaim the vision that is the fruit of that grace-filled effort. This vision will guide our Archdiocesan family over the course of the next five years. It is where we are going. It is the vision against which we will evaluate and justify our initiatives, programs, ministries and expenditures. It reflects who we are and what we do. This vision aligns with the Gospel vision of Our Lord and with the movement of the Holy Spirit guiding the Universal Church today through the ministry of Pope Francis and the college of bishops. It is in tune with the mission and the mandate that Jesus entrusted to his disciples before his Ascension:

Go Make Disciples

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20).

Go make disciples. This is God’s word addressed to us as we conclude this Year of Faith. It is our mandate. For all of us and for each of us, it is both an invitation and a challenge; a call and a mission.

The vision is rooted in who we are and why we are here. Our sacred purpose, as the people of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, is to joyfully witness to our Catholic faith in central and western Oklahoma through the teaching, sanctifying, and governing ministry of Christ and His Church so that the Body of Christ is made present, the universal call to holiness proclaimed, and all people are welcomed into the promise of eternal life.

Our vision, “Go Make Disciples,” will inform all that we do for the next five years. For the next two years we will focus on three priorities, each of which will be supported by two



specific and measurable goals. These will be presented below. “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1Th 4:3). This truth, so clearly expressed in the Scriptures, is the principle and foundation of the Christian life, of all pastoral planning and pastoral work. It has practical and far-reaching consequences for each individual Christian, for every household, for every parish community, indeed for the whole Church. God creates us for holiness. God calls us to become saints.

One of the greatest single contributions of the Second Vatican Council was its clear and emphatic presentation of this universal call to holiness. Like the wise steward in the Gospel parable (Mt 13:52) who brings from his storehouse both the old and the new, the Council Fathers re-presented a gospel truth that has been present from the beginning, though frequently overlooked. Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) is wholly dedicated to this foundational truth, that all Christians are called to holiness. This conciliar teaching is not merely a spiritual veneer, but the very heart of its teaching on the nature of the Church.

The Church as Mystery

The Church is clearly more than meets the eye. Though having a visible hierarchical structure, established by Christ upon the foundation of the apostles, the Church is also a “mystery,” that

is, a sign and instrument of the unity that God intends for the human race. As such, the Church is a people gathered together into the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to share in the very holiness of God, who is love.

The Church is a communion of love. As Blessed John Paul II wrote at the dawn of the new millennium, “Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit, which Jesus gives us to make us all ‘one heart and one soul’” (Act 4:32) (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 42).

The Church’s faith and inner life is expressed outwardly through its rich liturgical and sacramental rites; it is expressed through the sacred art and architecture it has inspired. The living faith of the Church is enshrined in the sacred Scriptures, creeds, dogmas and canons that express and preserve the living Tradition that comes to us from the apostles. The Church’s life is outwardly expressed in a most compelling way, however, through the witness of the saints.

The Church is Holy

The Church is holy. She belongs to the One who alone is holy, who became man, shed his blood and gave his life to sanctify

Holiness

Mission

and redeem her. This intimate communion of the Church with the Holy One is beautifully expressed in the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:32).

Blessed John Paul II wrote in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "Holiness, whether ascribed to popes well-known to history or to humble lay and religious figures, from one continent to another of the globe, has emerged more clearly as the dimension which expresses best the mystery of the Church. Holiness, a message that convinces without the need for words, is the living reflection of the face of Christ" (NMI 7). Holy men and women offer the most credible form of testimony to the truth of the Gospel and teaching of the Church. Though we are often painfully aware of the weakness and sinfulness of the Church's members, her essential holiness remains one of the Church's principal and defining marks. As we profess in the Creed: "I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church."

Through baptism into the Church, which is holy, we become holy. Through a living faith we participate in the Church's holiness. The Sacrament of Baptism begins our initiation into the holiness of God. Through baptism and the other sacraments of initiation we become living members of the Body of Christ, the Church (1Cor 12:12f).

We are incorporated into his Body by the Holy Spirit who

Grace comes to dwell within us and make us living stones in his holy temple (1Pt 2:5).

Baptized into Christ's death, we die to sin. We rise with him from the waters of baptism to begin a new life, sharing in the power of his resurrection through his Holy Spirit.

The sacraments are the special channels of grace, established by Christ, that enable us to live this divine life. "The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1210). The sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist) lay the foundation of the Christian life. They incorporate us into Christ and the Church and thereby equip us with the supernatural grace, the virtues and spiritual gifts necessary to grow toward full maturity in Christ as saints. All of this is God's merciful gift to us. In order for these gifts to bear fruit in a holy life, however, our cooperation with God's grace is necessary.



"Be Perfect as Your Heavenly Father is Perfect"

When we begin to recognize our high calling, we see how utterly unworthy of our dignity it is to settle for a life of moral or

Sanctity

spiritual mediocrity and shallow religiosity. The call to baptism is the call to heroic sanctity, the call to become a saint. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1-3).

"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Our challenge is to embrace and proclaim anew this high standard of ordinary Christian living. Holiness is not the prerogative of an elite few. It is the fundamental vocation that every Christian receives in baptism. As Vatican II stated clearly, "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (Lumen Gentium, 40). This is the essence of holiness: perfect love of God and neighbor. This high calling is beyond our mere human strength to realize, but not beyond our hope "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rm 5:5). Pope Benedict wrote about this divine source of love in his first encyclical letter. "Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable; they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a 'commandment' imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then

be shared with others. Love grows through love" (Deus Caritas Est, 18). Holiness, too, grows as love is put into action.

Though all Christians are called to holiness (the perfection of charity), the paths of holiness are as personal as the vocation of each individual. The great number of canonizations and beatifications in recent years illustrate these diverse paths. They

Vocation

show us that the saints are ordinary men and women, who are young and old; they are people of every background, vocation, culture and

condition of life. They are witnesses of authentic Christian living to inspire within us a longing for holiness and move us to pursue the heroic path of sanctity. They are models and intercessors to assist us on our own pilgrim journey.

New Evangelization

We must be clear that the call to holiness is not a license to indulge in a privatized and individualistic spirituality. On the contrary, it is a radical call to communion. Living our faith from the heart of the Church, living as disciples of Jesus and sharing in the very life and love of the Holy Trinity, moves us to serve the needs of others, as Christ served. "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). To be holy is to live in union with Christ, to know him, to love him and to imitate him in his concern for all. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is

insistent on this point: "The Christian message does not inhibit men and women from building up the world, or make them disinterested in the welfare of their fellow human beings; on the contrary it obliges them more fully to do these very things" (Gaudium et Spes, 34).

Holiness and communion lead necessarily to mission. We cannot separate the call to holiness and communion from the universal call to mission, that is, to the work of evangelization. "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She 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 to God and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection" (Pope Paul VI, On Evangelization in the Modern World, 14). The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the One in whom all people find salvation. "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19). There are still people who have not yet heard the Good News. Sadly, there are an increasing number of people even in formerly Christian lands who have not heard the Gospel. In these places and in many postmodern secular cultures a new atheism has been gaining new adherents. Our support and prayer for this mission "to all nations" (ad gentes) must continue. We are all called to share in this mission.

The work of evangelization that is particularly urgent in our time and place, however, is what Blessed John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI referred to as the new evangelization. Its focus is on the nations and cultures where the Gospel has been proclaimed, but where the flame of faith has been reduced to a barely glowing ember. A once fervent faith has given way to a lukewarm indifference. We all know many people today who are nominally Christian or nominally Catholic. They still claim to believe but act as though God does not exist. They compartmentalize their faith, as though it pertained only to Sundays or certain religious exercises. Their faith has little or nothing to do with the way they live their lives each day. Though they have not formally rejected Christ or his Gospel, the lives of many Catholics are informed far more by the conventional values of the secular culture than by the liberating truth of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church.

Evangelize

Rather than evangelizing the culture, that is, transforming the culture according to the truth, beauty and goodness of the Gospel, many Christians are being 'evangelized' by the anti-gospel values that the secular and atheistic culture espouses. This is strikingly evident as we witness how rapidly so many otherwise faithful people are losing a sense of the unique meaning of marriage as a permanent relationship between a man and a woman.

Witness

The faith of believers in our post-Christian culture needs to be re-awakened. The new evangelization calls for a re-evangelization. This is our challenge! "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). The Church exists in the world to bear witness to Christ. "Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16). Many Catholics shy away from their responsibility to become evangelizers. Perhaps they misunderstand their role. While each and every member of the Church has a proper part in the evangelizing mission of the Church, some as pastors, parents or catechists, all are called to be witnesses to Christ. "Preach the Gospel always; use words when necessary." This saying, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, reminds us that the witness of a holy, joyful and virtuous life is the most effective and compelling evangelizing influence. This is the lesson that the saints teach us! Holy and joyful men and women will renew the Church and bring the world to Christ.

The challenge of the new evangelization calls for a new ardor. It urges us to find new modes of expression and more effective ways of bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the same: "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8). It is the presentation of the Gospel that must be renewed so that it may be engaging, credible and compelling to people in the twenty-first century. This is our task. This is our mission. Go make disciples!

Missionary Disciples

But we cannot give what we do not have. To evangelize others is to invite them into friendship and relationship with Jesus Christ. Before we invite others, we the evangelizers must ourselves be truly evangelized. The evangelizers must first become disciples.

We have to be in relationship with Jesus. We have to know him and know that we are loved by him. It is not enough to know about Jesus. We have to become his friend. We have to sit at his feet and learn from him as did Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Lk 10:39). We have to fall in love.

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything." These words of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., former Superior General of the Jesuits, describe the experience of discipleship rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only the disciple can effectively evangelize others.

Salvation

Before his unexpected resignation, Pope Benedict wrote a letter for World Youth Day 2013. He spoke to young people about the meaning of evangelization. "To evangelize means to bring the Good News of salvation to others and to let them know that this Good News is a person: Jesus Christ. When I meet him, when I discover how much I am loved by God and saved by God, I begin to feel not only the desire, but also the need to make God known to others. At the beginning of John's Gospel we see how Andrew, immediately after he met Jesus, ran off to fetch his brother Simon (cf. Jn 1:4-42). Evangelization always begins with an encounter with the Lord Jesus. Those who come to Jesus and have experienced his love immediately want to share the beauty of the meeting and the joy born of his friendship. The more we know Christ, the more we want to talk about him. The more we speak with Christ, the more we want to speak about him. The more we are won over by Christ, the more we want to draw others to him." Our witness and efforts in the work of the new evangelization will be fruitful to the extent that we are aflame with the love of Christ. "The love of Christ urges us on!" (2 Cor 5:14).

Discipleship leads to evangelization. Mature disciples become disciple-makers. They become missionary disciples. Speaking to bishops and priests about young people at World Youth Day



in Rio de Janeiro, Pope Francis said, "They too have heard the mandate of Jesus; 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (cf. Mt 28:19). It is our responsibility to help kindle within their hearts the desire to be missionary disciples of Jesus. Certainly, this invitation could cause many to feel somewhat afraid, thinking that to be missionaries requires leaving their own homes and countries, families and friends. God asks us to be missionaries where we are, where He puts us! This is the vision I set before you today: Go make disciples!"

Priorities and Goals

Our vision, "Go make disciples," is intended to be broadly shared among all of the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese. It is for all of our parishes and schools as well as for all of the archdiocesan departments and other services that support the mission of the Church in the Archdiocese. It is for each of us in our homes, communities and workplaces. It is to be our north star as we set our course over the next five years.

In support of this vision, and upon the recommendation of the team that has assisted me throughout this thirteen month process, I have established three priorities that will be our particular focus for the next two years. Like the vision itself, these

Communion

Encounter Christ

priorities will be shared broadly among our parishes, schools and archdiocesan departments and agencies. Each of these will be supported by two specific and measurable goals. These priorities have been prayerfully discerned and identified from all that we heard during eight listening sessions and with careful consideration of all of the data received and studied throughout the thirteen month envisioning process. Our priorities are:

1. New Evangelization As we focus on this priority we will:

- A. Create an Office of New Evangelization in the Archdiocese by November 1, 2013.
- B. Initiate an Archdiocesan New Evangelization plan in 20 to 30 parishes and all diocesan offices by November 1, 2014.

2. Faith Formation As we focus on this priority we will:

- A. Implement a year-long "Transforming Adolescent Catechesis" process in 12 to 16 parishes and Catholic high schools of the Archdiocese by November 30, 2014.
- B. Increase participation in adult faith formation opportunities by 5 to 10 percent throughout the Archdiocese by July 1, 2015.

3. Hispanic Ministry As we focus on this priority we will:

- A. Begin implementation of a plan to alleviate the

overcrowding of churches with significant Hispanic populations in the metropolitan Oklahoma City area by May 1, 2014.

B. Enroll the first class of a Spanish language basic adult faith formation program among Spanish-speaking Catholics in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City by June 1, 2014.

Go make disciples! In his closing homily at World Youth Day in Rio, Pope Francis reassured young Catholics and the whole Church saying, "Do not be afraid! When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: I am with you always (Mt. 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus does not leave us alone, he never leaves you alone! He always accompanies you."

In presenting to you this pastoral letter and the challenge to "Go Make Disciples," I rely on the Lord's faithfulness. He accompanies us. With confidence in her motherly concern for the whole Church, I entrust our Archdiocese and this mutually shared vision to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Star of the New Evangelization.

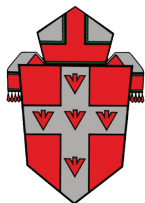
Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City



Go Make Disciples



Archdiocese of Oklahoma City
www.archokc.org

A Pastoral Letter
Archbishop Paul S. Coakley