

Integrating Bishop Boyea's Pastoral Letter and Pope Benedict's 'Year of Faith' Into Adult Faith Formation

In

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish-St. John Church and Student Center

“As disciples of Christ, we need a strong faith and a close relationship with Jesus. Until we have encountered Jesus at a deep and personal level, at a heart level, our engagement in the life of his bride, the Church, will remain quite limited. ... Jesus calls us his friends. Friendship is built on communicating with one another. Prayer is communicating and so we need to pray...” (*PROCLAMATION: A YEAR OF PRAYER – August 3, 2012 to December 9, 2013; Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing*)

BACKGROUND

I. Year Of Faith

Pope Benedict has announced a *Year Of Faith*, beginning October 11, 2012—the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council—through November 24, 2013—the feast of Christ The King.

“The beginning of the *Year of Faith* coincides with the anniversaries of two great events which have marked the life of the Church in our days: the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the [Second Vatican Council](#), called by Blessed Pope [John XXIII](#) (11 October 1962), and the twentieth of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, given to the Church by Blessed Pope [John Paul II](#) (11 October 1992).”

“The *Year of Faith* is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today - capable of leading those many people who are seeking it to the “door of faith.” This “door” opens wide man’s gaze to Jesus Christ, present among us “always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). He shows us how “the art of living” is learned “in an intense relationship with him.”^[13] “Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself the people of every generation: in every age he convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new. Today too, there is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”^[14]

II. Bishop's Pastoral Letter

In Spring 2012, Bishop Boyea issued his first pastoral letter—“*Go And Announce The Gospel of the Lord*”. In this pastoral letter, the Bishop calls for a Diocesan-wide effort to re-engage fallen-away Catholics and to be an “evangelizing force in our community”. He is calling on the Catholic faithful of the Diocese to live out Jesus charge to the Apostles—and the charge to each Baptized person—in Matthew’s Gospel to “Go, make disciples of all the Gentiles, 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.” (Mt 28:18-19)

To support this effort, Bishop Boyea calls for a Diocesan-wide **Year of Prayer**, beginning on August 3, 2012—the 75th anniversary of the Diocese of Lansing—through December 9, 2013—the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the Diocese.

To focus this effort, Bishop Boyea identifies three primary areas of need.

(1) The Household of Faith—

- a. He calls on all Catholics to embrace their faith to grow in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to grow in knowledge of the Catholic Faith
- b. He calls for catechesis for teachers in our schools and catechists in religious education to increase their knowledge of the Catholic Faith
- c. He calls for a strengthening of the Domestic Church, the family. Marriage as a vocation is in crisis.

(2) The Lost Sheep—

- a. He calls for an outreach to re-engage Catholics who have left the Church and those who have become lax in the practice of their faith.
- b. He calls for establishing a welcoming environment—including in liturgy, preaching, and music—so that people want to engage in the practice of the faith.

(3) The Court of the Gentiles—

- a. He calls for an outreach to the community in which the Church lives, encouraging a visible presence of the Catholic Church.
- b. He calls for a focus on learning about *Catholic social teaching* and how to live it out in our communities.
- c. He calls for a witness of charity in our communities
- d. He calls for public presence of the Liturgy in the communities in which we live.

III. Our Parish

- (1) The Parish Pastoral Council has identified list of items for building up the parish community and creating a welcoming culture in the parish.
 - a. The top priority is establishing a hospitality ministry.
 - b. The other items proposed fall into the following broad categories:

NOTE: All proposals apply to both sites as appropriate.

 - i. Making physical changes to afford more space for formal and informal gatherings.
 - ii. Apply technology both on-site and on the internet to provide information about parish events.
 - iii. Use social media to build a sense of community outside of parish functions.

- iv. More events that build community, e.g.,
 - 1. Remodeling a *Habitat For Humanity* house.
 - 2. Encourage participation in parish functions, e.g.,
 - a. Parish picnic
 - b. Pot Luck dinners
 - c. Faith Formation Events
 - 3. Public events that open up the parish facilities, such as MSU Music Department concerts and recitals
- (2) We are three years beyond the merger of two strong Catholic faith communities based less than a mile apart. There is considerable additional potential benefit that by the grace of God can be realized both for the good of our parish community and for the community(ies) in which we live, all related to Holy Father's call for a *Year Of Faith* and to the Bishop's Pastoral Letter and the *Year Of Prayer*. In order to realize this potential, it requires that individual members of the parish grow in their personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ in order at least to...
- a. renew and strengthen the parish from within,
 - b. reach out to those who no longer practice or have left the Catholic faith, and
 - c. reach out to those who have not been raised in the Catholic Faith and tradition.

The first item (a.) above *must happen* before the second and third items can happen.

The end result of the merger of the two East Lansing Catholic Faith communities into a single community is yet to be seen. Indeed, God continues to reveal His will for us individually and for the parish. Our role is to seek God's will and have the courage to act on it.

This is what we are about as we seek to know God's will individually and for the parish in responding to the Holy Father's *Year Of Faith* and the Bishop's Pastoral Letter. The life of the parish will be strengthened if we seek to know and follow God's will for us.

Possible Proposed Recommendations

The following are examples of how our parish might live out the *Year Of Faith* and the Bishop's Pastoral Letter and *Year Of Prayer*. This list is not intended to be either an exhaustive or a comprehensive listing of examples to address completely all parts of either the Pastoral Letter or the Years of Faith and Prayer. These are examples of a mix of existing faith formation activities and programs in the parish that could be directed for the purposes described above along with new activities and programs.

NOTE: Bishop Boyea exhorts us—"As disciples of Christ, we need a strong faith and a close relationship with Jesus." We build this relationship and strengthen our faith by meeting Jesus Christ in prayer. We are called to

pray both individually and as a parish, using our prayer to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will for us as we respond to the Bishop's charge and our Baptismal call—"Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord". Prayer must be the foundation for all that we do in loving and serving Jesus Christ and our brothers and sisters and those outside the parish community.

- (1) Develop a prayer card for these two observances to maintain the focus of the parish during this 16-month period. Every ministry and group in the parish would be asked to use this prayer at the beginning of every meeting and gathering.
- (2) Establish a Hospitality Ministry in which the parish as the Body of Christ evangelizes and welcomes current parishioners and visitors to Mass and special liturgical events. This ministry of welcome reminds people that they are entering a special time of worship in which they will experience God and God's love.
- (3) Schedule a Parish Mission with a focus on personal conversion to Jesus Christ and developing/strengthening a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- (4) Dedicate the *Soup and Substance* series during Lent AND/OR Establish a separate talk series to
 - a. Explain the *Nicene Creed*, which summarizes the beliefs of our Catholic Christian Faith
 - b. Review and discuss one or two of the major documents of the "Second Vatican Council".
 - c. Review and discuss the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.
 - d. Review several chapters of Fr. James Martin's book—"My Life With The Saints", to understand real-life faith struggles that the saints experience.
- (5) Schedule a monthly Holy Hour that could include...
 - a. Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction
 - b. Prayer and singing
 - c. A brief homiletic teaching on a specific aspect of our faith
- (6) Establish a *Marriage Enrichment* program. This effort will focus on strengthening sacramental marriage, including reminding couples that
 - a. God is a full partner in their marriage relationship
 - b. Prayer is the cornerstone of their marriage relationship
 - c. They have a commitment to help each other get to Heaven
- (7) Schedule Dr. Scott Hahn to present a seminar on a topic such as
 - a. Providing a Catholic Biblical perspective on Faith in Jesus Christ
 - b. Explaining how we can use scripture simply to grow in our Catholic Faith

NOTE: There are other prominent Catholic teachers who could teach on topics such as struggles with the Faith, opening up our understanding of the Eucharist—the ‘source and summit of our Catholic Faith’, growing in a prayer life, consciously living our faith every day, etc.

- (8) Schedule one or more events that address topics such as
 - a. Developing a Prayer life
 - b. Spiritual Growth and Spiritual Direction
 - c. Trusting in God’s Divine Providence
- (9) Schedule one or more events that address needs such as
 - a. Strengthening a Catholic family life
 - b. How a single person fits into and can grow in the life of a Catholic parish community.
 - c. How different ‘generations’ can learn from each other in growing in a personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ.
- (10) Learning about the *New Evangelization*, following the Synod of Bishops meeting on this topic in October 2012
- (11) There are many other planned and/or proposed events for the coming year in the parish that also would support the Year of Faith and Year of Prayer, e.g.,
 - a. Al’s ‘Sunday School’ for parents during Religious Education on Sunday mornings.
 - b. Bible study series.
 - c. Fr. Robert Barron’s video series on *Catholicism*