



# WE ARE HIS WITNESSES

## PERSONAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION FOR KEY PARISH LEADERS

"Inspired by the Word of God, this initiative invites us to walk a path of pastoral conversion - a call to follow where God is leading."

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark

"The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment."<sup>2</sup>

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO GUIDE US:

Where are we now? | Where is God calling us to go? | How will we get there together?

### GUIDING VALUES:

Synodality | Subsidiarity | Solidarity

## OPEN TO THE GRACE OF PASTORAL CONVERSION

### ATTITUDES TO LEAVE BEHIND

### ATTITUDES TO CULTIVATE

#### Self-interest

We need one another. When we set aside self-centeredness "we are able to learn from each other, journey together, and be at the service of one another."

#### Division and Discord

We are challenged to suspend our judgments and ideologies in order to enter into dialogue that promotes mutual understanding and unity within our diversity.

#### Limited Expectations

We are invited to set aside our own expectations so that we can listen more clearly to what God desires of us.

#### Fear

"For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control." (2 Tim 1-7)  
We are reminded that change is a necessary part of growth and fear inhibits growth.

#### Self-doubt

The participation of each person is essential for the synodal process to achieve its objective. You are called by virtue of your Baptism, to listen to the Holy Spirit in your life and to share your experience of God and His Church for the good of all His people.

#### Listening

We are called first to listen humbly. To listen in a manner that invites others to share authentically. To trust in the experience and wisdom of others.

#### Charity

We are also called to speak courageously and to share our experiences, our hopes, and our dreams with mercy and charity.

#### Seek God's will

We are called to seek God's will above our own. To discern God's desire for the Archdiocese of Newark.

#### Openness to the Holy Spirit

We are invited to embrace the action of the Holy Spirit, particularly in the ways in which the Spirit inspires us to embrace new ways of being Church.

#### Focus on others

"The Synodal Process is an opportunity to open up, to look around us, to see things from other points of view, and to move out in missionary outreach to the peripheries".

## PREPARING FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CONVERSATIONS

We are invited to enter into a sacred space  
where we will grow in deep love and respect for one another.  
We can create this safe and sacred space by entering with a heart  
rooted in covenant.

### COVENANT OF PRESENCE

#### When I enter into this sacred space with the aid of the Holy Spirit ...

- I commit to being punctual and arriving on time.
- I understand that we begin each gathering with prayer because our entire dialogue flows from our communal prayer.
- I commit to participate fully.
- I will listen generously.
- I will shift my thinking from certainty to curiosity.
- I will respond to others with open questions.
- I will welcome discomfort.
- I believe in possibilities.
- I have hope for a future which looks different from the present.

#### When I speak in this sacred space with the aid of the Holy Spirit ...

- I approach each conversation with an open heart, filled with compassion.
- I use respectful language.
- I share at my own comfort level.
- I speak in the first person, using "I" rather than "we".

#### When we come together in this sacred space with the aid of the Holy Spirit ...

- No one is anonymous.
- We sit in a circle to see one another.
- Cell phones and laptops do not enter the circle to distract us.
- We seek to slow down the tempo in order to hear God speaking to us.
- We always begin with a period of stillness allowing us to become fully present to one another.
- We value the relationships we form in the community.
- We take turns sharing and we don't speak twice until everyone has had a chance to share.
- We seek to build trust so if a person shares their personal story, we don't discuss what has been said outside our group.
- We take a pause between speakers and quiet is observed in order for an idea to be savored.
- We commit to action.

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them.  
When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.  
Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
*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."



## LISTEN

Select a passage from Scripture. Read it slowly and sit with the Word of God in silence for as long as you can. In the silence, notice the thoughts and feelings that begin to surface. Read the passage again and continue to sit with God's Word and to be attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit within you.

- **Isaiah 43: 10 - 12, 18-19** (Witness)
- **Matthew 28: 16-20** (Evangelization)
- **Mark 2:13-17** (Discipleship)
- **John 14:23-27** (Promise of the Spirit)
- **John 17: 17-23** (Unity)
- **Acts 2: 42-47** (Christian Community)
- **1 Corinthians 12: 4-11** (Gifts)
- **Ephesians 4: 1-6** (Communion)

## REFLECT

In what ways is God inviting me to allow this experience to transform me and to strengthen my relationship with Him and with the Church?

What do I need to leave behind in order to enter this process with an open heart, an open mind, and a willingness to share my experiences boldly and honestly?

In what ways do I hear God calling me to listen and embrace the thoughts, desires, struggles and hopes of others, especially those on the margins?

## PRAY

**God of Mercy, you call the Archdiocese of Newark  
to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ.**

**As we undertake the journey of pastoral conversion, endow us with your gifts of  
communion, courage and compassion.**

**Help us to fulfill the mission of Jesus and his Church through convincing outreach,  
vibrant parishes and effective ministries.**

**Raise up selfless and energetic leaders to serve the Church with fidelity and zeal.**

**May we, the Church of Newark in Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Union Counties,  
be sustained and strengthened by your grace.**

**May we the People of God discern and follow the promptings of your Holy Spirit.**

**May we your holy people dedicate our lives as firm disciples of Jesus Christ,  
Son of God and Son of Mary, wherever we go.**

**We ask this and all our prayers through Christ our Lord.**

**Amen**

**For more information visit <https://rcan.org/we-are-his-witnesses/> or use the QR code**

... "We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but "to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands" ...





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## AREAS OF MISSION FOCUS

### Pastoral Care of the Faithful

#### HOW WILL WE CARE FOR ALL CATHOLICS IN OUR PARISH COMMUNITIES?

Where are we now? | Where is God calling us to go? | How will we get there together?

#### THINK ABOUT

When you look at your own journey, you can probably think of times when someone at a parish brought you into a deeper relationship with the Lord. It may have been in preparation for sacraments, a liturgy that touched your heart, during a time of hardship, or a time of wondering about God and your life. Wherever people are in their life: joyful or sad, young or old, fully involved or on the margins or in need of healing, we want to be parish communities that provide encounters with the love of God and their sisters and brothers as part of their pastoral care for the people.



"So in Christ we, though many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." – *Romans 12:5*



The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1279*)



"The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the Gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth. Parishes are the home of the Christian community; they are the heart of our Church. Parishes are the place where God's people meet Jesus in word and sacrament and come in touch with the source of the Church's life." (*Communities of Salt and Light, USCCB*)



The parish is "the normal environment where we learned to hear the Gospel, to know the Lord Jesus, to serve with gratuitousness, to pray in community, to share projects and initiatives, to feel part of God's holy people." (*Pope Francis 10/29/24*)

#### AS WE PREPARE TO COME TOGETHER, WILL OUR PARISH RELATIONSHIPS HELP US . . .

- create more vibrant and well-attended liturgies?
- ensure the availability and responsiveness of pastoral ministers (clergy, religious, laity) to the needs of the community and individuals?
- provide resources and opportunities for Lifelong Faith Formation and Catholic education?
- better provide for ministry and outreach for those in pain and on the margins of the community? (e.g., the poor, separated & divorced, living with mental illness, etc.)
- provide opportunities and resources to engage in the pastoral care of youth and young adults?



The Most Blessed Sacrament is Christ made visible.  
The poor sick person is Christ again made visible.  
*Saint Gerard Majella (1726 - 1755)*



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## SPIRITUAL TOOLKIT FOR PASTORAL CONVERSION

### Lectio Divina - Be Open to God's Word

"Pastoral conversion requires [us] to be **open God's Word** and to listen to one another that we may journey together, united in the Holy Spirit to be agents of growth and change in our world."

*Archbishop of Newark, Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., D.D. - February 12, 2025*

### Praying with Scripture - Developing a listening heart

Prayer can be understood as listening, dialogue, a relationship, and the gift of presence. Scripture is God's word addressed to us. It is a record of God's revelation to His people. It narrates the story of a people created in love whose lives have been redeemed by God. It is an invitation to draw closer to God and to share in His divine life.

In praying with Scripture, it is essential to hear God's word spoken to us today.

*We are the new Israel—called, chosen and loved.*

*We are the early Christian community struggling to be faithful to the Gospel message.*

*We read the Scripture to find our story, so we can be attentive to God voice in our lives.*

*Scripture invites us, challenges us and consoles us.*



"Holy Scripture presents a kind of mirror to the eyes of the mind, so that our inner face may be seen in it. There we learn our own ugliness, there our own beauty."

*Saint Gregory the Great (c. 540 - 604)*



#### STEP 1 - Take time

- Let your spirit settle in stillness.
- Remove yourself from distractions.
- Be present to God.
- Be conscious of God's loving presence.



#### STEP 2 - Read a passage of Scripture.

- Remember that God's Word is meant to be a dialogue
- Consider reading aloud to yourself or take turns in a small group.
- Giving your voice over to the Word of God is a powerful experience of entering into dialogue with God.

#### STEP 3 - Re-read the passage slowly

- Pause when you sense God is speaking.
- Notice
  - when you experience God's presence and love.
  - when you are moved to express yourself.
  - when you are peaceful or lifted in spirit.
  - when you are disturbed or not at peace.



#### STEP 4 - Speak to God from your heart

- use whatever imagery, language, means or medium is most helpful to your expression.



### When you have finished with a Scripture passage, it is important to ...

#### ➤ Reflect on the insights and graces you have received, as well as your moments of consolation and desolation.

- Where has the Lord spoken to you?
- Where did you experience resistance to God's word?
- Where did you experience peace and joy?
- Where did you experience sadness and unrest?
- How is the Lord calling you to grow personally?

#### ➤ Be open to the word the Lord wishes to speak to you.

- Let that word take root in your heart.
- Savor it and let it unfold in your heart until you feel you have received all that you desire.

#### ➤ Return to those moments and remain there.

- They are touchstone moments of grace that are meant to be recalled and honored.
- The Lord often has more to say and more to give. Do not be in any hurry to move on or to cover too much.



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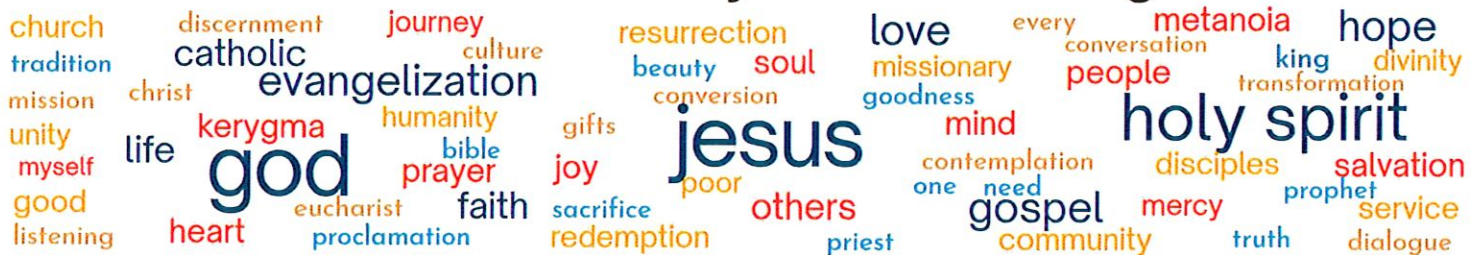
## AREAS OF MISSION FOCUS

### Evangelization and Outreach

#### HOW WILL WE SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH ALL PEOPLE IN OUR AREA?

Where are we now? | Where is God calling us to go? | How will we get there together?

#### What comes to mind when you think of Evangelization?



"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, even to the end of the age."  
– Matthew 28:19



Thus the Church's mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity.  
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 738)



"Being Church means being God's people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. . . It means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel."  
(Evangelii Gaudium 113)



Evangelization is not our attempt to conquer the world, but the infinite grace that radiates from lives transformed by the Kingdom of God. It is a path that we tread together, between the "already" and the "not yet."  
Pope Leo XIV - 6/7/2025

#### AS WE PREPARE TO COME TOGETHER, WILL OUR PARISH RELATIONSHIPS LEAD TO. . .

- A welcoming invitation to intentional discipleship of Jesus Christ, which includes engaging youth and young adults.
- Training and support to help people share their faith.
- A commitment to creating and maintaining a Catholic presence beyond parish boundaries.
- Outreach to the poor and marginalized that facilitates engagement with the community.
- Intercultural sensitivity across cultural boundaries.



"Can we think, the life of man, better employed than in this good work? What do I say? Would not all the labours of a thousand, be well rewarded, in the conversion of a single soul gained to Jesus Christ? I have always felt a great love for this kind of life and for a profession so excellent and so akin to that of the Apostles." Saint Isaac Jogues (1607 - 1646)



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## AREAS OF MISSION FOCUS

### Long-term Sustainability

#### HOW WILL WE PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR PARISHES INTO THE FUTURE?

Where are we now? | Where is God calling us to go? | How will we get there together?

#### THINK ABOUT

As you look back on your life, there are probably many ways in which you can see what a blessing your parish has been to you and your family. It is there that you received your sacraments, celebrated the joyous and sad times of your lives and grew in your faith. However, parishes have changed a lot over the years. Your experience of parish is most likely different from that of your parents and that of your children. We can see that we have less priests, smaller parish staffs, less resources, less people involved in ministry, and less people coming to Mass. Yet despite these realities God wants to assure us that He never leaves us and call us to stay on mission even as our parishes adapt and respond to the current times.



"The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes." (*Dei Verbum*, 8 #1)



All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.

*Acts 2: 44-45*



A real sense of Church communion, the gift of the Spirit that urges our free and generous response, will bring forth as its precious fruit, in the "one and catholic" Church the continuing value of the rich variety of vocations and conditions of life, charisms, ministries, works, and responsibilities, as well as a more demonstrable and decisive collaboration of groups, associations and movements of the lay faithful . . . This communion is already in itself the first great sign in the world of the presence of Christ, the Saviour. (*Christifideles Laici*, 64)



"We must seek together to be a missionary Church that builds bridges... always open, with open arms."  
(*Pope Leo XIV in his inaugural homily*)



"God has no hands or feet on earth but ours."  
*St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582)*

#### AS WE PREPARE TO COME TOGETHER, WILL OUR PARISH RELATIONSHIPS HELP US . . .

- provide parishes with the resources to support robust communities in the future?
- to have hope in the future while navigating the loss they may experience if their parish experiences changes?
- recognize demographic changes and trends affecting the communities?
- develop new shared ministry or outreach that we would not have had the people or resources to implement otherwise?
- call forth new leadership practices by utilizing diaconal or lay leadership rather than depending on the pastor for all pastoral leadership and service?
- ensure parishes can be cared for by the projected number of priests available in the future?
- maintain the needed building to ensure a Catholic presence in the area?
- provide the needed financial and human resources to sustain Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Faithful?