



SERVANTS ON CHRIST'S MISSION: A PASTORAL VISION FOR THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE 2024-2027

**May 19, 2024
Pentecost Sunday**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Since the Risen Lord commissioned the apostles to “go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), the Church has carried out the mission of sharing the Gospel of Life with the whole world. With the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the apostles and disciples, many of whom were eyewitnesses to the Risen Christ, were transformed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They courageously spread the Gospel message to both Jews and Gentiles. The missionary activity of the early disciples resulted in many people of various cultures coming to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Through the centuries, the Catholic faith has been a seed planted in many lands, coming to fruition in the lives of countless people. By their faith, prayer, worship and works of charity, each new generation of Catholics gave witness to Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen Lord.

In time, the Catholic faith became established in the United States of America, with the creation of new dioceses and the presence of bishops, clergy, religious and the laity. The Diocese of Belleville was erected by Pope Leo XIII in 1887, with the people entrusted to the pastoral care of their first shepherd, Bishop John Janssen. Waves of immigrants increased the Catholic population in southern Illinois and the clergy and faithful organized parishes, schools, convents, orphanages, hospitals and many charitable works. Even in counties that did not include large numbers of Catholics, the footprint of the Church made an impression in the wider community.

Since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Belleville Diocese has extended the practice of listening and consultation so that the hopes and aspirations of both clergy and laity could help with discernment and decision making. Parishes implemented parish pastoral councils and finance councils. The Diocese of Belleville created a Diocesan Pastoral Council, Finance Council and Education Advisory Council who provide input to the Bishop of Belleville and the Diocesan staff. More recently, Pope Francis has called us to be a “synodal Church”, listening to one another and discerning the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. Consultation is an important step in the process of discernment and decision making.

Recognizing the importance of consultation in the life of the Church, in the past year I invited members of the clergy and lay faithful to comment on what they perceive as the most important priorities for this local Church for the next three years (2024-2027). People responded at in-person meetings, through written letters and electronic communication. This spring I convened a small group of clergy and laity to review the hundreds of comments submitted and formulate this pastoral vision for our diocese. This document is a fruit of this process.

What follows are priorities that were identified by those who participated in the consultation, accompanied by identifiable goals that we will take steps to realize in the next three years. While the consultation included many thoughts, suggestions and ideas, I believe that this document expresses important priorities that emerged and are urgent for the life of our Catholic community. I invite you to read the list of priorities and the goals and bring them to prayer.

PRIORITIES AND GOALS (2024-2027)

PRIORITY: Youth & Young Adult Initiative

Goal: Education & Formation of Youth: Strengthening Catholic schools and PSR programs

Goal: Youth Ministry: Offer Programs to Gather Young Catholics for Faith Enrichment

Goal: Create a Culture of Vocation: Married life, Consecrated life, Diaconate, and Priesthood

PRIORITY: Family Life

Goal: Establish Comprehensive Programs to Prepare Couples for the Sacrament of Marriage and a Lifelong Commitment

Goal: Offer Meaningful Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment

Goal: Establish Family Enrichment Programs Across the Diocese

Goal: Develop Programs for Families in the Context of Rural Life

Goal: Develop a Culture of Life through prayer, education, formation, and service

PRIORITY: Faith Formation

Goal: Establish Diocesan Men's Conference and Women's Conference

Goal: Inaugurate New Adult Faith Formation opportunities (Bible Study, retreats, etc.)

Goal: Develop media resources to help people grow in prayer and learn about our faith

PRIORITY: Revitalize Parish Life and Ministry: Growing God's Family

Goal: Implement programs inviting the baptized to answer the call to holiness and missionary discipleship; with outreach to non-practicing Catholics

Goal: Diocese partnering with parish leaders in developing programs and best practices

Goal: Introduce stewardship across the diocese

Goal: Revitalize liturgical and sacramental participation

Goal: Commit resources to help develop preaching and music in parish life

Goal: Review how we are using our resources for our mission, both locally and diocesan wide

Goal: Build bridges between parish life and social service ministries

NEXT STEPS

The input of hundreds of people was vital in creating a vision for our future as a Diocese through concrete hopes and goals for our local Church. During the next three years, the Belleville Diocese will provide additional resources to implement Servants on Christ's Mission and

accomplish the goals we have set. We will establish a Pastoral Vision Steering Committee that will advise me and the Diocesan staff about how best to fulfill the goals we have set, assess our progress and report to the clergy and people how our vision is being realized in southern Illinois.

How can our people help in this important work? Let me offer three words: pray, volunteer and invite. First, pray for our diocese and all the people who are part of our community. Pray that the Holy Spirit give us the gifts we need for the renewal of the Catholic faith in our 28 counties. Second, volunteer to assist with the implementation of our pastoral vision. For instance, if your parish or partnership is identified as a site for a new Bible study this fall, consider this as my request to step forward and help organize and facilitate the study. Good things don't just happen in parishes; it takes people to make them happen. Third, invite people you know to participate in Servants on Christ's Mission. A letter of invitation from the Bishop asking for involvement is good, but a personal invitation from a family member or a fellow parishioner will likely have the best results. Pray, volunteer and invite.

For regular communication about Servants on Christ's Mission, we will utilize our Diocese of Belleville website (www.diobelle.org); Facebook page; and The Messenger, our diocesan newspaper. A quarterly communication from our Steering Committee will help keep everyone informed of our progress. I also hope to create opportunities for people to gather together in person for prayer and ongoing conversation about our Pastoral Vision.

A word of thanks to all who participated and submitted ideas and suggestions. Thanks to all who helped review the submissions and organize the priorities. My thanks to Monsignor Thomas Flach; Mary Fleming; Maria Gimenez; Judy Hoffmann; Fr. Godfrey Mullen, OSB; and Fr. William Spencer, OFM.

Finally, keep in mind that three years can pass by quickly. There are lots of good things happening in our diocese already; yet it will be important for us to keep the Pastoral Vision in front of us so that our Catholic community becomes stronger and helps people grow in our love for the Lord Jesus and our Catholic faith.

May God who has begun this good work in us bring it to fulfillment.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Michael McGovern
Bishop of Belleville

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- When I review Servants on Christ's Mission, what priorities or goals would best use my gifts?
- Can I identify personal goals that will help me grow in a relationship with Jesus beginning now?
- What do I hope will happen in the Diocese of Belleville as we implement Servants on Christ's Mission?