



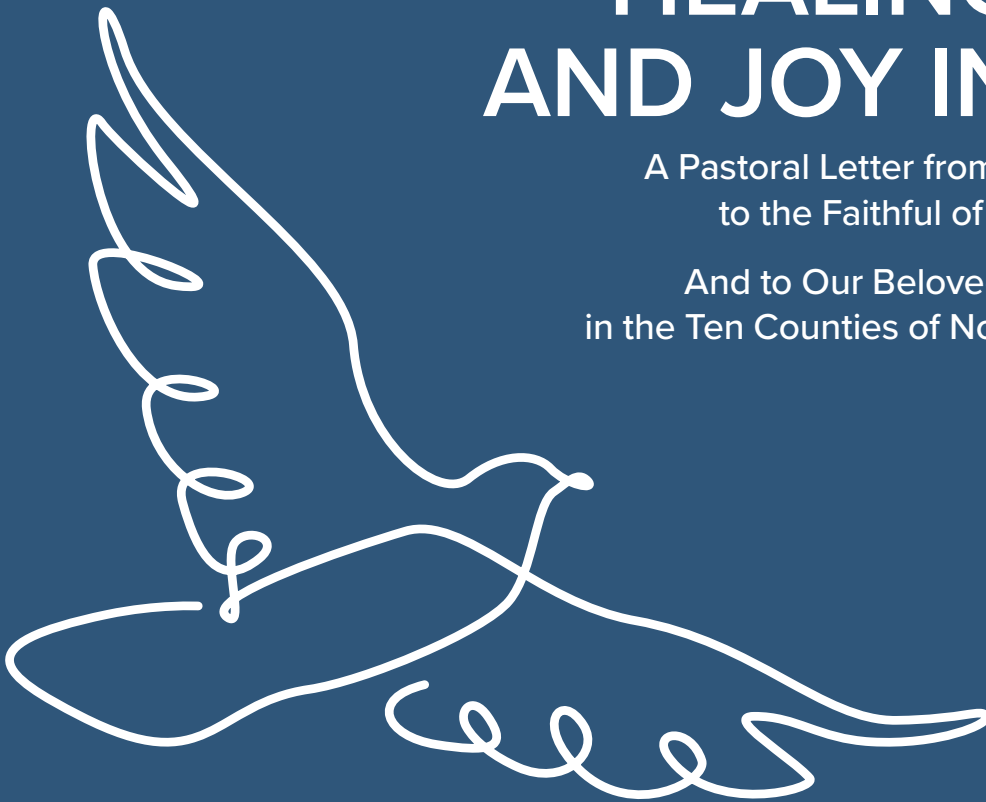
DIOCESE OF DULUTH

The Dawn from on High Shall Break Upon Us

HEALING, HOPE AND JOY IN JESUS

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Daniel Felton
to the Faithful of the Diocese of Duluth

And to Our Beloved Brothers and Sisters
in the Ten Counties of Northeastern Minnesota



Aitkin | Carlton | Cass | Cook | Crow Wing | Itasca | Koochiching | Lake | Pine | St. Louis

On the Occasion of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord
on the 25th Day of December in the Year 2022



IN THE TENDER
 COMPASSION OF OUR
 GOD, THE DAWN FROM
 ON HIGH SHALL BREAK
 UPON US (LUKE 1:78)

My dear brothers and sisters,

Let us proclaim from the height of International Falls, to the width of Walker and Grand Portage to the depth of Pine City, the dawn from on high is breaking upon us in the Diocese of Duluth! This dawning is an awakening to the vision and mission that God entrusts to us at this time in our history, a dawning and awakening that is the result of the Pentecost stirrings of the Holy Spirit moving boldly in our midst, calling us to proclaim the healing, hope and joy that we can only find in Jesus Christ to everyone who dwells in the 25,000 square miles of our diocese.

This call to mission is not just some new idea or the next program or another five-year plan. It is a *mandate*. It is at the heart and core of the preaching of Jesus, as he proclaims, “The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). It is the clarion challenge given to us by Jesus Christ himself, “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” (Matthew 28:19). It is aligned with the mission charge taken up in our diocese by the likes of Venerable Frederic Baraga, Msgr. Joseph Buh, and our beloved Bishop Paul Sirba, who stated, “It is time for us to move on to evangelization and mission” (Presbyteral Council Minutes, March 8, 2018).

DAWN FINDS ME READY TO WELCOME YOU, MY GOD!

The Holy Spirit has revealed to us in our over fifty *Let’s Listen* gatherings that the deepest longing we have amongst the people of our diocese is a desperate cry for healing instead of hurt, for hope instead of despair and for an abundant joy rising from the drudgery of everyday life as we know it. Our mission banner is simple: Abundant Healing, Hope and Joy in Jesus!

That is why, in this very moment, as disciples, we are intentionally helping one another grow closer to Jesus. It is no wonder that the Holy Spirit leads us to witness to others that Jesus is our **way** to healing, the **truth** of the hope that we are seeking, and our abundant **life** of joy, no matter where one may be in life’s journey (John 14:6).

Right now, as disciples on mission, we are called to accompany and lead all people to Jesus Christ, who in his person is the eternal dawning from on high that breaks upon us. In Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God’s healing, hope and joy are breaking into our personal lives, our Church and the civic communities where we live.

If we are in a divinely initiated moment of dawning and awakening to the mission and vision that God is giving to us, then we must be walking out of some great darkness. Otherwise, there is no need for a dawning and awakening! Only a people walking in darkness can see the great light (Matthew 4:16).

In recent times, we have been walking in the darkness of many challenges: the listing of priests with an allegation of abuse of a minor, bankruptcy, the merging and clustering of parishes, grieving the loss of Bishop Sirba, enduring the long wait for the appointment of the new bishop, the rise of coronavirus and its impact on all aspects of life, the decline in Mass attendance and reception of the Sacraments, the general decline in population for a majority of counties that



constitute the Diocese of Duluth, and the list goes on. Let's just say, the night has been long and dark.

We also live in the cusp of the beginning of a new era. As Pope Francis expresses, "We are not living an era of change but a change of era" (Speech to the National Conference of the Italian Church, November 10, 2015). A change of this nature only happens every four or five hundred years. The last great change of era was in the time of the Reformation during the 1500's. Every change of era is a new dawning in history. A change of era acknowledges an ending as well as the new beginning. The customary ways of doing things no longer work in the new era. This is certainly true in our encounter, expression and embodiment of faith. Many of the ways that we pass on our faith to others no longer work. And even though we are working harder than ever to pass on our faith, it no longer sees the impact that it once did in another time. Until we are ready to admit that much of what we are doing is not working anymore, we will continue to stumble through the darkness of despair, frustration and failure.

With so much darkness it is hard to see a step forward. Walking in darkness can be debilitating and frightening. Left on our own, walking in darkness can paralyze us, make us irrelevant and cast us deeply into hurt, despair and tribulation in our families, parishes and communities where we live. Much like the apostles in the upper room, we are huddled together in isolation, paralyzed and trapped by a fear that feels more like an ending than a beginning.

And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them ... (Acts 2:2-3).



In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high is breaking upon us. We have never been and will never be left on our own. It is God the Father Who has created us as His beloved sons and daughters, made in His image and likeness. And God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). And it is God the Father and Son who lovingly pour upon us and through us the in-breaking Holy Spirit of Pentecost healing, hope and joy!

As disciples in this divinely revealed moment of dawning, we walk from darkness into His light. In this awakening moment, as disciples on mission, we discover, embrace and give witness to the vision and mission that was given to us from the very beginning when our diocese was begun in 1889, and now in our own time, by God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4).

WARNING! YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE MISSION FIELD.

Since the beginning of our diocese, the gospel mission has remained the same. To the bishop, priests, deacons, religious and lay people of the Diocese of Duluth: accompany and lead all people to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in the ten counties entrusted to you as your mission field. Be on fire to bring yourself and others closer to Jesus Christ, no matter where we may be in the journey of life. Reveal to all that Jesus is the healing, hope and joy that we are



desperately seeking in our lives, the life of our family and the community where we live.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit and sent on a mission to bring others closer to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God is not just something that sounds nice and noble as an idea, or as a program that we want to emphasize or as the goals and objectives of a five-year plan. Jesus proclaimed, *“I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it was already ablaze!”* (Luke 12:49). The tongues of fire that came to rest on the heads of the apostles set their hearts on fire and they burst forth from the upper room into the world to blaze a trail to Jesus Christ. The early Christian community preached a Someone and not an idea, program or plan. And that someone they gave witness to was Jesus Christ – whose life, death and resurrection is the Kingdom of God at hand; and Who is healing, hope and joy.



As disciples on mission, we embrace the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is depicted as a heart on fire. As we break open the doors of our home and parishes to go out into the world to blaze a trail to Jesus, there should be a sign that reads, *“Warning! You are now entering the mission field.”* That mission field can be as far away as a foreign land or the person standing in front of me at home, at work, in the grocery store or on the football field. Every moment and every person that I encounter in the course of every day is wanting Who and what I have in Jesus Christ: the way to healing in their hurting, the truth of hope in their despair, and the life of abundant joy in the midst of their tribulations.

But why the warning? Well, if I choose to be a disciple of Jesus and a disciple sent on mission in His name, I must detach from everything in life that keeps me from being singularly attached to Jesus and the Kingdom of God. I cannot share Jesus with others, unless the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the deepest core of my heart.

I must detach from anything and anyone that keeps Jesus from being the center of my life ... anything and anyone. Whoever and whatever else are at the center of my life will become the center of my mission proclamation and witness to others. Anyone or anything that is not Jesus could become a significant distraction to carrying out the mission entrusted to me as a disciple of Jesus.

“Good Teacher what must I do to inherit everlasting life? And Jesus looking upon him loved him and said to him, ‘You lack one thing, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven’... and the man went away sorrowful; for he had many things” (Mark 10:17-22).

As disciples, we have many things that we don’t want to give up or give over to Jesus. This is true not only in my personal life but also in our Catholic parishes, schools, apostolates and institutions. Anything that is not aligned with the mission to bring others closer to Jesus Christ and to give witness to the Kingdom of God must end.

Warning: this approach to our mission and mission field will be filled with landmines waiting to explode if we step on them and the territory they are protecting. As Catholic communities we are better at starting or maintaining programs, organizations and services than we are at stopping them. The



programs, organizations and services that may need to end all served a great purpose at one time but may not serve our purpose in this new era as we move to this dawning and awakening mission moment.

Another challenge with moving to mission will be the focus of our mission attention and energy. The mission field for which we live and move and have our being is not me, or my parish (or school, apostolate, institutions) but it is all the people in the community in which I live. That is where our mission begins and ends. Too often, we perceive that the mission field is our parish, and as a consequence, the parish becomes the be-all and end-all of our mission attention and energy. Yes, we must be attentive to the needs of the parish community and its overall health; after all, as disciples on mission, we cannot give to others that which we do not have ourselves. But like Jesus, our mission is not unto ourselves – we do not exist to be served, but to serve. The mission of our parish is to go out into the communities where we live and invite all people wherever they may be in the journey of life, to discover, follow and worship Jesus.



This refocusing of our mission intent and field will yield much fruit. Not only will the community at large be served well, but the parish itself will reap the benefits and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and together we will change from a self-understanding of scarcity to one of abundance. In this divine moment of dawning and moving to mission, we must stop organizing ourselves around decline and begin to believe that in the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, there will be twelve bushel baskets left over of everything needed to carry out the mission given to us by God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

God would never give us a mission and then withhold what we need to accomplish His mission through us. The words scarcity and decline are not a part of God's vocabulary, but they are words that flow from our lips as a reason to give up and to give in to a sense of "it is what it is." Jesus preaches again and again in the gospel: *I came that they might have life and have it abundantly!* (John 10:10).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND, BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS! (MARK 1:15)

What is that good news? We are not left on our own. If the Holy Spirit is the agent calling us to mission, then we must pray to the Holy Spirit to make the impossible happen, to let go of everything and everyone but Jesus. Self-reliance often keeps us from detachment, as well as a fear of giving up who and what I have and being not sure of what I will gain by going all in. And like the young man, Jesus looks at us with love and says, "You are lacking one thing, go, and give up this one thing and come and follow me." Only with detachment do we realize that all of these somethings and someones that I am clinging to will never be the fullness of the Kingdom of God and the divine healing, hope and joy that I have in Jesus.

Finally, when it comes to the mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God that is at hand, Jesus often uses parables. The purpose of a parable is to draw people into a predictable story and change the ending, leaving them shocked and bewildered. In doing so, Jesus seeks to turn lives upside down, to stand them on their heads, so that they might see the Kingdom of God from a different perspective.

For instance, the parable of the shepherd and the lost sheep would have left



people shaking their heads and thinking no shepherd would ever leave the ninety-nine sheep to go looking for the one lost sheep. But Jesus concludes that He as the Good Shepherd is that passionate about looking for those who are lost, least and last in the world. And as crazy as it looks, as disciples of that Good Shepherd, our mission is to the lost, least and last in the communities in which we live. The parabolic nature of this dawning moment turns our sense of mission upside down, so that we may see our mission from the perspective of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, perhaps for the first time in a long time.

As we now move to defining the Vision, Mission, Values and Mission Initiatives of the new dawn from on high breaking upon us in our diocese, get ready to do a head stand!

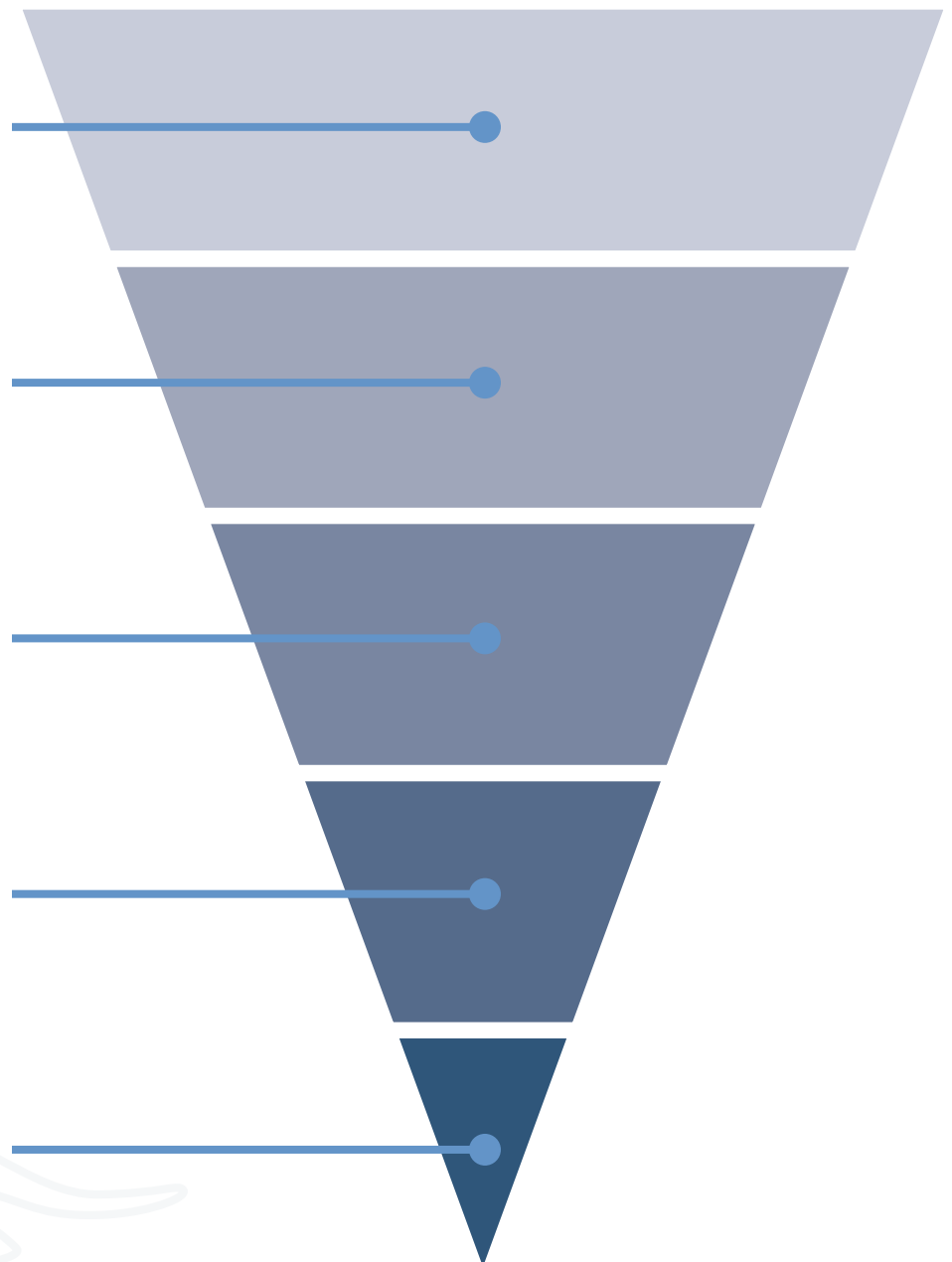
MISSION FIELD

MISSION CORE VALUES

MISSION INITIATIVES

MISSION

VISION



MISSION FIELD

A mission field can be as far away as a foreign land or as close as the person standing in front of me. For the sake of strategic mission planning, a mission field will be a designated geographical region for which we are accountable for introducing and implementing our Vision, Mission and Values. The mission field includes all of the individuals, families, Catholic communities and civic communities in the regional area. A mission field makes mission initiatives manageable, doable and accountable.

MISSION CORE VALUES

HEALING in Jesus
HOPE in Jesus
JOY in Jesus
ABUNDANCE in Jesus

MISSION INITIATIVES

EMPHASIS ONE: Strategic Mission initiatives for healing, with an emphasis on Healing Ministries, Sacraments, Prayer, and Corporal Works of Mercy.
EMPHASIS TWO: Strategic Mission initiatives for healing and hope, with an emphasis on the Scriptures and the Eucharistic Revival.
EMPHASIS THREE: Strategic Mission Initiatives for healing, hope and joy, with an emphasis on equipping and commissioning missionary disciples who joyfully preach the gospel, bring people closer to Jesus and proclaim the Kingdom of God that is at hand.

MISSION

As disciples of Jesus, we will intentionally help one another to grow closer to Jesus, no matter where we are in the journey of life.

VISION

As disciples on mission, we will accompany and lead all people to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.



GENERAL MISSION STRATEGIES

Personal Mission Field: You Can Do This!

As stated above, our mission field can be as far away as a foreign country or as close as the person in front of me. In both these circumstances, I am called as a disciple on mission to give witness to others of my deep conviction that in Jesus Christ alone we will know the truth, beauty and goodness of His healing, hope and joy. As St. Pope John Paul II reminds us, *“this mission does not only involve Church professionals, such as priests and religious ... but all baptized Christians must commit themselves to evangelization, cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of all people”* (1998 ad Limina Address to Bishop of the United States).

All baptized Christians are called to be disciples on mission who accompany one another to an encounter with Jesus. This can be as simple as learning how to pray aloud with the one in front of me who has asked for my prayers, a simple prayer to the Holy Spirit inviting Jesus to bring His healing, hope and joy in response to the specific prayer request. Yes, missionary discipleship is that simple ... and that challenging.

As pointed out by St. Pope John Paul II, often we think that this kind of Jesus encounter and accompaniment is for priests, deacons and religious, that left on our own, this praying out loud with the person in front of me or in a foreign land is an impossible task. But we must remember, our prayer and witness as disciples on mission are the actions of the Holy Spirit working through us and in the minds and hearts of all people standing in front of us. Missionary discipleship is not about us, but rather what the Holy Spirit of Jesus wants to do in and through us!

This understanding of missionary discipleship and the mission field is personal, unique and spontaneous: Personal in my discernment of how the Holy Spirit is moving in my life; unique in that these choices are specific to me and the person in front of me or the call to me; and they are spontaneous, especially with regard to the person in front of me or the call before me, which many times is a mission field unplanned or not expected in that moment.

At the same time, there is also a missionary discipleship and mission field which is communal, local and intentional.

Intentional Community Mission Field: Every Person and Every Square Foot of Our Diocese Is Mission Impacted!

Intentional community mission fields are defined by the families, Church communities and civic communities in which we live. With an intentional mission field comes the communal discernment of what the Holy Spirit is calling us to be and to do as disciples on mission within a particular area. It is local in its discernment and actions in the Holy Spirit. It is intentional in strategizing how best to live the mission of helping one another grow closer to Jesus and accompanying all people to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God within that defined area.

The parish is one understanding of an intentional mission field. Every parish is defined by the establishment of a geographical boundary. Over the years, with all of the mergers and clustering of our parishes, some of these geographical boundaries may need to be redefined. Likewise, it is a given fact that just because someone lives within the recognized boundary of a parish, it may be





that they belong to and participate in a parish outside of their parish boundary.

Additionally, it is the understanding of the Church “that a parish embraces all the Christian faithful within a certain territory ...” (Canon 518) — all the Christian faithful, not just the baptized Catholics in that area. In other words, the parish pastor and members of the parish are responsible for leading all the people within the parish boundary to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

More recently, in the instruction of Pope Francis, called *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish community in the service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, the Holy Father speaks of another understanding of intentional community mission fields called pastoral regions (July 20, 2020, VII. 42-45). As defined in the instruction, a pastoral region gives expression to a new understanding of geographically defined intentional mission fields. It is not bound by parish, deanery or diocesan boundaries. It does not change existing organizational parish mergers or clusters.

The sole intent of a regional mission field is for mission strategizing. By collaborating with a larger region than the parish itself, there will be more resources and opportunities for being disciples on mission, leading all people in that particular mission field to Jesus who is the Kingdom of God.

What is Your Intentional Community Mission Field? A New Day is Dawning!

The first step will be to identify the geography of your mission field. Priests, deacons and Catholic leadership locally will carry on a conversation with each other until there is a consensus on the area that will constitute your particular mission field. The intentional Community Mission Field will either be the parish itself or a grouping of parishes regionally.



When the Community Mission Field has been determined, this will become the mission field of families, Catholic communities and the civic communities that we, as disciples on mission, will accompany and lead to Jesus and His Kingdom of healing, hope and joy.

Each mission field will identify a mission field leader who is a disciple on mission with leadership abilities to serve as the convener and point person for mission field strategic planning.

It will be up to the local mission field leader, pastor(s) and parish leadership to determine how they want to move to mission within their respective mission field. This will necessitate getting to know the demographics and resources that are a part of the mission field. This information will provide background on the make-up of families, Catholic communities (parish, school, apostolates, institutions) and the civic communities (organizations, programs, services, reports, studies).

All mission strategic planning will begin, continue, and end in the locally defined mission field. This is a significant change in culture. There will be no top down or diocesan-wide initiatives. Local mission field strategizing will make our mission initiatives more manageable, doable and accountable.

At the same time, with the defining of local community mission fields, be it at a parish or regional level, the result will be that every person and every square foot of our diocese will be on mission.



Mission Core Values and Mission Field Initiatives

A mission value is a core belief through which we carry out our Mission and Vision. From the 50+ *Let's Listen* sessions that were held throughout the diocese in 2022, we listened to one another and for the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us through one another. Prayerfully, we have discerned that the Holy Spirit is calling us to the values and beliefs of abundant healing, hope and joy in Jesus. These mission values will be core to creating and carrying out the Mission Initiatives for each Mission Field.

The Mission Initiatives will be centered around the Mission Values of Healing, Hope and Joy, in that order. Each Mission Field will develop their own strategic Mission Initiatives for their designated region. Mission initiatives planted in that particular region will be local, organic and flexible in their implementation and ongoing development.

Strategic Mission Initiatives will have three areas of Emphasis:

EMPHASIS ONE: Strategic Mission Initiatives for healing, with an emphasis on Healing Ministries, Sacraments, Prayer, and Corporal Works of Mercy, *beginning immediately.*

EMPHASIS TWO: Strategic Mission Initiatives for healing and hope, with an emphasis on the Scriptures and the Eucharist Revival.

EMPHASIS THREE: Strategic Mission Initiatives for healing, hope and joy, with an emphasis on equipping and commissioning missionary disciples who joyfully preach the Gospel, bring people closer to Jesus and proclaim the Kingdom of God that is at hand.

The strategy behind the areas of emphasis for our Mission Initiatives are given to us in the scriptures and by the example of Jesus himself.



Mission Initiatives in Jesus as Revealed to Us on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)

In the Gospel account of the disciples walking and accompanying one another along the road to Emmaus, there is an encounter with Jesus who accompanies them along the way. As they journey together, the disciples begin to pour out to Jesus their hurts, pain and fear as a result of His crucifixion. Jesus listens and comforts them by his healing presence (Emphasis One).

Jesus then goes on to teach them and break open the scriptures, which reveal words of hope and encouragement in response to their deep sense of despair and darkness (Emphasis Two).

When it appears that Jesus will take leave, the disciples invite him to stay with them. When Jesus was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Immediately, their eyes were open to the Real Presence of Jesus and his communion with them (Emphasis Two).

They said, “were our hearts not burning within us,” (Luke 24:32) and they rose and returned to Jerusalem and told the others about how Jesus had become known to them in the breaking of the bread (Emphasis Three).

Emphasis One on Healing: Encounter and Accompaniment

Listening to the living Word of God given to us in the scriptures and following



the example of Jesus, we will begin with strategic Mission Initiatives with an emphasis on healing.

The Mission Field Leader and Mission Field Core Team will provide the opportunity to engage those in the Mission Field in a dialogue and discernment of what are the greatest hurts, pains and fears among the families, Catholic communities and civic communities of that region.

As was the case for the *Let's Listen* sessions, forums of listening conversation should be initiated where we can listen to one another and in doing so listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us for a particular people and region.

The Holy Spirit will come to rest in the Mission Field as Comforter and Healer and will lead us to the healing power of Jesus Christ.

Mission Field Initiatives for healing should reflect the dialogue of the people of that region and the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, our Mission Field Initiatives will not be a general and generic plan for the whole diocese, but will reflect the organic and lived experience of the various Mission Fields throughout our diocese. For example, the hurt and pain in need of healing in Chisholm will most likely be different than the hurting that is in need of healing in Deer River.

In this approach, all of the resources in a given Mission Field can be prioritized and focused to the Mission Initiatives that have been identified as the greatest need or as having the greatest healing impact on the Mission Field.

It is important to always keep in mind that it is through these Mission Initiatives for healing that we will be disciples intentionally helping one another to grow closer to Jesus through this experience of life. It is in the being and doing of the Mission Initiatives of healing that we will be disciples on mission accompanying and leading all people to Jesus and God's Kingdom of abundant healing.

With this approach to mission the role of our Diocesan Pastoral Offices will become one of resource and support. As the Pastoral Office Mission Support Team our diocesan office personnel will work as a resource with the Mission Field Leader and Mission Field Core Team in the creation of the Mission Initiatives and as a support in the implementation of the Mission Initiatives. This will also allow our offices to better utilize resources from the United Catholic Appeal, stewardship and third source funding.

As your bishop I will organize my office responsibilities in Duluth in such a way as to spend a greater portion of my time working and pastoring with you in your respective Mission Fields. To that end, I will establish three Field Offices of the Bishop in Tower, Cohasset and Pequot Lakes.

Emphasis Two on Healing and Hope: Holy Scriptures and Holy Eucharist

The timing for moving to the Second Emphasis of Hope will be discerned by the local Mission Field and its leadership. The sequence of these areas of emphasis are meant to build upon each other, to be cumulative in their strategy and implementation. It is not as though we have finished with the Emphasis on Healing and we are moving on to the Emphasis of Hope. Rather, it is intended to be cumulative, a generation of "mission energy" that ultimately carries us into being so filled with the healing and hope we find in Jesus that we want to be



disciples on mission as we share with others the healing, hope and joy that Jesus wants to give to all people. Thus, we will decide within the Mission Field when and how we are ready to equip disciples on mission with the necessary abilities and tools to accompany and lead all people to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Emphasis Two on Healing and Hope will coincide with the parish phase of the National Eucharistic Revival. Beginning with the Feast of Corpus Christi in June 2023, this will be a possibility for Mission Fields to emphasize the Liturgy of the Word and the Scriptures as being God sources of healing and hope.

The second part of this emphasis on healing and hope will embrace the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with a focus on the Real Presence of Jesus Christ and reverence for the Eucharist, authentic Christian hospitality, cultivating a deeper embrace of sacred music and excellent preaching.

Emphasis Three on Healing, Hope and Joy: Joyful Disciples on Mission

Emphasis Three on Healing and Hope and Joy will emphasize our call not only to be a disciple, but the *mandate* of Jesus to be disciples on mission as we are sent forth to share our healing, hope and joy with others that we have discovered in Jesus, through us others may come to know and believe as well. This emphasis will provide training and formation as to how do I introduce others to Jesus and then walk with them in our Emmaus encounter with Jesus and the Eucharist.



MISSION

Our mission is to intentionally help one another grow closer to Jesus Christ. This is the heart and the core of who we are called to be, why we exist and what we are to be about in our journey of life and faith, a disciple of Jesus. Guiding us in this mission is God the Father who sent Jesus into the world to become one with us and the Holy Spirit who is constantly leading us to Jesus that we might call him Lord. Our mission is Jesus and the simple proclamation: Jesus lived, died and rose from the dead, and so will we if we are one with him. What could bring us greater healing, hope and joy than this, which we believe ourselves and then profess to all those who are a part of our mission field.

Like the disciples walking the road to Emmaus, Jesus joins us wherever we may be in our journey of life. He is the One who encounters us first, so that we might encounter him. He accompanies us first, so that we might accompany him and all those we invite to join us as we walk together to Emmaus.

VISION

Our vision is the outcome we all seek, that in and through Jesus we will encounter the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus has ushered in the reign and kingdom of God. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God is at hand. We can know, touch and experience the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth to the extent that we are one with Jesus. It is no wonder that Jesus tells us to repent and turn away from the veil of sin which prevents us from knowing the fullness of God's Kingdom. In Jesus Christ, God is forever victorious, and so are we in His name. Jesus is the ointment Who heals our hurts and wounds; He is the hope which dispels our despair and darkness; and He is the joy that overcomes our tribulations. Our deepest longing is to be with Jesus in the Kingdom of God.



This vision is called the *pivot point*. As can be observed in the graph, everything funnels to this one point and contact with life and faith. Everything rests on this one point. Additionally, as a pivot point, the vision can adjust the overall mission to meet the blessings and challenges of our new era, with a divine sense of nimbleness and flexibility as we read the signs of our time. Jesus is the focus of our mission, and the vision is the fulfillment of our mission in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Truly, in the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high is breaking upon us! This Pastoral Letter is not meant to be all-inclusive and conclusive. Rather, it is intended to be a Holy Spirit next step (one step at a time) in our moving from the dark night into the dawning of a new day.

This Pastoral Letter is not a new idea or program or a five-year plan. It is not about the next something, but rather it is the re-presenting and re-claiming of a Someone: Jesus Christ as the source of our abundant healing, hope and joy. Our vision is Jesus. Our mission is Jesus. Jesus is healing. Jesus is hope. Jesus is Joy. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end to all that we be and do as disciples on mission.

Simultaneously, it is God the Father who has created us with His purpose and mission for us, and it is through the Holy Spirit that this purpose and mission is fused to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This dawning moment in Jesus is happening in a dawning moment of time and the change of an era. If Jesus is the Lord of time, then all time is fused to His Paschal Mystery of life, death and resurrection. Our Pentecostal dawning moment is one of dying and rising. There are many ways that we claim and proclaim the person of Jesus who Himself is unchanging. However, many of the methods, programs and organizations of claiming and proclaiming Christ in our lifetime are not seeing the results and impact we anticipate. Many of the outcome are causing frustration, disappointment, and sadness. But that is only a necessary part of the Paschal Mystery, which has its final fulfillment in resurrection and new life!

We can only begin to fathom the healing, hope and joy that is Jesus to the extent that we believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Paschal Mystery that is embodied in his Person, as the Body of Christ, is embodied in us.

As believers, how can we be anything but disciples blazing a trail to Jesus? Disciples who want to help one another grow closer to Jesus wherever we may be in life and disciples on mission leading all people to Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

It is not only the changing of time, but also a change of culture that is set before us in this Pastoral Letter, a change of culture that seeks to stand us on our heads so that we might see Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God and our mission and vision from a totally different perspective.

This change of culture includes moving from an attitude of scarcity to one of abundance; from organizing ourselves for decline to preparing ourselves for growth; from beginning with our diocesan pastoral offices for mission initiatives to beginning with the mission field for pastoral and mission strategy; from



understanding the mission of accompanying others closer to Jesus as the work of clergy and religious to being the mission of all those who are baptized; from maintaining all of the programs and apostolates we presently have to sustaining only those programs and apostolates in alignment with enhancing our mission and vision; from pastors as administrators to pastors as shepherds of their mission field; from seeing our parish as the be-all and end-all of our missionary activity to the communities where we live as being the primary mission field.

Because this new cultural approach begins in the Mission Field and is organic in nature, I would expect that within parishes and regions there will be a variety of ways and differences of time that are embraced in carrying out the vision, mission, and mission initiatives. And that is all right, as long as it is discerned as such in the Holy Spirit and that we are open to the Holy Spirit acting not a minute sooner nor a minute later than the Spirit wills it.

Finally, as this Pastoral Letter is meant to begin a process of conversation and conversion, there will be more written later on the second phase of healing and hope and the third phase of healing, hope, and joy. Remember, one step at a time!

Likewise, I acknowledge that in addition to the evangelical thrust of our mission, there is a necessary mission catechesis that accompanies mission evangelization. I am committed to exploring with your mission field catechetical ways that are aligned to mission and the dawning of a new day.

On this Christmas Day, we entrust our Vision, Mission and Mission Initiatives, our very selves as disciples on mission, to the Word; and the Word was God. *In him was life and the life was the light ... the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (Jn 1:1,3-5).

In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us!

Venerable Bishop Frederic Baraga, pray for us!

Holy Msgr. Joseph Buh, pray for us!

Holy Bishop Paul Sirba, pray for us!

St. Joseph, pray for us!

Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us!

May God bless you and those you serve,

Bishop Daniel J. Felton

Given in Duluth, from the Cathedral of our Lady of the Rosary, on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, 25 December, 2022

APPENDIX: THE LANGUAGE OF MISSION

Mission Field: A mission field can be as far away as a foreign land or as close as the person standing in front of me. For the sake of strategic mission planning, a mission field will be a designated geographical region for which we are accountable for introducing and implementing the Vision, Mission and Values. The mission field includes all people in the designated mission field.

The designated region is for the singular purpose of strategic mission planning. It does not impact the already established parish arrangements and deanery functions.

A mission field will make our movement to Mission and Vision more manageable. A mission field is a region smaller than the whole diocese or even a deanery. At the same time, a mission field can be bigger than the boundaries of a single parish or parish cluster. By collaborating with a larger region than the parish itself, there will be more resources and opportunities for being disciples on mission, leading all people in that particular mission field to Jesus who is the Kingdom of God.

Mission Values: A mission value is a core belief through which we carry out our Mission and Vision. From the 50+ *Let's Listen* sessions that were held throughout the diocese in 2022, as we listened to one another and for voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us through one another, we have discerned that the Holy Spirit is calling us to the values and beliefs of Abundant Healing, Hope and Joy in Jesus. These mission values will be core to creating and carrying out the Mission Initiatives of each Mission Field.

Mission Initiatives: A Mission Initiative is a tangible step and action that will carry out the Mission and Vision. The Mission Initiatives will be centered around the Mission Values of Healing, Hope and Joy, in that order. Each Mission Field will develop their own Mission Initiatives for their designated region. Mission initiatives planted in that particular region will be local, organic and flexible in their implementation and ongoing development.

Mission: A Mission Statement is our explanation of why we exist as the Diocese of Duluth, with all of the Catholic parishes, schools, apostolates and institutions contained therein. Our mission statement supports our Vision and communicates our purpose for all that we be and do as disciples for all who live within our mission field.

Vision: A Vision is what we want to ultimately achieve for all that live within our Mission Field. Our vision is that all will know, love and serve Jesus who is the Kingdom of God. The Vision is the ultimate why we are on Mission.

Disciple: A disciple is one who has encountered the person of Jesus and has intentionally chosen to follow Jesus. A disciple is accompanied by others to grow closer to Jesus and to make a commitment to Jesus that results in joining the Catholic Community to worship and give praise to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.



Disciple on Mission: A disciple on mission is one who introduces others to Jesus, accompanies and helps others to grow closer to Jesus and equips those who have become a disciple to become a disciple on mission to introduce and accompany others to Jesus.

Mission Field Leader: A Mission Field Leader is a disciple on mission with leadership abilities to serve as the convener and point person for mission field strategizing and initiatives.

Mission Field Core Team: The Mission Field Core Team will facilitate the establishment and implementation of mission strategic initiatives for that particular mission field.



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