



The Catholic Diocese of Buffalo
Office of the Apostolic Administrator

September 19-20, 2020

My Dear Sisters and Brothers -

On this 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time we gather together in-person - or with the benefit of live-stream technology - in celebration of God present and at work among us. Yesterday, we celebrated the call of Jesus Christ, accepted and manifested in the lives of two newly-ordained priests, Father Christopher Emminger and Father Denning Achidi, as well as four transitional deacons and 6 permanent deacons. I ask for your prayers and pledge of support for these men that their lives may reveal at all times the boundless grace and love of the Lord who calls each of us in our own way to carry forth His Gospel of truth, of compassion and hope.

As you may now be aware, we have embarked on a “Road to Renewal” here in our Diocese which aims to reinvigorate Catholic faith, to optimize more fully parish and diocesan resources, and, importantly, increase the reach and impact of our varied ministries throughout Western New York. Toward this end, I formed a Diocesan Renewal Task Force this past summer to look at best practices regionally and nationally to learn how others have or are facing similar challenges that we now confront with regard to diminished financial resources and reduced church and school attendance, but who nonetheless have been successful in promoting a culture of co-responsibility among laity, clergy and religious in carrying out the work of evangelization, education and service.

Beginning in the coming days and continuing into October, the Task Force members, along with the Vicars of the Diocese, will be conducting regional listening sessions in order to gain insight and input from parish leaders, school administrators, and from parishioners across the diocese that will inform decisions about how we will be structured and operate going forward. The financial hardship currently confronting the Diocese and many of our parishes - and exacerbated by the Covid-19 threat - is one that necessitates that we rethink how we are organized and how we can better utilize resources parish-to-parish, such that the impact of the good we seek to accomplish adds up to more than the sum of our many parts. I want to assure you that there are no predefined conclusions or decisions regarding which parishes or schools will be affected. Moreover, it’s important to keep in mind that it’s not an option merely to disband or eliminate any one parish. As a “Family of Faith” defined by a legacy of sacramental life, which has nurtured a distinctly Catholic identity and where life’s most profound moments have been shared and celebrated, a parish community reflects the very soul of those who belong to it. As such, we are intent on determining how best to preserve that identity as a “Family of Families” - regardless of decisions that may change the way any one parish family is organized and experiences the fullness of Catholic life.



The fact is, never has what we offer as a community of believers been more needed, particularly in light of the devastating, ongoing effects of the Covid-19 threat. As families struggle with the uncertainty of prolonged financial hardship, parish communities must be that place where those struggling to access basic resources have a place to turn, where there is always a shoulder to lean on and where no one is left to walk alone.

Throughout this journey that we now travel together, our guiding principles will be to listen and to learn; to be open and transparent about the challenges we face, and collaborative in devising solutions that must ultimately lead us to greater dependence on and support for one another, while renewing in each of us as members of this Family of Faith the zeal to proclaim Christ's Gospel of unconditional love, forgiveness and relentless service to others.

Please know that we will be communicating regularly about the progress of our discussions and the conclusions that will be informed by them. A special section of our diocesan website will include the most up-to-date information, as well as schedules for the regional consultation sessions. I invite you to participate as much as you can and to share your ideas, voice your concerns and to discern with others how we can best live and demonstrate our Catholic faith here in Western New York going forward.

Much as the disciples had their hope renewed after breaking bread with the Risen Lord following their unsuspecting walk with him on the long road to Emmaus, we are on a similar journey. Like those first followers of Jesus, we are traveling together, supporting one another, listening and learning, seeking a spirit of renewed purpose and determination, and united by our common faith in the One whose work it is we must ultimately accomplish, and who alone is capable of making all things new.

May our good and gracious God guide and sustain us as we travel this new and promising journey together!

+Edward B. Scharfenberger

Bishop Edward B. Scharfenberger
Apostolic Administrator